

REVIEW



an education and advocacy resource



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I AM NJEA

Union Township Education Association (Union) members who are alumni of Union Township Public Schools joined their fellow graduates and current students for a Black Lives Matter March from the Boys and Girls Club to the municipal building.



The Bloomfield Education Association (Essex), the Bloomfield Secretary Association, and the Bloomfield Public School Services Association coordinated their resources to provide meals to the community's essential workers, include the local police department, during the pandemic.

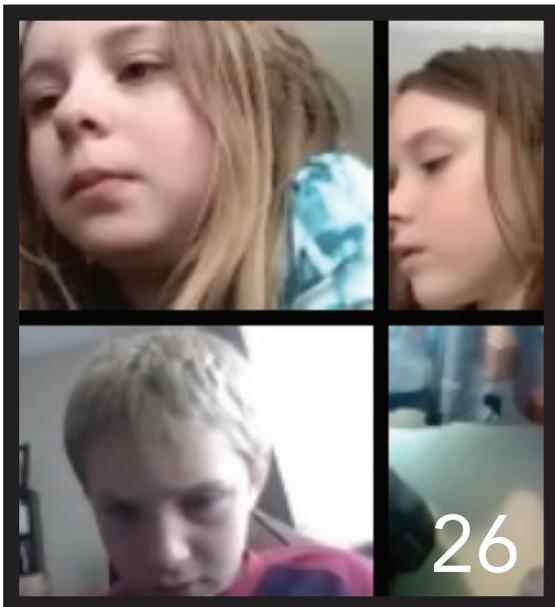


The Mainland Regional Education Association (Atlantic) used an NJEA PRIDE in Public Education grant to help local families and local businesses affected by the pandemic. MREA purchased food from local restaurants to provide meals for residents in need. In the first two weeks, MREA purchased 393 meals to serve 85 families.

Members of the Chatsworth Education Association (Burlington) delivered fruit baskets to their community's front-line workers, including their local postal workers.



FEATURES



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26 | UNTIL IT'S SAFE

For months, New Jersey educators and administrators have been working tirelessly to find a way to safely bring students back into school buildings in September. In August, with less than a month remaining before schools were scheduled to reopen, NJEA, NJPSA and NJASA reluctantly acknowledged that goal is simply not achievable.

BY PATRICK RUMAKER



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34 | RELATIONSHIPS: A KEY FACTOR IN ONLINE INSTRUCTION

Experienced teachers have been developing classroom relationships for many years. That was before COVID-19 took over the educational system and forced schools to adopt some form of remote instruction. How can teachers establish those relationships without having ever met their students face-to-face?

BY DR. TRACEY GARRETT



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30 | NJEA MEMBERS OF COLOR INITIATIVE

The NJEA Members-of-Color (MOC) Initiative was created to educate, engage, and empower members of an underrepresented affinity group within our state association through intentional organizing. The intention is to cultivate a welcoming space and a network within NJEA for members of color.

BY PATRICK RUMAKER

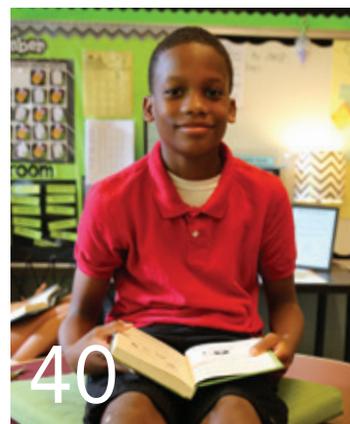


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36 | SCHOOLS OF CHARACTER

New Jersey leads the nation in character education. Folks in the other states yearn to know our secret because the Garden State leads all the other states in producing the largest number of National Schools of Character for the fourth consecutive year.

BY WILLIAM TRUSHEIM AND EILEEN DACHNOWICZ



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40 | INDEPENDENT READING

Independent reading in the classroom is reading instruction. But English teachers sometimes get a bad rap when someone walks past the classroom and sees 25 students silently sprawled across the room, noses in a book. "But then what is that teacher even teaching?" Find ways to foster the joy of reading that allows a release of teacher control but also facilitates a student accountability.

BY MORGAN TAYLOR

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The number \$336 Million

Amount of additional state aid proposed for K-12 public schools for the 2020-21 school year that was withdrawn due to the COVID-19 fiscal crisis.

Source: New Jersey Department of the Treasury, Office of Management and Budget

On the cover



45 | SPECIAL SECTION THE POWER OF MEMBERS: ORGANIZING FOR JOB JUSTICE

After years of laser-focused organizing, Gov. Phil Murphy signed Chapter 78 relief signed into law on July 1, 2020. Then, on Aug. 13, Murphy signed one of the two job justice bills, enacting long-awaited job due-process protections for educational support professionals (ESPs). The second job justice bill passed through both houses of the Legislature, but because two different versions were passed in each house, it has yet to make it to Murphy's desk. These new laws will change the trajectory of public education in New Jersey. Thousands of NJEA members participated in a historic campaign to get the bills written, sponsored and signed into law.



Heather Sullivan, an English teacher at North Plainfield High School, at home with her daughter Emily Sullivan Graf. Sullivan holds the sign she carried while attending several demonstrations throughout the state.

PHOTO BY
JENNIFER COHN MARSH

REVIEW



Editorial Director Steven Baker
 Editor Patrick Rumaker
 Associate Editor Kathryn Coulibaly
 Art Director Jennifer C. Marsh
 Graphic Designers Jennifer Larson
 Terry Cummings
 Advertising Liz Murphy

180 W. State St., P.O. Box 1211, Trenton, NJ 08607-1211 • 609-599-4561 • NJEA.org

President: Marie Blistan | Vice President: Sean M. Spiller | Secretary-Treasurer: Steve Beatty

EDITORIAL & PUBLISHING OFFICES

The *New Jersey Education Association Review* (ISSN-0027-6758) is an official publication of the New Jersey Education Association, published monthly 10 times a year, September through June, plus one special *New Jersey Education Association Review* Convention issue, which will be published in September. Send correspondence relating to editorial material, manuscripts, membership or subscriptions to: 180 W. State St., P.O. Box 1211, Trenton, NJ 08607-1211. Periodicals postage paid at Trenton, NJ 08650 and at additional mailing offices. Email: NJEAreview@NJEA.org

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Send address changes to:
 New Jersey Education Association Review
 Attn: Membership Processing
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NJEA STAFF

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A NEW YEAR BEGINS

I have always loved the start of a new school year. The promise of a new beginning, new challenges, fresh faces and a fresh start more than halfway through the calendar year reminds me that every day is a new opportunity.

This year, that rhythm feels disjointed. School will be back in session, but there is so much anxiety and uncertainty about what it will look like. While educators and students are eager to reconnect and start a new school year, there are very real fears no matter what choices are made about reopening. We all want to prioritize safety for students and staff, but the global pandemic has left us with few good choices.

There is an African proverb that states, "Smooth seas do not make good sailors." As educators and parents, we want smooth seas for children. We want to remove obstacles and protect them from harm so they can grow and thrive—that is an essential part of our work.

Additionally, we want smooth seas for ourselves; we like stability and order and control. But there are some things that are out of our control, and that can be very difficult to face.

Managing this loss of control and the anxiety that goes with it requires each of us to cultivate our own coping skills. And in doing so, we can help our students learn how to create their own "coping toolbox." Every life has its challenges; it's not a question of getting knocked down—that is a certainty. But what is important is how—and how often—we pick ourselves up and move on.

I am so impressed with how our members have already dealt with so many challenges and found creative and compassionate solutions to those problems. I firmly believe that the power of our union lies in our connection to each other, and our strength as educators lies in our dedication to improving our students' lives through education.

I want to thank you for all that you have done and continue to do to support our colleagues and our students. We are learning to sail these rough seas together.

In unity,

Marie Blistan



NJEA President Marie Blistan (r) with Kathleen Bruns-Meyer, a prekindergarten teacher at Livingston Elementary School in Union Township, Union County, during the Ch. 44 bill signing at Union Township High School on July 1.

OFFICERS ONLINE

MARIE BLISTAN

Facebook

@Marie.Blistan: Elizabeth EA President John Griffin, BOE, and city: We commend your decision to keep our students and their families, staff and their families, and the city of Elizabeth's residents' safety and health as your priority!

On Aug. 12, Marie Blistan shared an image from ABC7NY news broadcasting a statement from John Griffin, the president of the Elizabeth Education Association: "The safety of our students and our staff must be paramount to all other concerns. We can recover lost learning. We cannot recover lost lives." Elizabeth was one of many school districts across the state that as of Aug. 12 had opted for an all-remote school opening in September.

SEAN M. SPILLER

Facebook

@SpillerForNJEA: Thank you to Congressman Tom Malinowski and my fellow panelists for the important and informative town hall forum on reopening schools. #NotUntilItsSafe

On Aug. 13, NJEA Vice President Sean M. Spiller was a panelist in a town hall hosted by Rep. Tom Malinowski on Zoom. Spiller shared a screenshot of the meeting. The town hall provided a forum for educators and other members of the public to ask questions and voice concerns about the risks of reopening schools too soon and to discuss the conditions necessary to protect the health of students, staff and the community.

STEVE BEATTY

Facebook

@SteveBeattyNJEA: Due process for ESP members is now the law in New Jersey! Governor Murphy signed our ESP Job Justice bill this morning—making NJ the only state in the nation to afford these protections to our "essential schools employees" at a time when it is needed the most!

On Aug. 13, NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Steve Beatty celebrated the governor's approval of a bill that protects educational support professionals from being fired without cause. He congratulated the members who fought to make the new law a reality and called on the Legislature to resolve the anti-privatization job justice bill and get it on the governor's desk.

KNOW. LEAD. ACT.

New NEA Director
Brenda Brathwaite



BRATHWAITE, KOBER AND MORAN ELECTED AS NEA STATE DIRECTORS

Brenda Brathwaite of Atlantic County, Anita Kober of Hudson County, and Peter Moran of Hunterdon County were elected to the National Education Association (NEA) Board of Directors to represent NJEA members. Members of the NJEA Delegate Assembly (DA) are responsible for electing state directors.

The NEA Board of Directors is responsible for setting general policies between annual NEA Representative Assembly (NEA RA) meetings. It consists of at least one director from each state affiliate, at-large directors to meet representational guarantees, and representatives for students and retired members. Each state is entitled to an additional director per 20,000 active and life members.

NJEA is currently entitled to nine state directors. In addition, NJEA member Ashanti Rankin of Cumberland County is a nationally elected at-large director. He was resoundingly re-elected to that position at the 2020 NEA RA, capturing over 92% of the vote in a field of 18 candidates for nine positions. (See Page 17.)

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the NEA director elections were conducted through mail balloting with DA members from May 22 to June 5. Under DA rules, a candidate for NEA director must receive more than 50% of the valid ballots cast in order to be elected.

Brathwaite won in the first round of voting. A run-off election was held between June 9 and June 23, resulting in Kober and Moran receiving the required majority.

Other NEA directors, whose terms as New Jersey representatives are set to continue are James Frazier Jr. of Union County, Deanna Nicosia-Jones of Cumberland County, Robert LaMorte and Sue McBride of Bergen County, Kimberly Scott-Hayden of Essex County, and Marilyn Weeks of Middlesex County. Completing terms and going off the NEA Board of Directors are Richard D'Avanzo and Ann Margaret Shannon of Union County.

NJEA PAC ANNOUNCES 2020 ENDORSEMENTS

The New Jersey Education Association's 125-member political action committee (NJEA PAC) has voted to recommend to the National Education Association's (NEA) Fund for Children and Public Education the endorsement of U.S. Senator Cory Booker for re-election and Tom Malinowski for Congress in Congressional District (CD) 7.

NJEA PAC also announced their endorsement in special elections for the state Senate and Assembly Anthony M. Bucco for Senate in Legislative District (LD) 25 and Aura K. Dunn for Assembly in LD-25.

These endorsements join recommendations made to the NEA Fund for Children and Public Education for the July 7 primary, which carried through to the general election. Federal election endorsements are made through the NEA Fund for Children and Public Education.

The complete list of NJEA PAC's endorsements and recommendations to the NEA Fund for Children and Public Education for the general election are:

President

Joe Biden

U.S. Senate

Cory Booker

U.S. House of Representatives

CD-1: Donald Norcross

CD-2: Amy Kennedy

CD-3: Andy Kim

CD-4: No endorsement

CD-5: Josh Gottheimer

CD-6: Frank Pallone

CD-7: Tom Malinowski

CD-8: Albio Sires

CD-9: Bill Pascrell

CD-10: Donald Payne Jr.

CD-11: Mikie Sherrill

CD-12: Bonnie Watson Coleman

New Jersey Legislature

LD-25: Anthony M. Bucco – Senate

LD-25: Aura K. Dunn – Assembly

Screening procedures

Despite the challenges imposed by the global pandemic, NJEA PAC maintained its standards and practices for endorsements. Candidates were invited to respond to a questionnaire about their public education and labor priorities, and they were invited to attend a virtual screening with members of their local screening committee, made up of NJEA members from their congressional and legislative districts. The screening committee made recommendations to the full NJEA PAC, which voted on their recommendations. Statements from each of the endorsed congressional and legislative candidates will be published in the October Review.

Important dates

Oct. 13: Voter registration deadline for General Election

Not registered? Get your forms here: nj.gov/state/elections/voter-registration.shtml

Nov. 3: General Election

The Nov. 3 General Election will be conducted almost entirely by mail. Vote your ballot and return it immediately. Your ballot MUST be postmarked by Nov. 3.

APPLICATIONS FOR 2021 COHORT OF TEACHER LEADER ACADEMY CANDIDATES OPEN

Applications are open for the March 2021 Cohort of the NJEA Teacher Leader Academy (TLA). Information and the online application available at njea.org/TLA. The deadline is Oct. 15. TLA information sessions are scheduled for September. Details are available at njea.org/TLA.

Teacher leadership offers a paradigm shift that not only allows teachers to support their peers from a nonevaluative position, but also to influence the entire system. Teacher leadership gives educators a voice at the decision-making table on instructional issues at the school and/or district level.

Meeting weekly over the course of a year, and occasionally on Saturdays, the core of the program focuses on regional study groups in which candidates for the endorsement identify their own strengths and areas where they want to challenge themselves.

With those areas identified, each candidate leads the learning of groups of seven or eight other teachers working with them on the endorsement. With the support of a group facilitator supplied by the NJEA Teacher Leader Academy, the study groups are designed to use feedback from other participants to create an incubator for leadership.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, meetings are held virtually.

Graduate credit available through TESU

Candidates for the teacher leader endorsement in the NJEA Teacher Leader Academy are eligible to earn up to 12 graduate credits through Thomas Edison State University (TESU).

Depending on local collective bargaining agreements, these 12 credits may increase the possibility of both tuition reimbursement and movement on the salary guide.

STATE OFFICER PETITIONS AVAILABLE

Elections for NJEA state officer positions (president, vice president, and secretary-treasurer) will be held during the upcoming school year for the 2021-23 term.

All nominations for these positions may be made only by petition on forms prescribed by the NJEA Elections Committee.

Petitions for state officers must contain at least 300 signatures of NJEA active members (including active professional and ESP, as well as life members and retired members who are eligible to vote) with at least 10 such signatures from each of 11 counties. Persons who are retired are considered to be from the county in which they last held employment prior to retirement. No more than one nomination may be proposed on any one petition.

Below are the deadlines and procedures for acquiring and returning petitions. Please note that the procedures are subject to change because of the current global pandemic. Any changes to procedures will be posted at njea.org/NJEAelections. You may contact Aileen O'Driscoll at aodriscoll@njea.org with any questions regarding these procedures.

Petitions will be available on Sept. 1, 2020. They may be obtained from NJEA Headquarters in Trenton, or from a county or unit representative on the NJEA Elections Committee.

All signed petitions must reach NJEA Headquarters at 180 W. State St., Trenton, or an NJEA-NEA UniServ office no later than 5 p.m. on Oct. 15, 2020.

These procedures and the deadlines are for state officer positions only and do not affect nominations for other NJEA positions.

Balloting for contested positions will take place in the regular 2021 NJEA spring elections.

SEPTEMBER DA TO BE HELD VIRTUALLY

As a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the Sept. 14 meeting of the NJEA Delegate Assembly (DA) will be held virtually through an online meeting platform.

See njea.org/da for details.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING SUMMIT TO BE HELD VIRTUALLY

The NJEA Jim George Collective Bargaining Summit will be held on Saturday, Oct. 24 in a virtual format.

The annual Jim George Collective Bargaining Summit is an opportunity for local associations to come together for training opportunities that benefit members at the bargaining table.

Contact your local president or negotiations chair to let them know you're interested in attending.

NOMINATE A LOCAL ASSOCIATION FOR BARGAINING EXCELLENCE

A local association that has demonstrated excellence in collective bargaining will be honored at the summit with the 2020 Jim George Collective Bargaining Award. Those nominated will also be recognized. Typically, the award is presented at the annual NJEA Jim George Collective Bargaining Summit. Details on the date and venue for the awards presentation are yet to be determined in light of social distancing restrictions.

Criteria

A local qualifies for nomination by meeting one or more of the following criteria:

- 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 settled agreement.
- Used the bargaining process to propel new members into association involvement and leadership positions.
- Achieved a particularly good settlement, in comparison to state averages, in salary increases, benefits, professional development, and/or member protection and follows best practices for salary guides.

Nomination

Local associations can be nominated by any NJEA member or NJEA staff member.

To nominate a local, visit njea.org/cbaward.

To be considered for the 2020 Jim George Collective Bargaining Award, settlements must be ratified by both parties between July 1, 2019 and June 30, 2020.

Nominations are due Sept. 11, 2020.



New NEA Director
Anita Kober

NOMINATIONS FOR ESP AWARDS OPEN

ESP of the Year Award

NJEA will present the ESP of the Year Award to an NJEA member whose activities reflect the contributions of educational support professionals to public education. The purpose of the award is to recognize an individual who shows outstanding accomplishments in one or more of the following areas: professional practice, member advocacy and association involvement, community engagement, personal achievement, and enhancement of ESP image.

An individual must be an NJEA member for three consecutive years as of Jan. 15 of the award year. The individual must be nominated by his/her county association through the county association's adopted procedures. Each county can submit one nominee through its ESP award system.

A county award system is one developed by a county association that gathers nominations through local affiliates and selects one county-wide award recipient. Criteria for the county award are designed by the individual county and should not conflict with the state and national award's criteria and purpose. County associations should submit their nominees on or before Oct. 2, 2020.

Local associations are encouraged to select a nominee and submit his/her name to their county association no later than Friday, Sept. 11, 2020. If you have a nominee in mind, visit njea.org/esp for a nomination form and immediately talk to your local or county association president about the nomination.

Career Achievement and Friend of ESP awards

Do you know an educational support professional (ESP) who is an advocate for association members and who has been employed at least 10 years in public education? Or do you know a person or organization whose leadership, acts, dedication, commitment and support on a statewide level have proven that person or organization to be a true friend and advocate for ESP and their contributions to public education and students?

If so, consider making a nomination for an NJEA ESP Career Achievement Award or an NJEA Friend of ESP Award. Nominations are accepted through Oct. 23, 2020. For details and nomination forms, visit njea.org/esp.

NOMINATIONS OPEN FOR AWARDS TO BE CONFERRED AT NJEA EQUITY ALLIANCE WEEKEND

Nominations are now open for four awards that will recognize advocacy and achievement in equity and justice. The awards will be presented at NJEA's Equity Alliance Weekend to be held on Jan. 15-16, 2021.

The weekend will feature training on social justice issues and social justice activism, recognizing the intersection of diverse identities and circumstances among NJEA members and the communities they serve. The event is a collaboration of these NJEA committees: Exceptional Children, Human and Civil Rights, Minority Leadership and Recruitment, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, Urban Education, and Women in Education.

Four of NJEA's highest awards will be presented during the NJEA Dr. Martin Luther King Human and Civil Rights Celebration, held at the conclusion of the Equity Alliance Weekend.

- **NJEA Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Human and Civil Rights Award:** This award is conferred by the NJEA Human and Civil Rights Committee. Nominees may be an individual, group or organization working in the area of civil rights, and if eligible, NJEA members.

- **Judith Owens Spirit Award:** This award is conferred by the NJEA Minority Leadership and Recruitment Committee. Named for Judith Owens, the first African American president of NJEA, this award honors a member who has been a champion of ethnic minority rights and issues and who has had a significant impact on education and the achievement of equal opportunity for those facing discrimination because of their ethnicity.
- **Equality Champion Award:** This award is conferred by the NJEA Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Committee. This award honors a member who has been a champion of human and civil rights, and who has had a significant impact on education and the achievement of equal opportunity for those facing discrimination because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- **NJEA Elizabeth A. Allen Women in Education Award:** This award is conferred by the NJEA Women in Education Committee. Named for NJEA's first female president, the award honors a member or an individual living or working in New Jersey who promotes women's rights and equality for all persons, particularly in education.

Nomination forms and documentation for any of these four awards are due Oct. 30, 2020.

For awards criteria and to make a nomination, go to njea.org/equitynominations.

For more information, contact Colleen Stevens at cstevens@njea.org or 609-599-4561, ext. 2290.

CLEARING THE RECORD

An article titled "Cleaning to Fight COVID-19 in the June edition of the *NJEA Review* referenced a California study concerning a worker's likelihood to develop work-related asthma. The results of that study, as described on Page 37 of the *Review* require clarification.

The paragraph as printed reads, "For example, custodians using cleaning products (including disinfectants) are the most likely of any workers to get job-related asthma. A California study found that four of five people with work-related asthma were in areas during or right after cleaning was done."

It should have read, "For example, custodians using cleaning products (including disinfectants) are the most likely of any workers to get job-related asthma. A California study found that about 10 percent of work-related asthma cases in the state were linked to cleaning products. Of those, four of five people were in areas during or right after cleaning was done, while the others were cleaners."

New NEA Director
Peter Moran





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WRITING TO UNITE YOUTH WORLDWIDE DURING PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a traumatic experience for youth around the world. The Memory Project's Writing Exchange will help children and teens process the experience together, no matter how far apart they may be. In this exchange, students in the U.S. and around the world are invited to share their thoughts, feelings, and hopes for the future through writing of all kinds.

There is no cost to participate in this program. As a small nonprofit organization that depends on contributions to operate, the Memory Project encourages all participating schools to donate \$3 per student. However, schools worldwide are welcome to participate even if they are not able to donate.

For more information visit and to sign up, visit memoryproject.org/writing.



HAVE YOUR STUDENTS VOTE IN THE NEW JERSEY STUDENT MOCK ELECTION

The New Jersey Student Mock Election will be hosting an opportunity for students in grades 4 - 12 to practice the habit of informed voting this fall.

You can access the mock election regardless of whether students are in school or working remotely from home. Results are tabulated automatically and mapped by congressional district and grade band.

The election is sponsored by the New Jersey Social Studies Supervisors Association, the New Jersey Council for the Social Studies, and the New Jersey Center for Civic Education.

Registration is easy. Go to njmockelection.org. You'll also find plenty of teacher resources there.

Questions? Contact New Jersey Student Mock Election through njmockelection.org/contact-us.

NJSBF TO OFFER ONLINE MOCK TRIAL COMPETITIONS



The New Jersey State Bar Foundation (NJSBF) will transition its in-person mock trial programs for grades 3 - 12 to a Zoom platform.

Instructions for the 2020-21 High School Mock Trial Competition will be posted on our website, njsbf.org, by early October.

The NJSBF Law Fair Competition for grades 3 - 6 and Law Adventure Competition for grades 7 and 8 will proceed as usual with submission of original mock trial cases written by teachers and students according to rules that NJSBF provides. The May programs, at which winners present their cases before judges and attorneys, will transition to Zoom if in-person events are not possible next spring.

Free webinars to help teachers prepare for the High School Mock Trial Competition and for Law Fair/Law Adventure will be conducted on Oct. 22 and 15 respectively.

For details and updates visit njsbf.org. For further information, contact Sheila Boro at sboro@njsbf.org or 732-937-7519.

A+
Effort

TOMS RIVER EA MEMBER HONORED WITH SANFORD TEACHER AWARD



Kelly Wilbert a fifth-grade teacher at East Dover Elementary School in Toms River and a Toms River Education Association member, has been named a recipient of the National University System-Sanford Teacher Award for New Jersey on a surprise Zoom announcement.

To encourage greater acceptance of special needs students with their peers, Wilbert was noted for her efforts to help all students recognize that everyone is capable of growth and able acknowledge each other's unique strengths and be compassionate. Her work had fostered significant progress in social development.

Wilbert is a pioneer in implementing the Sanford Harmony

program, which promotes tolerance, positive peer relationships, empathy, and communications and self-regulation skills. Special needs students have peers who help model appropriate behavior. The children can practice and refine their social skills in a supportive and caring environment.

The Sanford Teacher Award honors the top teacher in each state and the District of Columbia with \$10,000 for supporting student development and achievement in inspirational and harmonious ways.

Each recipient is now eligible to be named the national winner of the Sanford Teacher Award, which comes with a total award of \$50,000 and will be announced at a future date.

Learn more at sanfordteacherawards.com/winners-2020.cfm.



GRANTS FOR SCHOOL SUSTAINABILITY PROJECTS AVAILABLE

Have a project that needs funding? The 2020 Sustainable Jersey for Schools Grants Program cycle, funded by NJEA will award ten \$10,000 grants to school districts or schools and forty \$2,000 grants to support school green teams. Applicants must be registered in the Sustainable Jersey for Schools program, which is free and voluntary.

With this contribution, NJEA has provided \$1.5 million to support a sustainable future for children across the state through the Sustainable Jersey for Schools Program.

“As we face climate change, the mass extinction of many species, and the clogging of our oceans with plastic, we must make better choices so that we leave the next generation a planet that is in much better shape,” said NJEA Vice President Sean M. Spiller. “When our students can learn, at an early age, that sustainable and healthy practices often go hand in hand with economic efficiencies, we all benefit from the positive changes. To that end, it is imperative that we emphasize the value of sustainability. NJEA is proud to work with Sustainable Jersey on this important program and channel resources directly into our schools to aid in that mission.”

In addition to the grant funding, NJEA supports Sustainable Jersey for Schools as a program underwriter.

“The funding will enhance the work of students, teachers and school communities as they address our most pressing issues including health, social equity and climate change. Together we will create a new era of sustainability in New Jersey—one that secures economic, environmental and community well-being,” said Randall Solomon, Sustainable Jersey’s executive director.

In recognition of the radically altered environment schools face due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the national movement for racial justice, project proposals that support teaching and learning in a virtual or hybrid environment, and equity and anti-bias initiatives are encouraged.

For more information and details on how to apply, visit sustainablejerseyschools.com, click on “Grants and Resources” and look for “NJEA Grant Cycle.”

Applications are due on Oct. 30, 2020, for this cycle of the Sustainable Jersey for Schools Grants Program.



**njea**

Member Benefits



TACKLE YOUR STUDENT LOAN DEBT

NEA Member Benefits is offering a new free member benefit that provides technical support for one year from student loan experts who can answer your questions and help you fill out and e-file a student or public service loan forgiveness application.

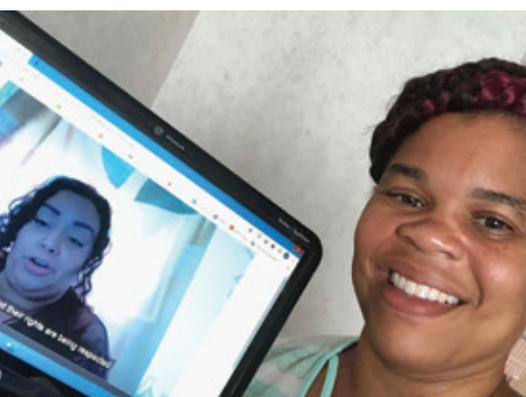
This personal assistance greatly increases the likelihood that you will successfully complete the process and, hopefully, reduce or eliminate some of your student loan debt.

To access this free benefit, visit tinyurl.com/neastudentdebt

Questions, contact bbuonsante@njea.org.

NJEA Report

NJEA heard loud and clear at virtual NEA RA



Every summer, the highest policy-making body of the National Education Association (NEA), the NEA Representative assembly meets with nearly 8,000 delegates representing educators from across the nation. Initially slated to take place in Atlanta, the 2020 NEA RA was held virtually to guard against the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19.

Most of NJEA's over 600 delegates to the NEA, attended it using devices in their own homes on July 2 and July 3. The agenda was scaled back from the usually four-day program. Delegates met to hear from candidates for NEA office, to consider the NEA Strategic Plan and Budget, and to hear from U.S. presidential candidate, Joe Biden.

Voting on NEA officer, NEA Executive Committee, and NEA Board of Director At-Large candidates was conducted by mail. Delegates also voted by mail on whether to affirm the endorsement of Biden for president and to approve the NEA Strategic Plan and Budget.

NJEA STILL LEARNING AD FEATURED AT RA

Even before NEA President Lily Eskelsen García gaveled open the 2020 National Education Association Representative Assembly (NEA RA) in a virtual space, New Jersey showed up on the devices of every delegate in the nation as NJEA's commercial (bit.ly/njealearning1) about Jersey City Education Association member Martha Garcia showing how she has been teaching art to students from home in the midst of the pandemic.

"NEA virtual convention with NJEA's commercial!" NJEA President Marie Blistan enthusiastically posted to her Facebook page. "JERSEY STRONG and #RedforED. NJEA, I'm so very proud of all that you do, and all that we do as a union!"

DELEGATION ACHIEVES MINORITY REPRESENTATION GOAL

More than 40 years ago, the NEA RA passed NEA Bylaw 3.1(g), which seeks to help state associations to send diverse delegations to the annual convention. The goal is to send a delegation with a percentage of ethnic-minority delegates at least equal to the percentage of persons of color in the state's total population.

According to the U.S. census, 41% of New Jersey residents identify themselves as persons of color. NJEA's delegation included 41.75% members of color. For many years, NJEA has made a conscious

effort to encourage the election of a delegation to the RA that looks like New Jersey. As a result, NJEA has in the last several years consistently met its 3.1(g) goal. This year that effort was energized by the NJEA Members of Color initiative, through which NJEA staff and members explained the path to becoming a delegate to new and more diverse audiences.

NJEA MEMBERS CAREFULLY EXAMINE NEA BUDGET

The delegation moved from an online format to a conference call to facilitate debate and questions about the budget among the nearly 8,000 delegates.

Among the dozens of callers was NJEA member Patricia Jones, an administrative assistant in the Robbinsville School District, who is the legislative chair and building rep for the Robbinsville Education Association. Jones also serves on the NJEA Elections Committee.

Jones expressed her concern for funding to support educational support professionals (ESPs) who may be furloughed or laid off because schools are required to again close their buildings because of COVID-19.

"Is there any funding or resources through this budget to help them," Jones asked.

Princess Moss explained that there is \$5.5 million in the budget available to all members and that they may work through their local or state association to apply for support.

Newark Teachers Association Vice President Yanique Leveque called in to note that the NEA budget, because of COVID-19, reflects the same level of expenditures as last year. Leveque asked why dues were increasing if the budget was the same. NEA dues for full-time certificated staff are increasing \$4 per year. For ESP, the dues are increasing \$2 per year.

Eskelsen-García explained that dues are calculated through a formula found in the bylaws. Bylaws can only be amended by delegates to the NEA RA. Amendments are proposed at one NEA RA and considered in the subsequent year's NEA RA.

Cheryle Haines, a teacher building rep for the Long Branch School Employees Association, noted that the proposed budget named various social justice organizations with which NEA would partner.

"How were those organizations vetted for us to be supporting them?" Haines asked.

Eskelsen-García called in NEA Chief Financial Officer Michael Mcpherson to explain that not



only does NEA look at the financial stability of any organizations with which it partners, but also examines whether the potential partners are pro-public education. He called on NEA members to let NEA know if they feel that a particular partner may need further examination.

Kathy Rodgers, a teacher and member of the Paterson Education Association, asked if the NEA budget includes funding for racial justice reform, particularly with African Americans as the group on which injustice is having the greatest impact.

Eskelsen-García said that throughout NEA's budget, \$26,652,793 goes toward racial justice work. She noted that NEA Secretary-Treasurer Princess Moss would be posting a report identifying those expenditures in the budget. Those budget expenditures are now posted on the NEA RA website and can be visited by visiting ra.nea.org/delegate-resources and scrolling down to "Racial and Social Justice Work throughout the 2020-2021 Strategic Plan & Budget."

NJ'S FRAZIER, WHITE-MORRIS, AND RANKIN ADDRESS RA

On Day 2 of the NEA RA, New Jersey again took center stage at the NEA RA, with NJEA members who are running for office.

James Frazier was NJEA's endorsed candidate for NEA Secretary-Treasurer, running in a field of four candidates.

"I will ensure that the tone at the top of our organization is to maintain our fiscal stability as well as doubling down on our strategic priorities," Frazier said. "We must continue to develop member-driven organizing campaigns and support states to combat injustices that have been fully realized and felt across our education community."

Danita White-Morris of the Bridgeton Education Association was running for her first term as an at-large ESP member of the NEA Board of Directors.

"We need Washington to know that we are sick and tired of being sick and tired, and that all children, no matter their race, religion or economic status, are entitled to a quality education," White-Morris, said.

Ashanti Rankin of the Millville Education Association, is an incumbent ESP-at-large member of the NEA Board of Directors. He was seeking re-election.

"This is our time to parachute in to be more assertive, more aggressive and more strategic,"

Rankin said. "To make sure our elected officials know that our students are first in the budget or their office won't last."

BIDEN ADDRESSES DELEGATES

Vice President Joe Biden addressed the NEA RA and took part in a townhall-style conversation.

"What happens to our children is going to determine exactly what happens to this nation," Biden said. "We need to ensure that you and your students get treated with the dignity that you deserve. When we win this election, you'll get the support you need and the respect you deserve."

In addressing systemic and institutional racism in our country, Biden said, "[If] ever there was a time for big change, it's now. We have to make this at least an era of action to reverse systemic racism with long overdue concrete change — we can do it... I think the country is ready."

In addressing how we can reopen schools safely, Biden said, "I'd mobilize the federal government to take special steps to provide for schools to reopen. I'd make sure states and districts have the funding to keep educators on the job in the midst of this crisis. I'd boost federal funding to cover the cost of PPE, extra cleaning, new technologies, redesign classrooms, all the things schools are going to need to do to be able to open and open with normality. I'd scale research on how COVID affects children to help understand how the virus affects children and create evidence-based guidance. Build a safer school best practice clearinghouse... I'm going to work with educators, child care providers, unions, communities and families on how to reopen safely."

NEW JERSEY DELEGATES LEAD THE NATION IN PAC CONTRIBUTIONS

New Jersey delegates to the RA are famous across NEA for consistently being at or near the top in contributions to the NEA Fund for Children and Public Education—the NEA's political action committee (PAC). This year was no different. New Jersey delegates finished first in the nation for the total amount raised, contributing \$161,650.

That outcome is because of the work of the New Jersey delegation's hardworking PAC captains: Tina Dare and Patty Kebrdle. Dare is the chair of the NJEA Government Relations Committee. Kebrdle chairs the NJEA Congressional Contact Committee.



Pennsylvania educator Becky Pringle elected NEA president

NEA endorses Joe Biden for U.S. President



Becky Pringle

Delegates to the National Education Association Representative Assembly (NEA RA) elected Becky Pringle to be president of NEA, Princess Moss to be vice president and Noel Candelaria to be secretary-treasurer. Pringle is a science teacher on leave from the Susquehanna School District in Pennsylvania and currently serves as vice president. She previously served as secretary-treasurer of NEA. Moss, a music teacher on leave from Louisa County Public Schools in Virginia, is NEA's current secretary-treasurer. Candelaria is a special education teacher in Ysleta Independent School District in El Paso, Texas.

NJEA member and Union County Education Association Vice President James Frazier, ran a strong campaign for NEA secretary-treasurer in a field of four candidates, taking nationwide his message for a more diverse cadre of educators, a fiscally strong NEA, and strong advocacy for students and educators against corporate-funded attacks on public education.

"I congratulate our new team at of leaders at the national level, Becky Pringle, Princess Moss and Noel Candelaria. Together, they will be unstoppable as they fight for public education in the coming three years," said NJEA President Marie Blistan. "I also want to congratulate NJEA's James Frazier for running a great campaign and making New Jersey proud!"

"I offer my congratulations to Becky Pringle, Princess Moss and Noel Candelaria," said James Frazier. "I wish to thank my team of volunteers who worked day and night to support my campaign. I thank my family, especially my wife Patricia, for their patience, love, and their faith in me. I look forward continuing to serve the members of this great association."

NEA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE ELECTION

Hanna Vaandering of Oregon was re-elected to the NEA Executive Committee. Because candidates must receive a majority vote to be elected, candidates Mark Jewell of North Carolina and Amber Gould of Arizona participated in a run-off election. Ballots were mailed to RA delegates on Aug. 12. Results came in after press time and will be posted at ra.nea.org.

BIDEN ENDORSED

NEA RA delegates overwhelmingly endorsed Joe Biden for president of the United States in the Nov. 3 election. NEA has previously endorsed Biden to be the Democratic candidate in the primary.

"Joe is the tireless advocate for public education and is the partner that students and educators need in the White House," NEA President Lily Eskelsen García said. "He understands that we have a moral responsibility to provide a great neighborhood public school for every student in every ZIP code."

Biden's plan for public education, released in May 2019, was praised by NEA for highlighting the need to expand community schools, address racial injustice, fully fund IDEA, triple the funds for Title I schools, and invest in children starting from birth, including high-quality, universal pre-kindergarten. Biden's outreach to educators has been led in part by his wife, Dr. Jill Biden, an educator and NEA member.

"Biden is also committed to attracting and retaining the best educators by paying them as professionals they are and increasing funding for support staff and paraprofessionals," Eskelsen García added. "And he will fire Betsy DeVos and replace her with an education secretary who comes from a public school classroom and believes that educators must have a seat at the table when crafting education policy."

NEA BUDGET ADOPTED

Delegates overwhelmingly supported the NEA Strategic Plan and Budget for the 2020-21 and 2021-11 fiscal year totaling \$357,790,775 and \$360,020,175 respectively.



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Ashanti Rankin wins NEA director seat with commanding lead

Three additional seats require run-off



In a field of 18 candidates, Ashanti Rankin, a paraprofessional in Millville received a whopping 92.26% of the vote from the nearly 8,000 delegates to the NEA Representative Assembly in his bid for re-election as an at-large member of the NEA Board of Directors.

To be elected to office in NEA requires attaining at least a simple majority of votes cast. Eighteen candidates ran for nine open educational support professional (ESP) at-large seats on the NEA Board of Directors. Rankin was the top vote getter in the first round of voting where no other candidate cracked 90%

Winning seats in the first round five other candidates joined Rankin: Margaret Powell of North Carolina, Saul Ramos of Massachusetts, Lisa Jennings of South Dakota, Stephanie Ervin of Washington, and Gerry French of Maine. The remaining three seats will require at least one more round of voting. Gwendolyn Edwards of Virginia, Debby Chandler and Pamela Johnson of Washington, and Carmen Hill of Missouri were on the run-off ballot, which was mailed to RA delegates on Aug. 12. Results came in after press time and will be posted at ra.nea.org.

Rankin and Damita White-Morris of the Bridgeton School Employees were two of three candidates endorsed by New Jersey delegates to the RA for the NEA Board of Directors. Margaret Powell of Wake County Public Schools in North Carolina, was also endorsed by New Jersey delegates. Rankin and Powell were current NEA directors, running for re-election.

“Congratulations to our endorsed candidates for the at-large positions on the NEA Board of Directors, Ashanti Rankin and Margaret Powell, for their re-election to the board, and congratulations to Damita White-Morris for stepping up to represent New Jersey,” Blistan said. “I am certain that Ashanti and Margaret will serve NEA members well and make public education a priority in the nation’s capital.”

2020 NJEA Convention to be held on a remote platform in November

Ruby Bridges will deliver keynote address



The 2020 New Jersey Education Association Convention, scheduled for Nov. 5-6, will be held remotely. Following extensive consideration of the factors involved in holding a traditional in-person event in the context of a global pandemic and the uncertainty of what social distancing and other safety precautions will be necessary in

the fall, NJEA has decided to proceed with a remote event this year.

A special edition of the annually published NJEA Convention Program guide will be mailed to all members with their October NJEA Review. In the meantime, visit njeaconvention.org for the latest information on the 2020 NJEA Convention.

The 2020 NJEA Convention will focus on providing high-quality remote professional learning opportunities for New Jersey’s public school educators while planning continues for a traditional in-person event in 2021.

“We did not come to this decision easily,” said NJEA President Marie Blistan. “The NJEA Convention is a valuable professional growth opportunity for our members. They appreciate the opportunity to meet their colleagues from around the state to share ideas and learn from one another. Unfortunately, the personal interaction that makes our Convention in Atlantic City so valuable to members also makes it impractical this year under these circumstances. We made the decision that is best for the health and safety of our members, their students and the residents of Atlantic City.”

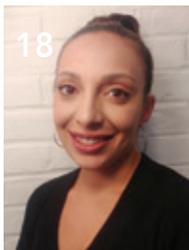
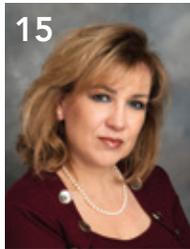
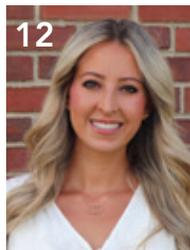
“Making this decision now allows us and our partners to focus on providing a virtual convention that lives up to the high standards we have set over the last century,” Blistan said in May. “We will do everything we can to ensure that our members have the professional learning resources they value even in a new format. To that end, we are very pleased that our 2020 Keynote Speaker, Ruby Bridges, will be part of our virtual event.”

NJEA has held its annual convention in Atlantic City for over 100 years, except for two years during World War II and in 2012, immediately following Superstorm Sandy. Over that time, the NJEA Convention has grown dramatically and now features hundreds of professional learning seminars, an exhibit floor filled with resources for educators, opportunities to interact with education policymakers, high-profile keynote addresses and forums for educators to meet and learn from each other.

“We look forward to creating a great remote event this fall and to coming back to Atlantic City as soon as it is safe to do so,” said Blistan.

Meet New Jersey's 2020-21 County Teachers of the Year

NJEA is proud to join with students, school employees, parents and others in congratulating the 2020-21 New Jersey County Teachers of the Year.



1. **ATLANTIC**, Phillip Pallitto, Jordan Road School, Somers Point School District
2. **BERGEN**, Megan Williams, Tenafly High School, Tenafly School District
3. **BURLINGTON**, Michael Dunlea, Tabernacle Elementary School, Tabernacle Township School District
4. **CAMDEN**, Angel Santiago, Loring Flemming Elementary School, Gloucester Township School District
5. **CAPE MAY**, Rachel Krementz, Ocean Academy, Cape May County Special Services
6. **CUMBERLAND**, Kristina Messina, Mount Pleasant Elementary School, Millville School District
7. **ESSEX**, David Coster, Cedar Grove High School, Cedar Grove School District
8. **GLOUCESTER**, Jami Centrella, Township of Franklin Public Schools
9. **HUDSON**, Alicia Vilas, Dr. Maya Angelou Elementary School (PS #20), Jersey City School District
10. **HUNTERDON**, Angela Mikula, Delaware Township School, Delaware Township School District
11. **MERCER**, Jessica Merz, Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf, New Jersey Department of Education
12. **MIDDLESEX**, Jaclyn Terebetski, Carteret High School, Carteret School District
13. **MONMOUTH**, Christina Gauss, Rumson-Fair Haven Regional High School, Rumson-Fair Haven Regional School District
14. **MORRIS**, Christopher Butchko, Montville Township High School, Montville Township School District
15. **OCEAN**, Lucia Giavatto-DiLeo, Manchester Township High School, Manchester Township School District
16. **PASSAIC**, Megan Graziano, Clifton High School, Clifton School District
17. **SALEM**, Michelle Williams, Woodstown High School, Woodstown-Pilesgrove School District
18. **SOMERSET**, Micki Cobos, Somerville High School, Somerville School District
19. **SUSSEX**, Meghan Radimer, Stillwater Township School, Stillwater School District
20. **UNION**, Jamie Warner, Orange Avenue School, Cranford School District
21. **WARREN**, Courtney Kopf, Belvidere High School, Belvidere School District

Watch interviews with
New Jersey's county teachers of the year at
njea.org/ctoy20.

State Board of Education approves revisions to New Jersey Student Learning Standards

The New Jersey State Board of Education adopted revisions to the New Jersey Student Learning Standards (NJSLS) in seven subject areas at its June 3 meeting. The revisions encompass the seven academic standards:

- Social Studies
- Science
- Visual and Performing Arts
- Comprehensive Health and Physical Education
- World Languages
- Computer Science and Design Thinking
- Career Readiness, Life Literacies, and Key Skills.

Of particular note, climate change has been incorporated into all of the revised standards—an initiative championed by First Lady Tammy Murphy. The change makes New Jersey the first state to comprehensively address climate change across multiple content area standards.

“In New Jersey, we have already begun to experience the effects of climate change, from our disappearing shorelines, to harmful algal blooms in our lakes, superstorms producing torrential rain, and summers that are blazing hot,” said First Lady Murphy. “The adoption of these standards is much more than an added educational requirement; it is a symbol of a partnership between generations.”

English Language Arts and Mathematics were reviewed in 2016. The NJDOE appendices for those two content areas are being updated to contain resources for teaching climate change.

In social studies, students may research public policy related to climate change. In computer science and design thinking, students may analyze climate change computational models, and in comprehensive health and physical education, students may investigate how local, state, and global agencies are addressing health issues caused by climate change.

The New Jersey Department of Education performs a review of the standards every five years. The state sets the academic standards, which describe what students should know and be able to do by the time they graduate high school, while local school districts implement the curricula that help students meet the standards.

The full standards are available at nj.gov/education/cccs/2020.



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Kennedy running for Congress

The former educator and NJEA member will fight for public education



From left: Martin Luther King III, NJEA-endorsed candidate Amy Kennedy, NJEA President Marie Blistan, former U.S. Rep. Patrick Kennedy, and NJREA member Robert Blistan after a Jan. 28 rally in Wildwood.

It wasn't supposed to happen this way. Amy Kennedy was a long shot to win the Democratic primary in New Jersey's 2nd Congressional District (CD-2). Yet on evening of July 7 as the first mail-in-ballot-only election came to a close, Amy Kennedy was declared the winner in a landslide victory.

A former teacher and NJEA member in Atlantic County's Northfield School District, as well as the daughter of two former NJEA members and current NJREA members, Amy Kennedy earned NJEA's endorsement in April because of her strong support of public education, her passionate advocacy for mental health and her strong support of racial, social and economic justice.

While COVID-19 spread across the state, it forced the campaign and NJEA members to find new ways to support Kennedy throughout the primary. NJEA members stepped up, using their ingenuity to propel the former educator to victory.

"As a former teacher and New Jersey Education Association member, it's been an incredible honor to have NJEA's endorsement and support," said Amy Kennedy. "I'm so grateful for the many NJEA volunteers and members who helped support my campaign."

"We are proud to have supported Amy Kennedy during this critical primary election," said NJEA President Marie Blistan. "The world is full of uncertainty right now, and, as educators, we must elect pro-public education candidates to represent us in Washington. Amy knows our profession because she's worked in it. She is the voice our members and students deserve to have in Congress right now."

"She's an inspiration," said NJEA Vice President Sean M. Spiller, citing Kennedy's underdog status, which she held throughout the race. "Without party backing, our members knew this would be a difficult task. It was daunting, but NJEA members aren't easily discouraged. We worked harder for Amy Kennedy because she will remain loyal to educators and our students. We need someone we can trust in CD-2. Amy Kennedy is that someone."

NJEA was among Kennedy's earliest major union endorsements. NJEA members made invaluable contributions to her congressional campaign and eventual primary election victory.

Throughout the campaign, NJEA member-volunteers in CD-2 found creative ways to talk about voting for Kennedy with the more than 6,000 registered Democrats in the district who were NJEA members. From sending text messages to making thousands of phone calls and posting

on social media, NJEA members quickly adapted to a campaign unlike any other.

"Our members were determined to make a difference in this campaign," said NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Steve Beatty. "Despite the challenges, from working remotely to campaigning remotely, our members stepped up. Amy supports public education, she stands up for racial, social and economic justice, and she isn't afraid to stand up to President Trump, unlike Jeff Van Drew. Amy Kennedy is worth fighting for, and we're excited to fight for her this November."

Amy Kennedy will face Jeff Van Drew (R-2) in this November's general election. A lifelong Democrat, Van Drew switched political parties last year to earn the support of President Donald Trump.

To learn how to get involved in NJEA's member-to-member effort to support Kennedy, visit [njea.org/volunteersforamykennedy](https://www.njea.org/volunteersforamykennedy).

NJEA Amistad Stakeholder Group recommendations released

Teaching the history of Africans and African Americans in the United States and their role in building this nation

Since it was established in 2002, the New Jersey Amistad Commission has played an essential role in supporting educators to fulfill the Amistad mandate into our schools. Through the commission's resources, conferences, workshops and summer institutes, educators throughout the state have gone back to their districts ready to place African Americans at the center of American history.

While much has been done, there is so much more to do. That is the conclusion of the NJEA Amistad Stakeholder Group, which offers its recommendations in a 38-page report titled "An Intentional, Authentic, and Inclusive Learning Experience." The NJEA Amistad Stakeholder Group

is a coalition of education stakeholders representing educators, parents, school and district administrators, education advocates and the New Jersey Department of Education.

Marie Blistan thanked the members NJEA Amistad Stakeholder Group for their advocacy to move the Amistad mandate forward.

"Thank you to our NJEA Stakeholder Group members for the work we have done so far regarding the implementation of the Amistad Curriculum!" Blistan said. "We will be working together on the next steps with our recommendations over this next school year."

The report can be downloaded at njea.org/amistad-report.

Remembering the Amistad Revolt

By Brenda Brathwaite, chair, NJEA Amistad Stakeholder Group

"We want free."

Sengbe Pieh, also known as Joseph Cinqué, said those exact words during his district trial testimony in New Haven, Connecticut to set himself and other African captives free, after their mutiny aboard the Spanish schooner *La Amistad* in 1839. The July 2 revolt occurred 181 years ago. It became one of the most celebrated uprisings against the trans-Atlantic slave trade, because of its symbolic nature in securing the freedom of abducted Africans within the institutionalized system of slavery in the United States.

The story of the Amistad Revolt has been well documented and conveyed through primary sources, including court proceedings. There are also biographies, books, and even a movie adaptation of the revolt. However, the extensive availability of information about the revolt becomes meaningless if we do not seek to educate ourselves about how the Black experience began in the United States.

Our racial and social justice work requires that we familiarize ourselves with historical occurrences that have produced systems of inequities and limited opportunities for people of color. The intent of the New Jersey Department of Education's Amistad Curriculum is to acknowledge the contributions of Africans and African Americans to the history of the United States. Whether choosing to review the Amistad Curriculum, delving into the Amistad Revolt, or beginning with a different facet of experiences of people of color, I invite you to begin this journey.

New Jersey Amistad Commission – Interactive Curriculum

njamistadcurriculum.net

The Amistad Case

archives.gov/education/lessons/amistad

The Amistad Rebellion – A Story Map

bit.ly/amistad-rebellion

The Amistad Slave Rebellion, 175 Years Ago

history.com/news/the-amistad-slave-rebellion-175-years-ago



Union county educators, community hold "AWAREness March" by Jacynth Johnson



According to Trauma Sensitive Schools, “traumatic experiences can impact learning, behavior and relationships at school.” Racism creates long-term psychological and emotional trauma in the lives of youth and adults alike. In the wake of George Floyd’s murder, marchers around the world took to the streets to unleash the power of their voices and stand united against racism.

As an educator and Plainfield resident, I felt moved to create a platform and space for students to be heard and empowered, share real stories, bring hope to the Plainfield community, and stand united with North Plainfield and South Plainfield. What impacts the world will eventually impact the community and schools. The A.W.A.R.E Organization was created to Awaken communities With Awareness by building diverse and inclusive Relationships while Educating them about social issues that impact their neighborhood and schools.

On Saturday, July 25, the A.W.A.R.E Organization took to the streets of Plainfield, led by the Plainfield Police Department, and marched with supporters from North Plainfield, South Plainfield, Piscataway, Scotch Plains, Union, and Elizabeth, New Jersey. Steady footsteps moved in harmony as the chants pierced the silent streets:

Hear my plea,
Hear my cry.
We can’t breathe,
Remove your knee.

At the conclusion of the march the crowd gathered at Library Park, with social distancing protocols in place, and students from North Plainfield and Plainfield school districts led the audience in an artistically conscious showcase educating the audience about the history and contributions of African Americans through drumming, song, poetry and dance.

The work of the A.W.A.R.E Organization continues by establishing AWARE Plainfield student groups in middle and high schools and strategizing ways to create racial equity in teaching and learning. AWARE groups will also bring awareness to other social justice concerns that plague the communities of South Plainfield,

North Plainfield and Plainfield and work together to protect our children and our community.

The first annual A.W.A.R.E. March would not have been possible without the dedication and sacrifice of the march committee, contributions and support of NJEA REAL Movement, Plainfield’s Mayor, Adrian O. Mapp, Plainfield Public School’s Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC), Plainfield Board of Education, Plainfield Education Association (PEA), North Plainfield Education Association (NPEA), and Sigma Community Enrichment Initiative (SCEI). The A.W.A.R.E Organization also thanks local area businesses, educators, parents and community members who donated, supported the cause and marched.

The A.W.A.R.E Organization’s continued goal is to bring together all racial groups from North Plainfield, South Plainfield and Plainfield to increase awareness of injustices and inequities that exist within these communities and schools, in order to partner and strategize ways to address them.

For more information and to connect:

Google Site: bit.ly/awareplainfield
Email: awareplainfield@gmail.com
Instagram and Facebook: AWAREPlainfield

Jacynth Johnson is a part-time NJEA professional development consultant and an NJEA REAL Movement member. Formerly a teacher in the Plainfield School District, Johnson is now a middle school supervisor in Montgomery Township School District.

Upper left: Plainfield Education Association President Keith Coston addresses the crowd and stands with the organization and its mission to end racial injustice.

Upper right: North Plainfield students stand against racial injustice in their local schools and communities.

Center: Plainfield Public Schools employee, Nyla Glover, honors the death of George Floyd and many others by raising a fist during a student tribute.

Photo credits: Plainfield Education Association member Joel Plummer and Plainfield Board of Education member Carmencita Pile.

Join the association's REAL Movement



In the wake of uprisings for racial justice that were sparked by the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, NJEA recognizes our critical role in this collective struggle for human rights and dignity.

As educators, we bear a great responsibility for shaping society. We have the unique privilege of working with children and young people as they are forming their values and worldview. We also have the great responsibility of responding with compassion, courage and conviction as they witness history in real time.

If you feel ready to rise up together, then join NJEA's REAL Movement, which stands for racial equity, affirmation, and literacy:

- Racial equity is our aspirational purpose in this work of transforming New Jersey's public education system.
- Racial affirmation challenges the "colorblind" narrative with the power of diversity and visibility.
- Racial literacy connects NJEA members to their power as educators to be generational gamechangers.
- Movements elevate a collective vision for a better world by activating and organizing the power of the people.

By joining the REAL Movement, you will embark on a learning journey with a diverse community of colleagues who are connected through shared values. This community of will cultivate relationships, share resources, and sharpens skills to do the racial justice work that is critical for our classrooms, our union, and our communities to change the game.

In the first 100 days of launching our movement we have hosted a series of conversations with members discussing White Supremacy Culture in Schools, Black Liberation and Racial Equity, Decolonizing Curriculum from Indigenous, Hispanic, and Latinx Perspectives, and Debunking the Model Minority Myth with Asian and Pacific Island educators. The culmination of these conversations elevated NJEA's first virtual conference called the Radical Imagination Summit for Educators (RISE) on July 16, which featured keynote speaker Dr. Bettina L. Love discussing Hip-Hop Civics and Abolitionist Teaching. Our Summer Leadership Conference (SLC) session continued the dialogue with over 300 registrants to prepare to organize for "Racial Justice: All Day, Every Day." The wealth from the recordings of these remarkable discussions will be shared widely with our members to continue their learning journey.

Our REAL Member Advisory Council created a Racial Equity Action Playbook that will launch in the fall to support educators across the state create Racial Equity Committees in their locals, organize within their community, develop their skills with inclusive pedagogy, and more.

This is only the beginning of an ongoing learning journey to build an unstoppable movement for good within our public schools. Here is a glance at our REAL organizational compass that is a sample of one tool that will help us navigate transformational change.

We also launched our new website, real.njea.org, that includes a master calendar for all events offered by our Equity Alliance, Members of Color Initiative, Priority Schools Initiative, and more! Go there to learn more join the movement, attend special events, receive a wealth of resources, and connect with like-minded and like-hearted educator-activists!

Visit our new website,
real.njea.org

NEED HELP?

FREE AND
CONFIDENTIAL HELP
WITH PERSONAL,
FAMILY AND
SCHOOL-RELATED
DEMANDS.

WHY HANDLE TOUGH TIMES ALONE?

AID NJEA is your 24-hour,
confidential helpline. Staffed
by NJEA members and
professionals from Rutgers
University Behavioral Health
Care, the helpline offers
practical advice, direction, ideas
and resources from those who
have walked in your shoes.



Pension funding update

By Sarah Favinger

The history of pension funding in New Jersey has been a tumultuous one. The state's longstanding failure to make its statutorily required pension payment year after year has created a deep hole that Gov. Phil Murphy and the Legislature are trying to dig out of. NJEA has fought the state's failure to fund the pension system in the courts. While the courts have acknowledged the right of members to receive the pension that they earn while working, they have held that they cannot force the state's hand to make the necessary payments.

The pension funds are funded partly by employee contributions, and partly by the state or the local employer. Certificated public school employees are part of one of the state funded systems—the Teachers' Pension and Annuity Fund (TPAF). Non-certificated public school employees are part of the Local Public Employees' Retirement System (Local PERS), which is funded by the local employer.

Every year the actuaries for each pension system publish a report called an Actuarial Valuation Report. This report provides a snapshot of the health of a pension system by measuring the assets and liabilities. As of the 2019 valuation, the TPAF was funded at 40.3%. The funded value represents the ratio of assets the plan currently has to the projected benefit payments that members have earned. In other words, the plan has enough assets to pay 40.3% of the benefits owed to active and retired members of the fund. This does not mean that members will only receive 40.3% of their benefit—it just means that at that point in time, the assets could not fully cover the liabilities.

As of the last valuation, Local PERS was funded at 67.4%—significantly higher than TPAF. This is because local employers are paying into the plan, rather than the state, and they have more consistently made the full payment. However, in the near future neither PERS nor TPAF are projected to reach a funded level of 80%, which is the threshold for which the potential reinstatement of the cost of living adjustment (COLA) can be contemplated.

WHO'S FUNDING THE PENSION SYSTEM?

Employees have always made their full

Sarah Favinger is an associate director in the NJEA Research and Economic Services Division. She can be reached at sfavinger@njea.org.

contribution to the pension system. In contrast, the state has not been making the full payment, and in most years, the contribution has been drastically lower than the required contribution. For each year that the state fails to make the total required contribution, the pension system's funded level goes down.

During the Christie administration, P.L. 2011, Ch. 78 was passed. The law made a modification to the pension benefit affecting the retirement age and formula used to calculate the pension benefit for employees hired after June 28, 2011, and included a guarantee that the state would begin increasing their payments over a seven-year period, at which point the full payment would be made. For three years, the state adhered to the payment schedule as outlined in Ch. 78. However, the Christie administration failed to include the four-sevenths pension payment in the 2015 state

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Record pension payments have been made over the past few years under the Murphy administration—an important first step to putting the pension system on track.

budget. NJEA immediately filed a lawsuit along with other public-employee unions. The New Jersey Supreme Court ultimately ruled in favor of the state, on the basis that the state's pension payments per Ch. 78 violated the debt limitation clause of the New Jersey Constitution.

Toward the end of the Christie administration, the state implemented quarterly pension payments, which helps the system because it gets the money to the Division of Investment faster so that it can

be invested. The state lottery was also redirected to three of the state's pension systems, with the bulk going to the TPAF, and a smaller percentage allocated to PERS. Lottery revenues are received on a monthly basis, which also improves the cash flow for the Division of Investment.

MURPHY ADMINISTRATION CONSISTENTLY INCREASES PENSION CONTRIBUTIONS

The Murphy administration has been committed to funding the pension system and has consistently increased the state's contribution to the pension system. The current trajectory for ramping up to the state's full payment is to increase the payment by tenths each year. During the 2019-20 fiscal year, the Murphy administration made a seven-tenths pension contribution. This means that the state's payment is 70% of what the state should be putting into the pension system as determined by the plan's actuaries.

In the 2020-21 fiscal year, the state is expected to make an eight-tenths payment. By fiscal year 2023, the state is finally expected to make the full pension contribution—also known as 100% of the Annual Required Contribution (ARC) as determined by the plan's actuaries. Once the state gets to the full payment, the pension system will begin to recover.

Even with the increased funding since 2011, the funded status of the state funded pension systems, including TPAF, has continued to decrease. This is in part because when the state fails to contribute 100% of the actuarially required contribution, liabilities increase. The funded status of the TPAF decreased from 53.2% in 2010 to 40.3% in the 2019 valuation. Liabilities increased by over 35% between 2010 and 2019.

For each year that the state makes a 100% ARC payment to the pension system, the funded status will improve slightly, so long as the investment returns are also on track. But it will take decades for the state to dig out of the pension hole that resulted from decades of underfunding. For the fund to become healthier, and to get to the point where the COLA can be reinstated, the state will have to continue making that full ARC payment for quite some time.

PERS BETTER FUNDED, BUT PRIVATIZATION AFFECTS SYSTEM

Since school districts fund Local PERS

differently, the funded status of Local PERS has increased from 61.6% in 2010 to 67.4% in 2019. Even with the considerably higher funded status, liabilities have grown by nearly 48.5% between 2010 and 2019. The payment made to the pension system for Local PERS employers also includes payment for previous underfunding of that system. Even with its comparatively higher funded level, Local PERS faces issues with the impact of privatization of support staff positions in school districts. Every time PERS positions are outsourced, the local employer is no longer paying into the pension, even though outsourced employees may qualify for a pension for the years previously worked.

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For the fund to become healthier, and to get to the point where the COLA can be reinstated, the state will have to continue making that full annual required payment for quite some time.

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

Until the current financial crisis caused by COVID-19, pension fund investments were doing well, averaging 7% over the past 10 years. As expected, the most recent pension fund report shows negative returns for the 2020 calendar year. However, keep in mind that since pension fund reports lag a few months behind markets have recovered quite a bit from the low point.

In addition to the losses in the market, the state

of New Jersey is expecting a significant budget shortfall for the upcoming fiscal year. The state made full quarterly pension payment in June, which was the final payment for the 2020 fiscal year. The state treasurer’s office has communicated that it is hoping to make the FY 2021 payment, but the payment will be behind. The first payment, which is due in September, is expected to be paid in October.

In summary, the good news is that the state has been significantly increasing the payment being

made to the pension system. Record pension payments have been made over the past few years under the Murphy administration—an important first step to putting the pension system on track. However, the hole we are digging out of is quite deep and has further been exacerbated by the current financial and state budget crisis.

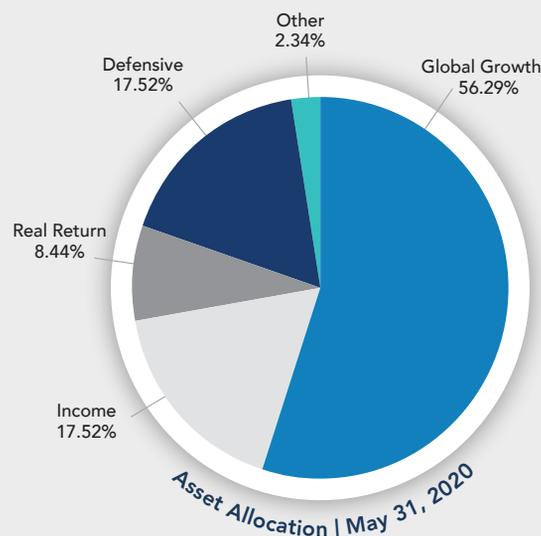
NJEA and NJREA will continue to fight for full funding of the pension systems.

PENSION UPDATE

TOTAL PENSION FUND: \$75.33 BILLION

The totals below reflect market values as of May 31, 2020, and for comparison, Feb. 29, 2020. The figures, which are rounded, may not reflect the current market values of some alternative investments through the period noted, because of lags in reporting under industry standards.

	May 31, 2020		Feb. 29, 2019	
	Market Value (\$ billions)	Asset Allocation	Market Value (\$ billions)	Asset Allocation
Global Growth	\$42.40	56.29%	\$43.30	58.94%
Income	\$13.20	17.52%	\$13.69	16.89%
Real Return	\$6.36	8.44%	\$7.15	9.15%
Defensive	\$11.61	15.41%	\$9.32	12.62%
Other	\$1.76	2.34%	\$1.98	2.40%
Total	\$75.33	100%	\$75.45	100%



All reports and financial statements are posted on the Division of Investments’ website at www.nj.gov/treasury/doinvest/index.shtml.



UNTIL IT'S SAFE

TEACHING, LEARNING,
AND WORKING
FROM HOME

BY PATRICK RUMAKER, NJEA REVIEW EDITOR

The last six months have been the most difficult months in nearly every NJEA member's career. In addition to the personal challenges of navigating a global pandemic and your concern for the health and well-being of your families and loved ones, the profession has been turned upside down. In a matter of days—and in some cases, in a matter of hours—you had to completely reinvent our work.

For teachers and paraprofessionals, it was finding ways to reach their students and continue instruction. Those concerns cast a spotlight on the wide digital divide, where better-resourced schools and communities were able to more quickly reconnect with students electronically, but reconnecting with all students in underserved communities proved daunting. Some students became unreachable when school buildings closed, leaving staff scrambling to deliver instructional packets and perhaps connect by telephone or a socially distant knock on a door. For students with special needs the challenge to recreate needed services safely during a pandemic was particularly acute.

For educational support professionals (ESPs), the fear of layoffs loomed large from the day in March when school buildings first closed. Nonetheless, ESPs cleaned, sanitized and maintained buildings, prepared and distributed meals, delivered instructional packets and sorted student work when the packets were returned. They continued meeting office administrative responsibilities from kitchen tables, figured out how to keep attendance

records when students weren't physically coming to school, tracked down students who were not "in attendance," maintained building security, and performed the hundreds of other job responsibilities that keep a school running even when school is being run from the homes of staff members.

From the stories sent in to NJEA by members, it was clear the creativity of teachers and ESPs was in overdrive. A flood of ideas from members arrived at NJEA for instruction, connection, ways to honor graduating seniors and retiring staff, retooled NJEA Pride in Public Education grants to meet community needs, food distribution, and more. So many photos and stories came in that NJEA created a special website to make these ideas more widely available: njeatogether.org.

Despite the joy that creativity can bring, members approached this new and unexpected reality with a great deal of sadness. We know what is lost when we cannot be with our students in person. We know the power of personal relationships, group collaboration, peer interaction and one-on-one help when students are struggling. None of those things can be re-created remotely as well as they can be done in person. We didn't enter education to see our students remotely through screens or to communicate with them by email.

NJEA FROM HOME

Work was re-imagined for NJEA leaders and staff as well, with nearly all working from home except for the staff who maintain the headquarters building in Trenton, handle mail, and run the print shop. Accounting Department staff worked primarily from home but came into the building to handle payroll and other confidential matters that cannot be administered from a remote location. Otherwise, staff from both the field offices and the

Editor's note: This edition of the Review went to press on Aug. 19. Much will have changed between that date and the first day of school and may affect certain details in this article.



headquarters building used new tools but provided the same extensive support and service as always as we all navigated unfamiliar terrain together.

NJEA President Marie Blistan, NJEA Vice President Sean M. Spiller and NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Steve Beatty didn't miss a beat—continuing to represent and fight for members from home or for socially distant public events. In fact, it was as the beginning of the shutdown that legislation providing Ch. 78 relief, due-process rights, and protection against anti-privatization passed in the Senate, followed by its passage in the Assembly in June. (See pages 45-60 for more on this legislation.)

With schools at the heart of nationwide and statewide discussions about COVID-19, it was not uncommon to see Blistan, Spiller or Beatty interviewed for news programs or participating in panel discussions about the impact of COVID-19 on members, students, families and communities.

NJEA Executive Committee meetings, Delegate Assembly meetings, other committee meetings moved onto WebEx and Zoom platforms. Local, county, and statewide leaders continued to handle the business of the association, nearly all of them balancing their association responsibilities with their work in the school districts where they are employed.

Local presidents in particular felt the weight of leadership in these un-precedented times, relying more than ever on the expert advice and support of UniServ field reps, their assistants in field offices, and NJEA staff in its various divisions.

The “doorstep service” UniServ field reps are known for moved to laptops, tablets, telephones and seemingly endless online meetings. Field reps were called on to deal with an avalanche working conditions issues and questionable district and school board practices never imagined in pre-COVID times. They received calls from members, especially those in high risk groups who lived with family member in high risk group, who feared the consequences not reporting to their schools if they reopened. Others called to inquire about early retirement.

This in addition to assisting locals with negotiations, contract enforcement, grievance adjudication, arbitrations, and all that comes with being the face of NJEA for most members at the local and county levels—but working out ways to provide all of these services remotely.

The questions raised when school buildings closed, such as “How will teachers and staff be evaluated?” “Will statewide standardized tests be administered?” “How should students be graded?” “When and how should schools reopen?” among dozens of others, landed primarily, but not solely, in the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE). The NJEA Professional Development and Instructional Issues Division (PDII), tasked with monitoring the NJDOE, instituted weekly online meetings to advise NJEA staff and officers on guidance from the department and making recommendations.

Both UniServ field reps and the PDII Division relied on the legal counsel of NJEA's Member Rights office and Research and Economic Services Division staff for assistance in interpreting guidance and broadcasts from the NJDOE.

LEARNING TO MEET WITHOUT MEETING

When it became clear that conferences and other large in-person meetings would not be permitted over the summer, PDII staff moved its Radical Imagination SUMMIT for Educators (RISE) from a physical space to Zoom. Over 200 members participated.

The annual Jack Bertolino Summer Leadership Conference (SLC), primarily administered by the NJEA Organizing Division and the NJEA Leadership Committee, also moved to a Zoom platform. It provided, to the greatest extent possible, many of the same multiday leadership training programs offered in person.

Early in the planning process for SLC, both staff and the Leadership Committee wondered if members—after having spent three months educating students online would have an appetite for spending time during the summer looking at their screens. There was no need for worry. More than 1,800 members registered for SLC, and they attended multiple workshops while there—leading to more 2,200 workshop participants and 4,750 minicourse participants over the four days.

This bodes well for another NJEA program that comes primarily from the PDII Division and overseen by the NJEA Convention Committee: the NJEA Convention. The association's largest all-member event and the largest professional development event of its kind in the world, will be held online instead of in Atlantic City. (See Page 17.)

The shift to so much of NJEA's work, and the work of local and county association, to online formats required re-branding that required the creativity of the graphic artists in NJEA's Communication's Division.

All of NJEA's major initiatives, including Pride in Public Education, NJEA FAST, the NJEA Priority Schools Initiative, the NJEA Teacher Leader Academy, the NJEA REAL Movement, the NJEA Members of Color Network, the NJEA Early Career Network, and the NJEA Patriots' Alliance and others moved their operations online. PRIDE grants, as noted earlier, were retooled to enable grants to be used for COVID-related community service projects.

COVID-19 was not the only news this year to shake the nation. The murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor led staff and members to ache to be together to talk, to cry, to grieve, and to discern what we as educators and union members could do. Online platforms made it possible for members and staff to gather frequently on a large scale in a way that might not have been possible as often in person. Through the NJEA Members of Color Network, the NJEA REAL Movement, through “Movement Mondays,” “Freestyle Fridays,” and other events, the work of

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Despite the joy that creativity can bring, members approached this new and unexpected reality with a great deal of sadness.”





racial, social, economic and educational justice moved forward in an online space.

In every part of the association, NJEA's associate staff—executive, confidential, program and administrative assistants, clerks, secretaries, operators, and office assistants—kept the association going as they recreated their jobs from home. Nothing would move forward at NJEA without their work.

In addition, balancing both their responsibilities to their school districts with their responsibilities as part-time NJEA employees, consultants from the UniServ, Professional Development, Communications, and Organizing divisions as well as retirees who work as Pension Consultants and Priority Schools Initiative Consultants took on assignments to ensure that members continued to be well represented and offered top-notch professional development.

WHEN WILL WE GET BACK TO "NORMAL"?

So much has happened since mid-March, that it's difficult to remember that when schools first closed, most of us had no idea that it would be the last time we saw our students in our buildings—that proms, graduation ceremonies, field days, spring sports, spelling bees, staff retirement parties, and countless other end-of-year traditions would be cancelled or re-imagined. Or that NJEA's events all the way through to NJEA Convention eight months away at the time, would move online.

And now that we are in a new school year, things are far from normal. On Aug. 11, NJEA, the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association, and the New Jersey Association of School Administrators issued a joint statement, calling for a remote school opening statewide. At the time, NJDOE guidance required some form of in-person instruction from the first day of school, leaving it up to individual school districts to determine how it would work.

"For months, New Jersey educators and administrators have been working tirelessly to find a way to safely bring students back into school buildings in September. Now, with less than a month remaining before schools are scheduled to reopen, it is time to reluctantly acknowledge that goal is simply not achievable," the statement began. "Reopening schools for in-person instruction under the current conditions poses too great a risk to the health of students and schools staff"

The statement called on Gov. Phil Murphy and the NJDOE to direct all schools to open remotely in September, saying, "The question of whether and when to reopen for in-person instruction is first and foremost a public health decision that cannot be left in the hands of nearly 600 individual school districts. The stakes are too high, and the consequences of a wrong decision are too grave."

On Aug. 12, the governor stopped short of calling for a remote opening statewide but permitted districts to open remotely if they met certain criteria and had a plan to get back to in-person instruction. While school boards several districts had voted for a remote opening prior to the governor's announcement, more did so soon after.

On Aug. 13, an op-ed from NJEA President Marie Blistan was published on njspotlight.com. Part of its title made it clear where Blistan and NJEA stood: "It's Time to Admit It's Just too Dangerous."

"There is simply no level of planning we can do in the next four weeks, and no amount of caution and care we can practice in September, that will guarantee the safety of students and staff," Blistan wrote. "And the scenarios we've had to contemplate—no group work, cafeterias closed, wearing masks and sheltering behind plexiglass unable to approach students for individual instruction—are so far removed from what existed before March that even if students come back to buildings, they will not be coming back to anything they will recognize as school. It will be an alien, intimidating experience."

While NJEA's joint statement with NJPSA and NJASA stated categorically that the governor should require a remote opening statewide, from the start

“**How, when, and under what conditions can schools open safely so as to not endanger the lives of our beloved students?**”

NJEA said that schools should reopen for in-person instruction only when it was safe to do so.

This was well articulated in NJEA's testimony to the Assembly Education Committee delivered by Dr. Christine Miles, an associate director in the NJEA PDII Division, on July 22.

Herself a parent of two school-aged children, Miles told the committee, "As parents, we would never knowingly send our children to school when a credible threat against human life is present. We don't think, 'Oh, well my child won't be a target, so they'll be fine.' We drop everything, rush to school as quickly as humanly possible, and are there to protect our kids, the most valuable aspect of our lives."

Miles told the committee that science must lead the way on reopening schools safely.

"As we consider what school reopening during the COVID-19 pandemic looks like we should stop asking if we want brick and mortar schools to reopen. Obviously, everyone wants schools to reopen as soon as possible," Miles testified. "It's not about dates; it's about data. The true question we need to be asking and seeking answers to is "How, when, and under what conditions can schools open safely so as to not endanger the lives of our beloved students, their caregivers, and each community's educators?"

Miles enumerated what empirical research indicates would be required to keep the virus from spreading in schools. A daunting list of requirements that few, if any, schools could meet.

On Aug. 13, Asw. Mila Jasey (D-Essex) and Ralph Caputo (D-Essex), both members of the Assembly Education Committee, introduced A-4509, which would have required school districts to provide virtual or remote instruction for beginning of 2020-21 school year, but permit in-person delivery of certain special education services. It also would have permitted school districts to delay start of 2020-21 school year. It's Senate companion, S-2809, was introduced by Sen. Linda Greenstein (D-Mercer).

As of press time, Aug. 19, that fate of A-4509/S2809, was not yet known.

But what is known is what NJEA's president wrote on Aug. 13: "Schools are going to be central to our success in navigating it," Blistan wrote. "Until we can safely reopen buildings in person, it's going to take exceptional effort and creativity to serve our students. NJEA members stand ready to do that." 🙏

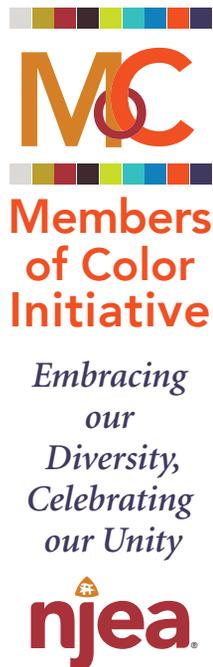




BECOMING A UNION that looks like its members

THE NJEA MEMBERS OF COLOR INITIATIVE SEEKS TO
CHANGE THE “ONLY ONE IN THE ROOM” PATTERN

BY PATRICK RUMAKER, EDITOR, NJEA REVIEW



“We call it the ‘head-nod,’” says Jennifer Johnson, an NJEA organizing consultant and teacher at Piscataway Township High School.

“It’s unspoken,” adds Eric Jones, a field representative in the NJEA Organizing Division. “We’re saying ‘You and I are the only ones in here.’ It’s a constant frustration at NJEA meetings, events and workshops—where is everybody?”

During his 18 years as an elementary school teacher in Plainfield, Jones did not regularly have the experience of being the only Black man in the room at local association and school district meetings. But after he became president of the Plainfield Education Association, Jones began to attend meetings at the statewide level of NJEA. It was obvious to him that NJEA had failed to attract members of color in substantial numbers to active participation and leadership.

“We have had all sorts of initiatives, but we haven’t had anything to connect to a huge demographic of our membership—over 35,000 members of color who are hardly reflected in anything we do,” Jones contends. “And when they are reflected in the Review or on the website, it’s typically the same seven to 10 people. It cannot be considered a complete representation if only the same set of individuals are highlighted.”

INVITING MEMBERS OF COLOR

It was with this in mind that Jones approached NJEA Executive Director Steve Swetsky to say that he wanted to do something to welcome a broader representation of members of color into more active participation in NJEA. Out of that request, the NJEA Members of Color (MOC) Initiative was born.

The NJEA MOC Initiative was created to educate, engage and empower members of an underrepresented affinity group within our state association through intentional organizing. Consistent with NJEA’s goals, the purpose is to create a safe space for the association’s diverse membership to build awareness and strengthen our collective power. The intention is to cultivate a welcoming space and a network within NJEA for members of color.

“If you’re not embracing or making a space for NJEA’s various affinity groups, then we haven’t really served all of our members,” says Johnson. “They’re paying their dues—most of us do it because we know that’s the responsible thing to do, like having car insurance—but if they’re not embraced, you’re not going to engage them. If they don’t feel like there’s a place that really does belong to them, they’re not going to come.”

CALLING ALL MEMBERS OF COLOR

Through the NJEA Organizing Division, Jones and Johnson planned meetings in each of New Jersey’s 21 counties to which every member of color living or working in each of those counties was invited.

Typically, when NJEA seeks to invite members into an initiative, it activates its usual tools for outreach: publication in the Review, njea.org and social media, emails to local and county presidents, the notification of UniServ field reps, and various other means through NJEA’s structure. But for dues-paying members whose daily experience rarely intersects with the association’s structure, such methods of invitation do not reach them. That’s why Jones opted for a more

Patrick Rumaker is the editor of the NJEA Review. He can be reached at prumaker@njea.org. To learn more about the NJEA MOC Initiative, write to Eric Jones at ejones@njea.org.



direct invitation.

When joining NJEA—and anytime they update their records—members have the option to self-identify their ethnicity. Of NJEA’s 200,000 members, nearly 36,000 identify as a person of color. Using the mobile phone number members provided in their membership records, Jones activated the Hustle app to text every member of color in a given county to invite them to their county’s meeting.

The MOC Initiative partnered with the respective county association leadership and UniServ field offices over the course of the 2019-20 school year to determine meeting dates and venues for the MOC Initiative in each county.

“In addition to the actual events that have taken place, the partnership that we’ve been able to build is getting strong support from various leaders throughout the state,” Jones says.

The plan worked. Hundreds of members across the state who had never attended an NJEA event in the past responded and showed up. At one county meeting an African-American woman said she came because “this was the first time anyone has invited me anywhere in 25 years. I’m a counselor in a nearly all-white district—every one of my colleagues is white. I’ve never been so much as invited to a birthday party.”

“The MOC initiative has created a family environment that has brought together some dynamic educators who have the belief that we are stronger together,” writes an early-career member from Lindenwold. “Coming to MOC events creates a sense of unity and a sense of belonging to members who have, in some cases, felt invisible.”

“Everyone wants to feel a sense of belonging,”

Jones says. “We can’t control how districts treat people, but if the union is equally ignorant to the needs of all of its members, we’re not doing our job.”

CREATING SPACE

The county meetings had a simple format. Members were invited to sit at round tables by their years of experience in education. After some introductions—often statewide and county association officers and UniServ field reps and other NJEA staff were in attendance—members were asked to discuss three questions at their tables:

- Do you feel you fit in or belong in NJEA? Why or why not?
- What would the best version of NJEA look and feel like from your perspective?
- What would you like to see more or less of from NJEA?

The meetings also provided opportunities to learn more about how to become involved in the association at the local, county, state, and national levels. And as with many NJEA events, attendees broke bread together, shared stories, and started to build lasting relationships with their fellow colleagues.

“NJEA is great at collective bargaining—it is the premier state association in the country,” Jones says. “We protect our members, we help our members negotiate great contracts, and we fight for them. But in so many ways we’ve ignored our members of color, and that’s not OK if we’re standing under a banner of social justice. Just as we can’t teach our students well if they don’t know that we care about them, we can’t expect our diverse membership to fully embrace their state association if they continue to feel marginalized or

underrepresented. This disconnect has been huge.

“Prior to the Members of Color Initiative, I had no sense of connection to NJEA because I had never seen anyone representing my culture or heritage in leadership,” wrote Martha Arrizón, a member in Alloway Township who now serves on the NJEA Women in Education and NJEA Professional Development committees. “I honestly felt I was paying my dues to some entity and not being represented. The main reason I’m taking part in the Members of Color Initiative is to make sure newcomers to NJEA, of various ethnicities, know they are welcomed and valued; that they are respected, and their worldviews are honored.”

PROFESSIONAL, EDUCATIONAL, AND SOCIAL GATHERINGS

Meetings were scheduled in all 21 counties, but Cape May and Hudson county meetings were yet to be held when the COVID-19 crisis ended the opportunity for in-person meetings.

Prior to the closure of meeting spaces, the NJEA MOC Initiative had many other social and educational gatherings. At the NJEA Convention, MOC hosted a Power of Diversity Brunch. Convention keynote speaker Cornel West dropped in to address the group. During the course of the year, MOC hosted several events with various themes and agendas at NJEA Headquarters in Trenton and at UniServ field offices around the state.

These sessions have continued in the virtual world on Zoom and WebEx.

“This is all at the direction of what members want,” Jones said. “For example, two members—one a social worker and one a counselor—

approached me saying, “Why don’t we do something for people who technically aren’t teachers but are still certified? I suggested they put something together. They did, and it was amazing.”

Jones notes that these kinds of activities give members the opportunity to lead in a nontraditional sense. They may not want to be a negotiations chair, or a grievance chair, but they have leadership skills and through the NJEA MOC initiative they can use them.

Regular Zoom events such as “Wind Down Wednesdays,” financial planning sessions, and member-led activities, such as a prayer hour on Saturday mornings, hosted by East Orange Education Association President Dr. Dawn Nichol-Manning, empower members to take the lead and broaden interest in the association.

On the NJEA staff side, the MOC initiative has held multiple sessions for NJEA consultants of color. NJEA consultants are members of NJEA who work in, or are retired from, a school district but do part-time work for NJEA outside of their school-district hours. Consultants are employed in the UniServ, Organizing, Professional Development and Instructional Issues, Research, and Communications divisions.

“We also have started affinity organizing within the MOC Network by hosting several early career sessions as well as the first-ever NJEA

Men-of-Color Symposium in June,” Jones said. “Inclusivity requires intentionality. We want to be sure to engage all members and be sure they understand what NJEA is all about: the conferences, the structure of the local versus the county versus the state, and so forth.”

Jones and Johnson say they were surprised and pleased by how retirees have responded to the MOC Initiative. They are coming to events as well, noting that they wished these opportunities had existed much sooner.

“I am so delighted to be a part of MOC!” writes Barbara Gary, a New Jersey Retirees Education Association (NJREA) member and a retired NJEA Priority Schools consultant. “It thrills my heart to see the movement and the power evolving from members of color. I have been a member

since 1971, and this new phase, I feel, is a part of my legacy!”

NJEA MOC ON SOCIAL MEDIA

In addition to meetings on Zoom, and eventually again in person, the NJEA MOC provides a space for interaction and networking on Facebook and Instagram.

“The MOC initiative, specifically this Facebook page, has been a great source of information for its members,” writes Jocelyn Martinez, a teacher in Jersey City. “I have learned more about NJEA in these past few months, than in the past 18 years of teaching and being a member. I am

grateful that we are made aware of the different workshops and conferences for its members. MOC has provided us with opportunities to get together and meet other members throughout the different counties.”

The NJEA MOC Facebook page can be found by searching “NJEA Members-of-Color Initiative” in the Facebook search bar. The Instagram page can be found by searching “NJEA Members of Color” on Instagram.

BEING A PART OF NJEA

While the NJEA MOC provides a space for members of color to become reacquainted with NJEA and to build supportive member-to-member relationships, it also is meant to serve to make the larger association representative of its diverse membership at all levels. If the NJEA MOC is successful in its aims, the Jennifer Johnsons and Eric Joneses of tomorrow will not enter meetings and, yet again, find themselves to be the “only one” in the room.

“MOC has provided our members insight on how they can begin to feel ownership of their union by playing a more integral role, not just on the local level but branching out to running for different offices throughout NJEA,” writes Lauren Chavis-Ferrer, a Paterson Education Association member. “We have had meet and greets in each county to come together and network with one another and have mini-workshops to empower mobilize and strategize with one another so no one person is spread thin attending the many activities going on throughout New Jersey.”

To learn more about the NJEA MOC Initiative, write to Eric Jones at ejones@njea.org.

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NJEA MOC: Meeting in-person and online

The programs and activities of the NJEA MOC Initiative are inspired and initiated by its participants. It takes its direction from what members want. The COVID-19 crisis has changed how members meet, but it has not changed that members meet.

Participants in the NJEA MOC Initiative organize meetings around programs of general interest or the particular interests of affinity groups among members of color. These, so far, have included:

- Countywide focus groups
- Masquerade Mixer at the NJEA Convention
- Power of Diversity Brunch at the NJEA Convention
- Female leaders' discussion
- Presidents'/vice presidents' focus groups
- Vision Board Empowerment Brunch
- COVID-19 Saturday Prayer Hour
- Wind Down Wednesdays
- Financial literacy workshops
- Men-of-Color Symposium
- Early Career Connections
- "How to Prepare to Work for NJEA" workshop
- Chapter 44 discussion
- "Reopening of Schools" discussion

A measure of the impact

One intention of the MOC initiative is to cultivate a welcoming space and a network within NJEA for members of color. This is not limited to meetings of the MOC Initiative but is meant to include increased participation by members of color in all NJEA activities.

When joining NJEA—and anytime they update their records—members have the option to self-identify their ethnicity. By cross-referencing membership data with the participants in the Jack Bertolino Summer Leadership Conference in 2019 and 2020, it appears that the MOC Initiative, which heavily promoted Summer Leadership Conference among its participants, made a significant difference.

Participation by NJEA members of color in Summer Leadership increased by 83%.

Ethnicity	2019	2020
Alaska Native	1	0
American Indian	6	6
Asian-American	12	45
Black/African American	162	296
Hispanic	63	98
Mexican-American (Chicano)	1	1
Multiethnic	4	15
Other	4	5
Pacific Islander	1	1
Total	254	467



RELATIONSHIPS: A KEY FACTOR IN ONLINE INSTRUCTION

BY DR. TRACEY GARRETT

As the author notes, the suggested strategies in this article rely on all students having access to a device. In some districts and for many students, this is not the case. The Review would welcome any submissions about building relationships remotely with students without the benefit of electronic devices. You may send them to NJEAReview@njea.org.



Angel Boose, an educator at Benjamin Banneker Elementary School in East Orange, teaching remotely.

What comes to mind when you think about online instruction? Do you think how will I possibly teach all of the required content effectively? Do you think about whether or not your students have access to the necessary technology? Or, how will your students with special needs receive their services?

What about the idea of building and maintaining relationships with students? According to researcher, Dr. Robert Pianta, the quality of relationships that exist within a classroom setting has a direct impact on a teacher's ability to develop an environment conducive to learning. Similarly, Rita Pierson, creator of the well-known Ted Talk titled Everyone Needs a Champion (bit.ly/tedchampion) states, "Kids don't learn from people they don't like!"

All learning takes risks. Think about it. Whether a teacher asks a student to complete a math problem on the board, demonstrate how to shoot a basketball, spell a word in front of the class or contribute to a class discussion, there is an element of risk involved. The degree of risk will depend on the individual's personality; an extroverted student will be more likely to take a risk than an introverted student. However, the bottom line is

that students will not take risks unless they believe that their teacher cares about them and classmates value their contributions to the class. In light of this, it is a teacher's responsibility to develop relationships with and among his or her students.

Developing relationships might seem like a relatively straightforward task. Experienced teachers have been doing this for many years. However, that was before the world of COVID-19 for the majority of schools, COVID-19 didn't have an impact until mid-March by which point in the school year, relationships, for better or worse, were firmly in place. Therefore, maintaining the relationships that were already established during the first three quarters of the year was made somewhat possible by hard-working and creative teachers.

As the pandemic lingers into this school year requiring either partial or total remote instruction to continue, how can teachers establish those relationships right from the start without having ever met their students face-to-face? How can they maintain those relationships for the duration of online teaching however long that may last?

Relationship building will take on a more pivotal role than ever before in the learning process and require teachers to become more intentional about what strategies they can implement to develop and maintain relationships with and among students.

THE GOALS OF EFFECTIVE RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

There are two goals with respect to implementing effective relationship building strategies. The first goal is to move beyond surface level icebreakers, which are usually quick, fun activities designed to ease beginning of the school year jitters to genuine relationship building strategies. Effective relationship building strategies are purposefully designed to provide opportunities to become more comfortable with one's classmates and teachers, get to know new information about one another and ultimately make connections with one another, all of which will enhance the learning environment because students will be more comfortable taking the risks necessary for learning to transpire.

The second goal to keep in mind is that strategies to build relationships should be implemented all year long. Too frequently teachers engage in these strategies during the first few weeks of school, but then let them fall by the wayside claiming that there isn't enough time to incorporate relationship-building strategies into

their practice in addition to the curriculum they need to cover. However, developing relationships isn't a task that should be looked at as something that is in addition to your curriculum. Rather, it is at the foundation of your curriculum.

How can both of these goals be met during a time of online instruction? Following are some suggested strategies to build relationships and

foster a sense of community in the classroom while engaging in online instruction. It is important to note that the suggested strategies listed below presume that all students have access to a device. It is understood that in some high needs districts, this might be a false assumption.

“
How can teachers establish relationships right from the start without having ever met their students face-to-face?”

Dr. Tracey Garrett is a professor in the Department of Teacher Education at Rider University. She is also the author of the book titled Effective Classroom Management: The Essentials. She can be reached at tgarrett@rider.edu.

STRATEGIES TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AND FOSTER COMMUNITY DURING ONLINE INSTRUCTION

Before trying any of the suggested activities listed here, review and adhere to your school board and district policies regarding electronic communications with students, and discuss your plans with your building principal and/or supervisor.

Hold live meet up sessions

Whether your platform of choice is Zoom, Google Hangout or something else, holding a live session where students can interact with their teacher as well as each other is essential to building relationships. It is important to monitor participation to involve as many students as possible just like teachers do when teaching face-to-face. A helpful suggestion might be to print out a roster of students' names and place check marks next to students after they participate. This allows teachers a quick visual to monitor and equalize participation allowing all students in the class to begin to feel like a valued member of the class community.

Conduct coffee talks

Develop a list of time slots that work with your schedule during the first two weeks of the school year. Have students sign up in small groups of four to five students per slot. Then, hold a virtual "coffee talk" where each student gets a cup of coffee, tea, etc. and joins the group for a chat to get to know each other. At the beginning of the coffee talk, let students know that as you wrap up, you are going to ask them to identify one or two new things that they learned about someone else at the coffee talk. Repeat periodically throughout the year being sure to mix up the groups of students. This will help the teacher and students learn each other's names as well as make connections with one another.

Play Little-Known Fact About Me

During the first week of class, have all students submit (via email, private chat feature, private video conference, etc.) a little-known fact about themselves. Then, during the first two weeks of class, at the beginning or end of one of your live class sessions/meetings, read one or two little-known facts and have the students guess who they think it might be. Continue the process until every student's little-known fact has been shared with the class. Repeat this process several times throughout the year. This gives students the chance to learn something new about each other and make connections.

Play This or That

Design a list of questions that only have two possible answers. Develop a signal for how students can indicate which answer they selected. Then, during your live meetings, pose a question

to your students and have them answer with the designated signal. Ask for volunteers to elaborate on their answer. Then, follow up by asking if anyone can make a connection with what was just shared with the group. Some possible questions might include:

- Are you shy or outgoing?
- Do you prefer to be indoors or outdoors?
- Do you like to take risks or play it safe?
- Are you a morning or night person?
- Would you rather give up sugar or caffeine?
- Would you rather give up TV or social media/video games?

Sponsor spirit or theme days

Select a topic or theme and have students dress accordingly. For example, hat day, favorite team, sport or jersey day, or crazy sock day are some of the endless possibilities. Give students a few minutes to explain why they wore their selected item and ask if anyone can connect with anything that was shared with the group.

Utilize Flipgrid

There are many effective ways to use Flipgrid in the classroom from sharing projects to posting a question of the day. However, in terms of helping build community, whether it is responding to a question of the day or sharing of work, require that students watch a designated number of classmates' videos and post a comment, connection or question to each of the classmate's videos that they viewed. Make it a class goal that every student has a minimum of two people respond to his or her post. This gives students the opportunity to learn about their classmates and make connections.

Create an open house video

Start the year off on the right foot by creating a welcome video expressing how excited you are to have your new students in class. Discuss a few of the exciting things that you are going to learn during the year. Also, use this as an opportunity to let students get to know you and perhaps learn something about you that they can connect with. Students are always curious about their teacher.

Therefore, allow students a brief glimpse into your personal life to see your home office, your significant other, children and/or pets. In return, ask students to send you either an email or short video introducing them to you or possibly the whole class.

Capitalize on the power of Padlet

Post a different question of the day each morning on Padlet that lets students get to know one other. Start with low risk "get to know you" questions such as favorite hobby, book, movie, sports team, etc. Then, move on to questions or requests that give you insight into the social-emotional needs of the student, such as "Post an image that best captures how you are feeling this week" or "What is something that makes you feel better when you are having a bad day?" Start the morning or class session off with a three- to five-minute discussion about the question of the day and allow students to try to make a connection with another classmate based on their answers. This also provides you an opportunity to observe whom you might want to follow up with individually if you are concerned about something that was shared.

Looking Forward

There are many relationship- and community-building strategies available to teachers. Some of the sample strategies listed above will be more appropriate than others for your particular teaching context depending on lots of factors such as the grade level and subject that you teach as well as your personal schedule. Some strategies can be slightly modified to work better for your context such as substituting a birthday breakfast for the birthday lunch or having a virtual snack time chat instead of a coffee talk.

The possibilities are endless, and creativity knows no limits. The bottom line is that relationship building is essential in every context and will take on an even more pivotal role as online instruction continues into the new school year and beyond, so keep thinking about what strategies you are going to use as the year unfolds. 📌



Carteret teacher and Milken Educator Award winner Nikki Silva helping her own children learn, while she teaches her students remotely.

NEW JERSEY LEADS THE NATION IN CHARACTER EDUCATION

BY WILLIAM TRUSHEIM AND EILEEN DACHNOWICZ

“What kind of magic is going on in New Jersey in character education?” Folks in the other states yearn to know our secret because the Garden State leads all the other states in producing the largest number of National Schools of Character for the fourth consecutive year. When Character.org, the national advocate for character education, announced the names of the 84 schools and seven districts to be so honored across the nation in 2020, New Jersey, with 31 schools and four districts, was clearly at the head of the class. (For a complete list of 2020 New Jersey and National Schools/Districts of Character visit njasecd.org/nj-schools-of-character/2020-soc.)

TEACHERS REVEAL THE SECRET

“It’s not magic,” says Elizabeth McLaughlin, an English teacher at Elizabeth’s Juan Pablo Duarte

Dr. William H. Trusheim is the president of the New Jersey Alliance for Social, Emotional, and Character Development (NJASECD) and is a former educator with 42 years of service in New Jersey schools. He has served as a teacher, administrator, principal and superintendent. Since his retirement in 2012 as superintendent of the Pequannock Township Public Schools, he has worked with a variety of state and national organizations to promote character education, social-emotional learning, and a positive school culture and climate in schools in New Jersey and across the country.

Eileen Dachnowicz, a former Honors English teacher and administrator in Cranford, has been involved in the Character Education Movement since 2004 when Cranford High School was the first public school in New Jersey to be named a National School of Character. She has served as a writer, trainer, evaluator, and national site visitor for Character.org. She is also a trustee of NJASECD and has served as New Jersey’s Schools of Character Coordinator. Her work with schools around New Jersey is a significant reason for New Jersey’s leadership in the Schools of Character Program.

– José Julian Marti School 28, a school that is being recognized as a National School of Character for the second time. “It’s the result of teamwork, a dedication to our students’ well-being, and a consistent need to create a culture of caring that enables students and staff to do their best.”

And McLaughlin should know, because she has witnessed the transformation of School 28 over seven years. Character education has been the key to its remarkable change. Once a school beset with fights and a negative climate and a reputation for low achievement, School 28 is now a happy place where students have made great progress academically, personally and socially.

“Just look at our low teacher turnover rate to see how much we enjoy teaching here,” McLaughlin says. “It went from ‘What did you do to be assigned there?’ to ‘How can we work there?’”

Teachers and educational support professionals (ESPs) in other Schools of Character attest that the emphasis on social-emotional and character education has made them better teachers.

“This school challenges me to be the best quality teacher that I can be,” Patty Swick, a teacher at Elizabeth’s William F. Halloran, reports. “I am not only able to be an educator but a role model for my students and create positive relations with them.”

SUCCESS AT ALL LEVELS

Mary Reinhold and Laurie Anne Coletti, the coordinators for the New Jersey Schools of Character, agree that there is no set pattern for this year’s honorees. Reinhold points out they represent a cross-section of all grade levels, demographics, school types and geographical locations. Coletti adds that this year’s roster includes four districts, seven high schools, three middle schools, 17 elementary schools, one kindergarten, one preschool, one charter school, and one Catholic school. “We call that a perfectly diverse group of schools.”

What is it that makes for a school of character? Across this year’s awardees, and true of every school named in the past, you can see:

- A sense of family that includes all staff, students, and parents in a common bond.

- Core values that signify what is important to that family.
- Intentional use of the 11 Principles of Effective Character Education as the framework for the school’s culture.
- A “whole child” approach that emphasizes social-emotional learning.
- A pursuit of excellence in character, in learning, and in service to the community.

Not surprisingly, these schools have registered significant academic improvement and a decrease in disciplinary and harassment, intimidation and bullying (HIB) incidents.

Leslie Finke, a parent at Macopin Middle School in West Milford, another school that has been recertified as a National School of Character, sums up the school’s special flavor: “As a parent, the best part of Macopin is the way that all staff encourage a ‘family’ atmosphere. I always knew that my kids were in an environment where they were not only physically safe, but ‘safe’ to be themselves, express differences, accept challenges, make mistakes.”

INCLUSION OF ALL IN ALL

No one is marginalized in these Schools of Character. Character education is not a “top down” frill, but a true way of life that embraces all—administrators; teaching and support staff; custodial and cafeteria workers; bus drivers, students of all races, ethnicities, and abilities; parents; and community members.

“The entire staff at Grice thrives to support character education by being a consistent positive presence in the lives of our students,” Melissa Hooper, an ESP at Grice Middle School in Hamilton, notes. “We recognize every child has a story, and we utilize resources throughout our generous community to provide various supports to our students. As a school family, we lead our students by example.”

Old Bridge Township Public Schools, a highly diverse district that was first recognized as a National District of Character in 2015, can well serve as a model of effective character education because all 15 of its schools have been named

both State and National Schools of Character. Kim Castagne, its Conservation and Revenue coordinator, praises the district's unified vision: "I work with all departments on various projects. There's one clear vision in our district: work as a team for students."

Brianna, a 2020 graduate of Old Bridge High School, in reflecting on her four years at such a diverse high school, comments, "I have always felt loved, I have always felt protected, and I have always felt like my voice matters." She concludes that her school's emphasis on including all should be a model for all schools, all nations: "Old Bridge is my hope for the rest of the world."

NEED HELP ON YOUR CHARACTER JOURNEY?

The core organization in the state that guides schools and districts on their character journey is the New Jersey Alliance for Social, Emotional, and Character Development (NJASECD), often referred to as the Alliance. As the state sponsor for the New Jersey Schools of Character, it administers the program, scores all applications, provides feedback to all applicants and designates and honors the New Jersey Schools of Character.

The highlight of its work occurs every May at its annual Recognition Ceremony and Conference at Rider University, a character education love fest that celebrates its Schools of Character and provides a host of breakout sessions to help educators learn new practices and refine old ones. (This year's conference was canceled due to the COVID-19 Pandemic).

"The Rider conference is amazing," says Suli Jimenez, the principal of Elizabeth's John E. Dwyer Technology Academy and past principal of School 28. "There's something for everyone here." Jimenez draws attention to the other services of the alliance, particularly the help with the application given at its three Regional Networking Centers (RNC) that enable schools to work with representatives of National Schools of Character closer to home. Last year, the John Dwyer Academy participated in an ASCENT grant from the Porticus Foundation under the auspices of NJASECD. With North Plainfield High School as a mentor, the Dwyer team improved its own character program and developed a much-needed student mentoring program.

TIPS ON BECOMING A SCHOOL OF CHARACTER

The first step in becoming a School of Character is understanding and implementing the 11 Principles of Character Education.

"Based on decades of research on effective schools, the 11 Principles serve as guideposts for schools to plan, implement, assess and sustain their comprehensive character development initiative," according to *Character.org*. Not only does it serve as a **guide** in your journey, but also it serves as the

criterion in judging the application. The Character.org website provides details on the process as well as the application itself. (Visit character.org/schools-of-character.)

A school/district must first become a State School/District of Character; once it has attained that status, it then has the option of applying for national certification for an additional fee. As part of the national process, a site visit by a trained national evaluator comes next. The evaluator's job is to see how the school/district has successfully addressed the 11 Principles in its culture, classes, school policies, curriculum, service learning, parent-community relationships and assessments. The application consists mainly of 11 narratives, one for each principle with accompanying evidence. Additional information on demographics, assessments, stakeholders' testimonials rounds out the application.

If the application process seems overwhelming, help is readily available. NJASECD's Rider conference features a "Tips on Applying" session, and each of the Regional Networking Centers holds a technical assistance session where you can talk with a past National School of Character educator. Teachers can email the coordinator of the RNC nearest them. The RNCs are:

- Northern Region: Hanover Park Regional High School District and West Milford Township Schools
- Central Region: Old Bridge Township Public Schools and Hamilton Township Schools
- Southern Region: Cherry Hill Public Schools, Pemberton Public Schools and Vineland Public Schools).

Contact Information is available on the NJASECD website at njasecd.org/regional-networking-centers. Schools that don't make the cut the first time are designated as "Emerging Schools" or "Honorable Mention" and can use their feedback and uncover ways to address their areas of growth. The Schools of Character program is meant to be a continuous improvement process and schools receive support from NJASECD throughout their character journey.

GETTING TO THE HEART OF CHARACTER

Certainly, 2020 has been a year of great national turmoil and unrest. It's important to help young people cope with this

changing world and to develop values that will sustain them. Araceli, a fifth grader at Catherine A. Dwyer School, expresses the meaning of Rockaway Township's core values—H.E.A.R.T.: Honesty, Empathy, Acceptance, Respect, Trust—that the district adopted in response to a tragedy.

"Sometimes heart is a word we breeze over," Araceli says. "But it is much more to me and the Dwyer family than just a motto. H.E.A.R.T reminds us of what really matters in this world, and it helps us understand how we treat others. The Dwyer family is the heart at our school. Whether it is a friend helping another in need to having the courage to speak up for what we think is right. We don't tell people what heart is, we show them what heart is."

YOUR FIRST STEPS

For ways to improve character-building, check out njasecd.org for resources. Also, if you're not ready to apply for a School of Character yet, applying for a Promising Practice may be the way to go. Go to character.org/promising-practices for more information. More SECD lesson plans such as the one found in the sidebar are available on njasecd.org. 📖



The ASCENT Project

The ASCENT Project brought together nine pairs of schools from New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania. One member of each pair was a National School of Character and their partner school was aspiring to become a National School of Character. The project was funded by the Porticus Foundation allowing for the schools to meet regularly and participate in an opening Orientation Session and a Final Showcase.

Schools jointly developed SMART goals that guided their work. SMART is an acronym for goals that are specific, measurable,

achievable, relevant and time-bound. This yearlong program resulted in two partner schools being named Schools of Character and one being named and Honorable Mention School. In 2020, John Dwyer, the 2019 Honorable Mention School, became a State and National School of Character. Another school, Joseph H. Brensinger School 17 in Jersey City, became a 2020 New Jersey School of Character. Seven National Promising Practices were recognized from the schools participating in the project.

Read more about the ASCENT Project at njasecd.org/ascent.



A character ed lesson plan

Title: “Bullied, A Case that Made History”

- Grade Levels: Middle School
Length: 880 Minutes
- Connections to Core Values – Respect
- Lesson created at Juan Pablo Duarte-Jose Julian Marti, School 28, Elizabeth

Lesson Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Consider the role students, teachers and administrators play in ensuring that schools are safe for all students.
- Relate to the main character in the story by thinking about their own thoughts, words, and actions on a daily basis in relation to bullying and how they treat others.
- Think about how bullying affects their school and what they do to help prevent or add to it.

Lesson Materials

- Video – Bullied: A Student, a School and a Case That Made History (a documentary film that portrays the account of one student’s nightmare with anti-gay bullies and how he chose to handle the harassment).
- Teachers guide to video—specifically pages 4-6—“Bullied by Numbers”, and “Facts vs. Myths” about bullying

Lesson Procedures

1. Students will first take a Facts v. Myth quiz on bullying.
2. The teacher will display the Bullied by Numbers poster on the smart board for students to review and assess.
3. Teacher will then review the quiz with the students. Teacher will discuss why they selected the response they did. Did any of the statistics from Bullied by the Numbers surprise them?

4. Students will then watch the video, “Bullied: A Student, a School and a Case That Made History.”

Lesson Assessment

Small Group Discussion (15-20 mins):

Students will be placed into three small groups—each group will be given a category and questions to discuss about the video:

1. **Courage and Empathy:** What did Jamie hope to accomplish by filing a lawsuit? What do you think Jamie felt on a typical day?
2. **The Impact of Bullying,** Dealing with Discrimination: What role did bystanders play in Jamie’s bullying?
3. **Making History:** Standing Up for Justice: What is the constitutional basis of Jamie’s case? What are Jamie’s key messages when he speaks at the assembly?

After discussion, students come back together and share with the whole class. Other groups can share their ideas and views on the different topics after hearing that original group discussion.

Extensions/Adaptations

You could turn the discussion portion into a gallery walk.

The video kit for this lesson plan is available for purchase from Teaching Tolerance at bit.ly/ttbullylesson.

Please note: All photos and quotes have been taken from the School of Character applications submitted to Character.org. Permission was granted for use of this material.



INDEPENDENT READING TO CREATE INDEPENDENT READERS

BY MORGAN TAYLOR



*One child,
one teacher,
one book,*



*one pen
can change
the world.*



*One of
the biggest
challenges here is
to be completely
hands-off as
the students
read.*

One of the questions I am asked most at every Back to School Night and parent-teacher conference is, “My kid doesn’t like to read, what should I do?” While I feel that this is a multifaceted question that requires both the parents and teachers to work together to create an environment of positive experiences around reading, when asked that question, the parent is asking *us*, as teachers, for help. It is then up to us to shoulder a bit more to help the student get to a place of reading for fun, so that the parent can then facilitate that as well.

A few years back, I remember asking students how much they read outside of my classroom, and the answers ranged from zero minutes to many hours—it honestly depends on the kid! I understood then that it became my responsibility to incorporate more independent reading time in my classroom.

I sought to give reading opportunities to those students who were more focused on gaming, family, athletics, or other interests in their time

after school. If at the very least, I could offer those kids one class period per week to read whatever they wanted and throw in some flexible seating, maybe I could have a positive impact on at least one student to become a reader.

As Malala Yousafzai once said, “One child, one teacher, one book, one pen can change the world,” and the more opportunities we give children to read, the more we can open their eyes to that wealth of possibility.

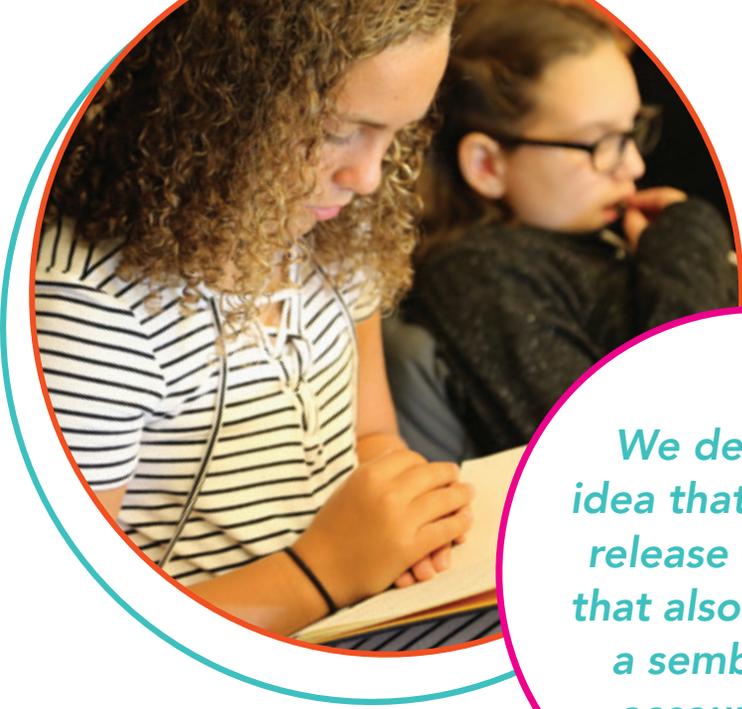
SETTING A PURPOSE

The problem here then becomes the age-old debate in schools, “But how do we hold the students accountable?”

Sometimes English teachers get a bad rap when someone walks past the classroom and sees 25 students silently sprawled across the room, noses in a book. “But then what is that teacher even teaching?” becomes the question. The answer is that reading is the essence of learning.

When we are teaching a love for reading, we are simultaneously teaching vocabulary, empathy, culture and more. Kids look for themselves in their reading, especially at the pivotal middle school age.

Morgan Taylor is an English language arts teacher at Woodrow Wilson Middle School in Edison Township. Taylor is working toward her master’s degree in the teaching of English at Teachers College, Columbia University. She can be reached at mpt2136@tc.columbia.edu.



We devised an idea that allowed a release of control that also facilitated a semblance of accountability.

structured lesson that is centered on the teacher and can grasp the benefits of setting aside one class period for the greater good of the student as a whole, you'll see the impact it will make on the learners in your classroom.

ACCOUNTABILITY

In having a discussion of these issues with my supervisor, we devised an idea that allowed a release of control that also facilitated a semblance of accountability.

As most schools require, each day the teacher sets a purpose for learning; this may be in the form of a WALT (we are learning to) or SWBAT (students will be able to) or whatever other framework your objective takes. The goal of the class is by the end of the lesson and/or unit, the student can achieve that objective, through a culminating activity or test.

But what if we could do micro forms of that for independent reading? What if as the students read, they thought about all they had learned in that week and were able to apply that knowledge and make an independent connection to their chosen novel?

FRAMEWORK

To give a bit of background, what follows is by no means the only way in which this should be done, but merely how I do this in my classroom. I set aside one Friday class period per week for independent reading exclusively. Even if there is a change in the weekly schedule that will have an impact on independent reading on Fridays, I prioritize this hour of reading and include it in the schedule regardless.

It is important for my students to see their independent reading period as just as important as any other class lesson. Having it fall by the wayside because we ran out of time in class sends the wrong message. For our reading period being on

Fridays, my students would enter the classroom, find a comfy spot, and begin reading without any teacher direction.

Their only written task for the day was assigned at the end of class. Before they left, they had to fill out a quick Google Form. I'm fortunate that we have a device for every student, but this can be accomplished in a notebook, exit slip, or other format.

On the Google Form, I asked questions such as "What book are you reading?" "What is the author's name?" and other similar basic questions. I also asked, "What pages did you read?" but it was not for me to count. Rather, the students used this as a virtual bookmark, so the following week they could look to see where they left off, since tangible bookmarks are apparently now a thing of the past. (I altered form settings so upon submission the student received a copy of what their responses were.)

Finally, I provide students three open-ended questions. The first was always the same: choose a signpost to respond to about their reading. Signposts come from Kyleene Beers Notice and Note strategies. Signposts alert readers to significant moments based upon literary patterns in a text that encourage a closer read. The signposts are:

- Contrast and contradiction
- Words of the wisest
- Aha! moment
- Again and again
- Memory moment
- Tough questions

The other two open-ended questions changed week to week and related to what we were learning

in class. For instance, if we were doing a vocabulary study that week, one question may be "rewrite two sentences in your novel using one of our new vocabulary words" or if we were learning about characterization, a question may be "create a STEAL (Speech, Thoughts, Effects, Actions, Looks) chart for a character in your story."

Here's the most important piece: **the students only respond to ONE open-ended question.** They decide. This is to stress that the primary time in class should be spent on reading, not filling out Google Forms. Completing just one response gave me more than enough information. I could see their close reading skills, reinforce class objectives, and connect with students to see what they were reading.

DATA-DRIVEN

This data afforded me multiple opportunities to assess student progress. I was able to look at the following things in just that one response:

- The types of books the student chose to read: patterns in genre, author, etc.)
- If they understood the course materials this week: Were they using the vocabulary correctly? Did they understand traits versus emotions for characters?
- How "deeply" they were understanding the text by means of making connections to themselves and their world.

Using the Google Sheets extension FormMule, I used the data gleaned from the students' response and wrote each student personal feedback about the above. Much of my feedback opened a dialogue about the books they were reading and talking about the connections they made to lessons in class.



FormMule allowed me to send a personal email to each student with my feedback, and I labeled the email the same heading as the form, so they could easily match the two. This was necessary because they automatically received a copy of their form submissions.

In lieu of technology, this can be accomplished through writing on the back of a notecard or in a reading journal. By having my feedback focus on connection, and by sharing my experiences with a novel, it becomes more of a conversation with the student than an assignment with a grade. This promotes engaged readers.

STUDENT CHOICE

One of the biggest challenges here is to be completely hands-off as the students read. Allow them to choose their novels. Some students will read graphic novels such as Manga, some will read chapter books, and some will walk in with magazines. The biggest mistake we as teachers can make is to regulate student reading choice, as children's book writer and professor Michael Tunnell notes in the introduction to the textbook *Children's Literature Briefly*, "When we already have an interest in what we read, engaged reading comes naturally."

That is also why there is a choice of varied questions in the response options, so that no matter what students have chosen to read, they can find a connection to make and share.

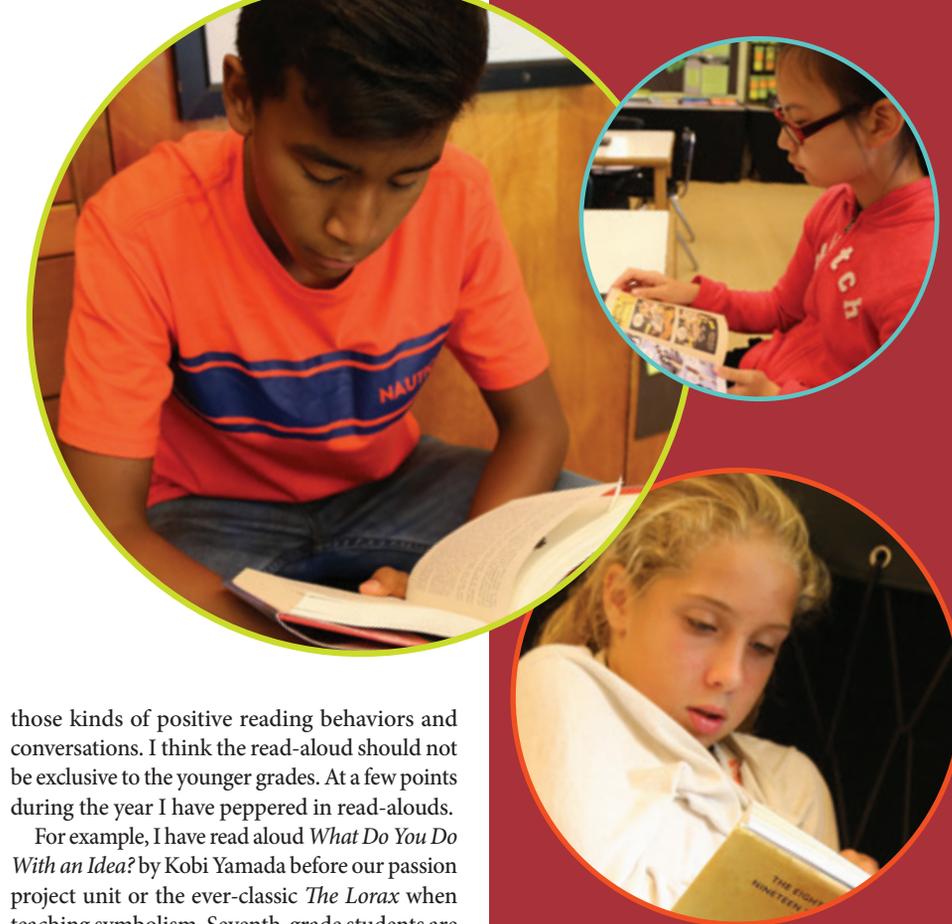
Now of course, I have a list of "Ms. Taylor's favorite novels" broken down by genre to share with the students, but I have also been blessed with donations to my classroom library and have stumbled across a few good Scholastic warehouse sales.

Tunnell later goes on to state that problematic learning "comes when students are given a good story to read but the primary goal is not involvement with that story..." That is why the key here is having open-ended questions meant to be answered in brief responses that should reaffirm learning and allow for a sharing of ideas.

I am sure many of us have found after reading something truly interesting, the first thing we want to do is to talk with someone about it! This ties in with natural reading as well. It is hard not to be dismayed when a student chooses a graphic novel or even a magazine as their choice of reading for the week, but as Daniel Willingham notes, "reading attitudes are emotional." In the modern age, as we have read from educator greats such as Gloria Ladson Billings, to be culturally responsive is to understand that literature is no longer a canon—it involves tweets and micro-texts. So, the question becomes: would you rather a nonreader or a student who is reading a different type of text?

TEACHER ROLE

It goes without saying that the most significant thing you can do as a teacher is to model



those kinds of positive reading behaviors and conversations. I think the read-aloud should not be exclusive to the younger grades. At a few points during the year I have peppered in read-alouds.

For example, I have read aloud *What Do You Do With an Idea?* by Kobi Yamada before our passion project unit or the ever-classic *The Lorax* when teaching symbolism. Seventh-grade students are just as excited as those in younger grades. When driving home a point, it is easier for students to grasp the concept of metacognition through teacher example than by teacher explanation.

"Independent reading time and teacher read-alouds made [students] want to read more," write Douglas Fisher, James Flood, Diane Lapp and Nancy Frey in "Interactive read-alouds: Is there a common set of implementation practices?" that they penned for *The Reading Teacher*.

By doing small read-alouds with texts we can model the thinking we want our students to have as they independently read. Are they making connections? Are they inferring the meaning of unknown vocabulary words? Are they understanding the different symbols and motifs in a text? When we model this aloud for our kids, we are showing them how to immerse themselves in reading.

If you want to go the extra mile, your students should see YOU reading during the allotted independent reading time. As a coach, you don't just tell the player, "When you step up to the plate, widen your stance, bend your front knee and load with your hips." You demonstrate and show. The same practices should work for readers.

If we want the students to come in and be excited to read, then we should be too. We should allow ourselves to get comfy—our desk isn't that comfy a space—and show ourselves to be engaged readers. Park yourself on the floor, for example. Open up a book and show your students that it is okay to relax and read, show them that reading transcends age as a timeless activity both students, teachers, and all adults can take part in.

References

The author relied on the following to develop her classroom practices around independent reading and in drafting this article. If you wish to learn more about how to access these resources, email Morgan Taylor at mpt2136@tc.columbia.edu.

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NJEA Review Special Section

The Power of Members:

Organizing for Job Justice



MEMBER POWER WINS

HISTORIC CAMPAIGN ROOTED
IN MEMBER-LED ORGANIZING

BY MATTHEW STAGLIANO



After years of laser-focused organizing, Gov. Phil Murphy signed Chapter 78 relief into law on July 1, 2020. Then, on Aug. 13 Murphy signed one of the two job justice bills, enacting long-awaited job due-process protections to educational support professionals (ESP).

The second job justice bill passed through both houses of the Legislature, but because two different versions were passed in each house, it has yet to make it to Murphy's desk. These new laws will change the trajectory of public education in New Jersey. Thousands of NJEA members participated in a historic campaign to get the bills written, sponsored and signed into law.

"We did the impossible," said NJEA President Marie Blistan. "Our members trusted in the actions called for by this campaign, and because they trusted in the actions and participated in them, we were heard. This proves one thing: there is nothing this union—our union—cannot accomplish if we all work together. We can move mountains. This campaign wasn't easy, but we persevered for the future of our profession. I am indescribably proud of every member-leader, member and staff person that worked to achieve this historic success for the future of the schools we love so much."

This historic accomplishment didn't come easy, nor did it come without sacrifice, dedication and a steadfast belief in the power of unionism.

NINE YEARS OF WAITING, WORKING

In 2011, then-Gov. Chris Christie signed P.L. 2011 c. 78—commonly known as "Chapter 78." The law was hailed as "benefit reform," but, as any NJEA member would tell you, the law did anything but benefit public school employees. Ch. 78 required NJEA members to contribute a higher percentage of their ever-increasing health care premiums every year, far outpacing any increase in salary. Consequently, the law decreased educator take-home pay in the nine years it lasted. It was unsustainable, unfair and caused undue hardship to thousands of families.

Also in 2011, Christie vetoed two bills that would have provided job security and job protections for many of public education's most vulnerable employees: educational support professionals

(ESPs). Both bills were passed by the New Jersey General Assembly and the Senate in 2011 only to be rejected by Christie.

It was time for a change.

A NEW APPROACH

After seven years under Ch. 78 and almost no legislative movement to expand job protections for ESPs, NJEA members were clamoring for a more effective and universal approach to the health care and job security. In August of 2018, NJEA President Marie Blistan, along with Vice President Sean M. Spiller and Secretary-Treasurer Steve Beatty, formed what would become known as a Campaign

Steering Committee. They appointed Patrick Manahan, regional director of NJEA UniServ South, chair of the committee that would include, at the time, six NJEA members and six NJEA staff members.

"Our greatest strength is the collective action of our members," said Manahan. "Having members and staff in the room together as part of the steering committee was so important because you had different perspectives and different talents. When you bring all of this together, you can create something that is truly unstoppable."

The charge of the committee was to serve as a statewide action committee, organizing members into collective action throughout the campaign. It was the first committee of its kind in modern NJEA history; rarely have member-leaders made day-to-day, tactical and strategic decisions alongside NJEA staff. As the campaign went on, it evolved to include more NJEA members' voices. The committee met for the first time in August of 2018, just one month before versions of all three bills were introduced in Legislature. It met regularly for the duration of the campaign.

LEADERS TAKE CHARGE

After working for eight long years under the reality of the anti-education Christie, NJEA members knew that it was difficult to pass legislation that would benefit workers, schools and students. When Murphy was elected governor in 2017, with substantial support from NJEA members who organized a successful #Members4Murphy campaign, he shifted the

political landscape, opening a long-closed door for policies that benefited working people. The bills had just been introduced in both houses of the Legislature and had a long way to go before passage. Even with the change in state leadership, many believed moving them would be impossible. After all, Ch. 78 had been passed by a Democratic-controlled Legislature.

"Our members felt cautiously optimistic," said Sue Clark, president of the Gloucester County Education Association (GCEA) and member of the Steering Committee. "They were glad that we were going to do something to get relief and job justice, but, at the same time, everyone knew this was going to be a very heavy lift politically. We knew it would take a great deal of pressure, and that would involve all of our members. It was a big ask."

The Steering Committee got to work. The 12-person team decided that to move the bills there was only one viable route: collective action. The team knew that moving all of the bills through the Legislature would require thousands of members working together to one unified end.

The group knew that if NJEA were to act with 200,000 voices speaking as one, they would need the local association presidents on board. On Sept. 20, 2018, Marie Blistan called the second all-presidents meeting in NJEA's history. Each of the 495 presidents who attended the meeting committed to going back to their locals and have their members sign a petition.

"We took on a challenge that many people around the state laughed at," Clark remembers. "They said we were crazy. They underestimated the determination of our statewide leadership and the tenacity of our membership."



Jersey City Education Association members protest Ch. 78.



NJEA President Marie Blistan presides over an all-presidents meeting to plan the campaign for job justice on Sept. 20, 2018.

The petition, which Clark said set the stage for a successful campaign, would be delivered to strategically selected political figures at a time advantageous to moving the bills.

The petition read:

"As education professionals in New Jersey's public schools, we are proud that our experience, expertise, and dedication have ensured our schools rank amongst the top three in the country. We

Matthew Stagliano is an associate director in the NJEA Communications Division.

care deeply for our students as we do for our own families. As professionals, we deserve job security without the constant threat of privatization. As professionals, we deserve quality, affordable health care. We cannot sustain bringing home less money annually that is the result of Ch. 78 legislation. We stand united that job security and affordable, high-quality, health care are basic rights of hard-working people—including educational professionals.”

Five months later, when the petition was delivered to legislators, 116,150 members had signed it, achieving for NJEA another accomplishment of historic proportions: more than 70% of all active NJEA members had signed the same petition. The campaign was real.

OWNING THE WORK

As the weather got cooler, changes happened within the campaign: the Steering Committee expanded to include more NJEA members to amplify their voices, lobby days were scheduled for every month, and postcards were delivered to lawmakers in Trenton at an unprecedented rate.

On Jan. 17, 2019, when NJEA hosted a Lobby Day attended by over 140 NJEA members, 12,819 postcards urging legislators to sponsor and pass all three bills had been sent. It was on this cold January day that members delivered the petitions collected in the previous three months to Gov. Murphy and other legislative leaders, urging them to support the bills. NJEA members were acting in unison



On Jan. 17, 2019, NJEA President Marie Blistan, along with her fellow statewide officers, and county and local presidents, deliver petitions demanding job justice to the Statehouse. They were signed by 116,150 NJEA members.

across the state, and it was making a difference, especially for the bills aimed at providing job justice for ESPs.

“This was a grassroots movement” said Chris Mueller, president of the Passaic County Community College Administrators Association and member of the Steering Committee. “Information flowed seamlessly from rank-and-

file members to leadership through the Steering Committee. Members were more informed about the issues and their potential impact on their lives, so they felt more inclined to get engaged in the campaign.”

In January, the bill providing ESPs with due process job protections had earned 16 sponsors in the General Assembly and the anti-privatization



Passaic County Education Association members converged on Willowbrook Mall for the Jan. 30, 2019 Statewide Day of Action.

bill had earned 12. The Ch. 78 relief bill had 20 sponsors in the Assembly, up from three back in September. It was clear that legislators were getting the message, but something more needed to be done.

“From the standpoint of our ESP members,” said Mueller “this had potential to be very big win for us because we could negotiate in good-faith with our institutions, without the threat of privatization at the conclusion of the process.”

Another shift transformed the campaign again. Members started asking the Legislature to pass all three bills by asking them to “Fix The Unfairness.” Taking it a step further, the campaign began to look like a #RedForEd campaign, which had led to statewide walkouts in other states the year before over issues such as compensation, health care and job protections. Red pins, red scarves, red signs, and red shirts appeared throughout the state reading #RedForEd #FixTheUnfairness and #WeAreWorthIt, and not long after, legislators knew exactly what those three terms meant.

Stemming from discussions during the Steering Committee meetings, NJEA members began to participate in separate, but collective, actions across the state. Led by members and organized by member-leaders, NJEA members gathered in malls across the state, all wearing red. In all, more than 1,000 members wore #RedForEd and gathered and walked in malls to send a message to their legislators that they were

not afraid to exercise their power.

NJEA staff began going into schools every Wednesday to talk with members in their schools and about the bills and the campaign. By the end of the year, NJEA staff would visit more than 500 schools and talk with countless members about the role they could play to pass these bills.

The movement was real.

Eloy Delgado, president of the Linden Education Association, served on the Steering Committee. He described the campaign as feeling different than any other union-led campaign.

“It felt different because there was more ground-level support than in the past,” said Delgado. “There were more asks of the general membership to get

involved. Whether it was picketing outside of a legislative office, having one-on-one meetings with legislators, or simply being engaged in the work of the campaign, members were asked to take ownership of

this work in a very real way.”

NJEA members continued to batter legislative offices with constant communications urging them to move the bills. By the end of March, more than 41,000 postcards had been sent to legislative offices. The two Job Justice bills had each earned more than 40 sponsors in the Assembly, and the Ch. 78 relief bill had more than 30 sponsors in the Assembly. As the sponsor list grew, members began to believe the passage of the three bills was possible. As that belief grew stronger, the actions grew more impactful.

“At a time when many—virtually every—Trenton insider thought it was impossible to move these three bills, our members committed to each other, our profession, and this campaign,” said NJEA Vice President Sean M. Spiller. “Through strategic, sustained collective action, the Statehouse began to hear us. This wasn’t about politics, it was about what was right for educators, public education, and the students we serve. As we kept at it, we began to change minds under the gold dome. We made a difference that will be felt for years to come—maybe forever in New Jersey’s public schools.”

SMALL VICTORIES AND MORE HURDLES

During the spring of 2019, things heated up as members of the Assembly launched their campaigns for the November election. On May 15, 2020, members in all 21 counties across the state rallied outside of targeted legislative offices.

“This campaign was very well organized, and

we stayed focused throughout a long campaign,” said LeShaun Arrington, president of the New Brunswick Education Association and member of the steering committee. “There is power in numbers. It’s not just about the work of the leadership. If we as educators want to see change, it has to be all of us. Our voices speak louder when we speak together. When we use our voice collectively, things work out for us.”

Eight days after the 21 coordinated rallies outside of legislative offices, both of the ESP Job Justice bills passed the Assembly by overwhelming majorities. Those two bills moved on to the Senate, while the Ch. 78 relief bill stalled. It had yet to be heard by any legislative committee. Members were frustrated and began to feel that familiar “this is impossible” feeling that they’d grown so used to over the previous governor’s term.

That’s when the campaign expanded to include parents and community members. Yard signs bearing the phrase “I Love New Jersey’s Public Schools” were seen on lawns in communities across the state. Supporters of the three bills put the signs on their lawns and magnets on their cars indicating to educators that they stood with them. This fight, which started as a fight for educators, became a fight for the future of public schools.

It would have been easy for NJEA members to say they were tired of working so hard. After all, the campaign had continued to evolve using modern technology such as text messages and



NJEA and NJREA members display the “We Love New Jersey’s Public Schools” signs that appeared on lawns throughout the state.

social media to put pressure on the Legislature. By May, NJEA members had sent more than 40,000 campaign-related texts, and still nothing would move the bills.

“We were tired but not broken,” said NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Steve Beatty. “Our members work full-time jobs, some of them get up at 4 a.m. to make sure their buses are prepared and ready to pick up children at 6 a.m. And here we were: asking them to make calls, attend rallies, and talk to other members about the passage of bills that seemed destined to fail. We never gave up hope, though. As leaders, we knew the Legislature felt

the power of our members in every ZIP code in the state. We were so energized when June 9 rally happened.”

In early June of 2019, NJEA joined forces with the Communications Workers of America to host a rally outside the statehouse. Thousands of members flooded the Capital complex in Trenton, and the course of the campaign was changed forever. Organized exclusively by NJEA members, the rally made headlines and members felt energized.

THE CAMPAIGN SHIFTS, THE BILLS PASS

As the summer months came and the campaign began its second year, there was a shift in strategy as the election of the General Assembly grabbed the focus of everyone in Trenton. NJEA members agreed to work with the certain members of the Assembly to win elections. Members demonstrated that their commitment to good policymakers went beyond bills: for NJEA members, it’s about electing the right people who will help New Jersey’s public schools best serve their students.

Shortly after the election, Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin introduced a new version of the Ch. 78 Relief bill that reimaged health care for educators in New Jersey.

“It’s simple: these bills became laws because of member power,” said NJEA Executive Director Steve Swetsky. “The united, coordinated actions of members on these bills. NJEA members, speaking with one voice, convinced the Legislature that these bills were important for public educators, and by extension, important for

public education. Educator’s voices are powerful and these new laws should serve as a constant reminder of our ability to use those voices to support policies that support public education, for the good of the children we teach, and the schools we together call home.”

While the pressure on the Legislature continued to mount as a result of the actions of thousands of members, NJEA leaders began to work with New Jersey Senate President Steve Sweeney on the passage of the bills. On March 9, 2020, at a statehouse press conference, Sweeney and Blistan announced a landmark agreement on a Ch. 78 relief bill. A year and a half after the campaign

began, on March 19, all three bills were finally passed through the New Jersey Senate.

As the bills passed, the world was changing more rapidly than anyone could have imagined. The pandemic caused by the spread of the novel coronavirus, which causes COVID-19, had forced all in-person organizing to move to the digital realm. Schools were open only remotely, and despite members being physically separate, the activism continued.



Middlesex County EA President Lois Yukna speaks with Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin about Ch. 78 relief and job justice for ESPs at an MCEA legislative event.

FEELING THE POWER OF NJEA MEMBERS

The bills passed the Senate with overwhelming majorities because the members of the New Jersey Senate felt the power of NJEA. In just under two years, more than 12,800 calls had been made to legislative offices by NJEA members and more than 2,000 members attended lobby days. More than 100,000 NJEA members sent emails to legislators, and, not surprisingly, the Steering Committee had expanded to include more than 40 NJEA members guiding the actions of the campaign.

The pandemic forced the campaign to shift to an almost all-digital landscape, and yet, NJEA members stepped up even as they navigated the new world of educating in remote environments. On June 29, 2020, all three bills passed the Assembly. Gov. Murphy signed the Ch. 78 Relief bill July 1, 2020.

One more hurdle for ESP Job Justice came at the eleventh hour: differences between the versions of the anti-privatization bill in the Senate and Assembly had to be resolved. While the due process bill awaited the governor’s signature, Sen. Sweeney and Speaker Coughlin committed to aligning the language in the anti-privatization bill. As of this writing, the bill awaits only a concurrence vote before it is sent to Gov. Murphy’s desk.

The due process bill, however, was signed by Gov. Murphy on Aug. 15, 2020.

“Our union is powerful because our members are powerful,” said Blistan. “The passage of these bills demonstrates our members’ strength. When we choose to act, we make a difference. Given the challenges facing our nation and our schools right now, I am filled with confidence because I know when we work together, we can achieve the impossible. I am excited to see what future changes we can bring forth for public education in New Jersey.”

JOB JUSTICE FOR EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS



Members in Salem and Gloucester counties fighting for ESP Job Justice.

UNDERSTANDING THE JOB JUSTICE BILLS

After years of waiting and working, educational support professionals (ESP) in New Jersey return to schools this September with enhanced—and long overdue—job protections. As of press time in mid-August, one of the two bills has passed into law, and all indicators point to the second bill becoming law in the near future.

Known as the job justice bills, the two bills were part of a package that NJEA members fought for as part of a two-year campaign that began in August of 2018.

ESPs and their certified colleagues engaged in the campaign in countless ways. For nearly two years, thousands of NJEA members sent emails, made phone calls, met with their legislative representatives in Trenton and in their district offices, participated in electronic activism—posting on social media and sending text messages—and hosted dozens of rallies urging lawmakers to pass the bills. They had passed through the Democratic-controlled Legislature only to be vetoed by then Gov. Chris Christie in 2011. Members knew that many legislators had previously supported those bills and we reminded them of that.

After actions taken by NJEA members, and despite a global pandemic forcing schools to operate remotely, the bills passed through the Legislature in 2020. One of the job justice bills is now law, while the other bill is closer than ever to becoming law.

The bills took nearly two years to pass, but NJEA members never lost sight of the goal. Both job justice bills were passed by the Assembly in March of 2019 with overwhelming majorities, but they were not taken up in the Senate before the end of the legislative session.

Both bills were reintroduced in the new legislative session that began in January of 2020.

While in the previous legislative session the bills had moved slowly in the Senate, this time was different. After nearly two years of advocacy by NJEA members, the Senate passed both job justice bills in March by overwhelming majorities. In the Assembly, they passed for the second time in as many years in June.

“We call these bills the ‘job justice’ bills because they will provide professional equity to our schools’ hardest-working employees,” said NJEA President Marie Blistan. “From cafeteria workers and security

guards, to bus drivers and grounds workers, to teacher’s aides, paraprofessionals and secretaries, to custodians and school maintenance workers, educational support professionals are the rock that public schools stand on. The success of our schools starts with the people who run the schools. These bills moving ever closer to law symbolize and acknowledge the contributions of more than 50,000 educational support professionals.”

DUE PROCESS LAW: STRONGEST IN NATION

ESPs now have the comfort of knowing their positions are safe from the arbitrary whims of those who wield institutional power. After being passed twice through the Assembly in the last two years, and once through the Senate, Gov. Murphy signed the bill into law on Aug. 13. It is one of the strongest laws of its kind in the nation, and ESPs will feel the security provided by the bill right away.

In the technical language of the law, it extends to nonteaching employees of local, county, or regional school districts, boards, or commissions the right to submit to binding arbitration any dispute regarding whether there is just cause for disciplinary action.

This means ESPs have due-process protections similar to their certified colleagues as public school employees. With these essential protections in place, students will gain more consistent interactions with educators and build valuable relationships with them over the years.

“This win is about fairness and stability for our students,” said NJEA Vice President Sean M.

Spiller. “This law means that ESPs can perform their jobs without the threat of being let go or fired for unjust reasons. Consistency in these positions means students will have more harmony in their school buildings. This law means ESPs can better serve their school communities, which is a win for public schools, achieved through union activism.”

PRIVATIZATION PROTECTION PASSES BOTH HOUSES, EXPECTED TO BECOME LAW

The second job justice bill passed both houses of the New Jersey’s Legislature. However, because two separate versions of the bill existed in their respective legislative houses, it has not yet been sent to the governor’s desk to be signed into law. Even though it’s not yet law, all parties involved have pledged to iron out the differences in the coming months and send it to Gov. Murphy’s desk.

Once passed, the bill will provide common-sense job protections for ESPs employed by New Jersey’s public schools. Right now, a district may attempt to privatize ESPs at any time, even during the life of an active collective bargaining agreement. If passed into law, this would prevent that practice that often leaves ESPs and communities and educators organizing against privatization.

This bill would prohibit employers from entering into subcontracting agreements during the term of an existing collective bargaining agreement. Once a collective bargaining agreement expires,

an employer would be permitted to enter into a subcontracting agreement only if: the employer provides written notice, and the employer offers the majority representative the opportunity to meet and discuss the decision to subcontract and negotiate over its impact.

The bill would also mandate that each employee replaced or displaced because of

a subcontracting agreement would retain all previously acquired seniority and would have recall rights if the subcontracting terminates.

“It’s a bill that just makes sense” said NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Steve Beatty. “It’s no secret that students need stability and consistency in their learning environments to thrive, and that’s what this bill will provide. ESPs deserve respect offered by the collective bargaining agreements that local associations negotiate at the table. This bill enhances the collective bargaining process’s importance for both union members and communities alike.”

“
ESPs now have the comfort of knowing their positions are safe from the arbitrary whims of those who wield institutional power.”

PRESERVING HIGH-QUALITY HEALTH CARE WHILE REDUCING ITS COST

UNDERSTANDING CHAPTER 44

The passage of P.L. 2020, Ch. 44, was the result of more than two years of sustained member organizing and advocacy as detailed in “Member Power Wins” on pages 46-49, but the reason it was needed traces back nearly a decade to the passage of P.L. 2011, Ch. 78, or Chapter 78, as it became known to NJEA members.

HISTORY OF BARGAINING OVER BENEFITS

Prior to Ch. 78, the cost of health insurance benefits had largely been negotiable at the local level as part of school employees’ overall compensation. Ch. 2, an earlier law passed in 2010, had established a baseline health benefits contribution of 1.5% of salary. Outside of that, both the level of health benefits and the amount employees contributed toward them was fully negotiable.

THE DAMAGE OF CH. 78

Ch. 78 changed that. It imposed much higher mandatory minimum contributions toward health insurance and linked those contributions not to a percentage of an employee’s salary but to a percentage of the health insurance premium. Because health insurance premiums can grow unpredictably and rapidly, employees did not know from one year to the next what their health insurance costs would be. Even worse, because premiums could grow so quickly, it became far too common for an employee’s take-home pay to decrease from one year to the next, a phenomenon known as “negative net.”

Eventually, premium contributions grew into thousands of dollars per year for most NJEA members and exceeded \$10,000 per year for a growing number. With little relief available at the bargaining table in most districts, the costs imposed by Ch. 78 began to threaten the ability of some educators to stay in the profession.

THE GOAL OF THE CAMPAIGN

When NJEA members set out to win relief from Ch.78, they had three primary objectives:

- To immediately reduce the amount members were paying for health insurance and help reduce the financial burden that was threatening their ability to remain in the profession.
- To break the link between the employee’s contribution and the cost of the premium and instead link any employee contribution to their salary. That would have the immediate effect of ensuring that health insurance costs

could not grow more quickly than salaries and eliminate the threat of “negative net.”

- To eventually return the question of health insurance contributions to the bargaining table where they belong, after first resetting a more reasonable baseline from which to bargain.

OBSTACLES OVERCOME

After many years of Ch. 78, that was no small task. Boards of education had grown accustomed

Ch. 44, the law passed unanimously by both the Senate and the Assembly and signed by Gov. Phil Murphy on July 1 at a ceremony attended by Senate President Steve Sweeney, bill sponsor Sen. Joe Cryan and Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin, accomplished all of those things and more.

HOW CH. 44 WORKS

Specific details about Ch. 44 can be found on pages 54-60. The underlying concept of the new



At the Ch. 44 bill signing. From left: Asm. Speaker Craig Coughlin, NJEA President Marie Blistan, Asm. Joe Cryan, Linden EA President Eloy Delgado, Sen. President Steve Sweeney, Gov. Phil Murphy, NJEA Exec. Director Steve Swetsky, NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Steve Beatty, and NJEA Vice President Sean M. Spiller.

to the large contributions they were able to take from employees’ paychecks and were not eager to give up either that money or the unfair advantage that Ch. 78 gave them at the bargaining table. Legislators, even those who recognized the problem and were committed to helping fix the unfairness of Ch. 78, were concerned about the impact on school district budgets if they simply reversed it. And NJEA members had to commit to finding and fighting for a creative solution

that met all three of their objectives and could overcome the hesitation of both the boards and some legislators to upset the status quo.

law is relatively simple: decrease the overall cost of health insurance and share the savings between school employees, boards of education and the state of New Jersey.

It does so by making strategic changes to the design of a new default plan option that would be offered in all school districts and county colleges no matter whether they participate in the School Employees’ Health Benefits Program (SEHBP) or not, beginning Jan. 1, 2021.

This new plan will be called the New Jersey Educators Health Plan (NJEHP), and beginning Jan. 1, 2021, it will join the NJ Direct 10 and NJ Direct 15 as offerings in the SEHBP. In districts that do not participate

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This law is a win-win-win for NJEA members, our students and New Jersey residents. Our schools are stronger, our members are more secure, and our communities are in a better position as we face the serious challenges ahead.
 – NJEA President Marie Blistan

in the SEHBP, it will join those plans that have been collectively bargained by that local association.

The NJEHP preserves access to high-quality, low-cost benefits for employees while also reducing the premium costs paid by employers. Employees who enroll in the NJEHP benefit from a new contribution schedule that dramatically lowers employee's contributions and ties them to a new contribution chart based on a percentage of salary rather than a percentage of premium. The only way an employee's health insurance contribution can rise even slightly is if their salary increases, and unlike under Ch. 78, the employee is guaranteed to keep the vast majority of any salary increase.

The savings for members and employers alike is achieved by

“

We've achieved fairness and financial relief for NJEA members and savings for school districts and the state. Our members deserve a lot of credit for their determination and persistence in getting us here.

– NJEA Vice President
Sean M. Spiller

incentivizing the use of in-network doctors and facilities. In the SEHBP, the NJEHP will use the same large Horizon Blue Cross/Blue Shield national network as the existing Direct 10 and Direct 15, so no member currently using in-network providers in those plans should have reason to change doctors if they move

to the NJEHP. Out-of-network providers can still be used as well, but member costs will increase out of network and reimbursement to those providers will be lower, which could result in additional balance billing. Districts that do not participate in the SEHBP, will see a similar in-network and out-of-network result.

Ch. 44 also respects collective bargaining. Members hired before July 1, 2020 have the option to select the NJEHP with its lower member contributions or remain in any available plan already negotiated in their contract at the existing contribution levels as well. And very importantly, as of Jan. 1, 2028, all benefit levels and contribution amounts will become fully negotiable again, allowing the collective bargaining process to work as it is supposed to.

“

We knew from the beginning that it would take patience, determination and tireless advocacy, and we never backed away from that challenge. Members know they aren't just members of any union, they are members of NJEA.

– NJEA Secretary-Treasurer
Steve Beatty

RESTORING FAIRNESS AND HONORING COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Ch. 44 fulfills all three objectives NJEA members had when the campaign for Ch. 78 relief began over two years ago.

It significantly reduces the amount members

are required to contribute while preserving access to platinum-level benefits. It ties future member contributions to their salaries, so that no matter what happens with premiums, members know exactly what their contributions will be based on their negotiated salaries, and no member will see their insurance costs outstrip their salary growth. It respects collective bargaining by ensuring that any member who had negotiated a different level of benefits or contributions prior to the passage of Ch. 44 will be able to keep that, and locals will be able to



At the Ch. 44 bill signing, a hearty round of applause and an elbow bump for NJEA President Marie Blistan from Linden EA President Eloy Delgado (l) and Gov. Phil Murphy as Blistan is introduced

continue to negotiate those plans and contributions.

Finally, it strengthens and reinforces the importance of collective bargaining by returning the whole issue of health benefit levels and contributions to the negotiating table in 2028, after the damage of Ch. 78 has been reversed and a fair starting point has been reestablished.



NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Steve Beatty, NJEA President Marie Blistan and NJEA Vice President Sean M. Spiller hold the pens Gov. Murphy used to sign Ch. 44 into law.

WHAT THEY'RE SAYING ABOUT CH. 44



"I am proud to sign this bill into law and at long-last provide relief for our educators from Chapter 78."

– Gov. Phil Murphy



"This agreement will produce meaningful and lasting financial benefits at the same time it preserves quality health care for public workers."

– Senate President Steve Sweeney



"This is a significant achievement that will produce benefits for educators and taxpayers."

– Assemblyman Joe Cryan



"Public education employees are essential to New Jersey, and we value their contributions."

– Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin

SEHBP and Ch. 78 Relief – Frequently Asked Questions



Note: This FAQ was extracted from the website on Aug. 12, 2020. Additional questions may have been added after that date. Visit njea.org/jobjustice to view any new questions.

SEHBP and Ch. 78 Relief

WHAT IS CHANGING?

On Jan. 1, 2021, the School Employees' Health Benefits Program (SEHBP) will begin its new plan year offering only the following options:

- Horizon Direct 10
- Horizon Direct 15
- A NEW PLAN, the Horizon New Jersey Educators Health Plan (NJEHP)

WHAT PLANS WILL BE AVAILABLE TO ME AS OF JAN. 1, 2021?

All new employees hired on or after July 1, 2020 must take the NJEHP as of Jan. 1, 2021. All employees hired prior to July 1, 2020 will be given the opportunity to select the NJEHP starting Jan. 1, 2021 during an open enrollment period prior to that date. Regardless of what premium sharing is required in a local contract, employees selecting the NJEHP will pay only the premium sharing required for that plan.

When the voluntary Garden State Health Plan (GSHP) is offered, all employees, may opt to choose it and pay only the lower premium sharing required by that plan.

If your contract currently offers the Direct 10 and/or Direct 15, you will continue to have access to those.

All other plans currently offered by the SEHBP (e.g. 15/25, 20/30, Direct 0, etc.) will no longer be offered by the SEHBP.

WHAT WILL THE PREMIUM SHARING BE FOR THESE PLANS?

Premium sharing for the Direct 10 and Direct 15 plans will continue to be calculated at Ch. 78, Tier 4 levels or at whatever other contribution arrangement has been negotiated in your contract. That premium sharing remains negotiable.

Premium sharing for the NJEHP will be based on a percentage of salary set out in the law. For full details, please review the charts on pages 57-60.

When it is offered, premium sharing for the GSHP will be up to 50% less than the NJEHP.

WHAT IF MY DISTRICT OFFERS AN SEHBP PLAN OTHER THAN DIRECT 10 OR DIRECT 15?

Your local association should work with your NJEA UniServ field representative to review your contract language and determine whether to bargain over the impact of the other plans being eliminated.

HOW IS THE NEW NJEHP DIFFERENT FROM DIRECT 10 AND DIRECT 15?

The new plan is still valued at a platinum level plan and is similar to Direct 10 and Direct 15. The notable changes are an increase in copayment for the emergency room visits that do not result in a hospital admission, the out-of-network deductible and coinsurance, and a different reimbursement schedule for out-of-network providers. For prescription drugs, there is an increase in most copayments as well as mandatory use of generic drugs when they are available. For full details, please review the charts on pages 57-60.

WHAT HAPPENS TO MY HEALTH BENEFITS ON JAN. 1, 2028?

All SEHBP plans and premium sharing arrangements become fully negotiable for all employees.

Non-SEHBP districts/employers

WHAT IS CHANGING?

On Jan. 1, 2021, your employer will offer a new plan called the New Jersey Educators Health Plan (NJEHP) in addition to all other plans currently offered under your collective bargaining agreement.

On July 1, 2021, your district must also offer another plan, the Garden State Health Plan (GSHP). That plan is entirely voluntary. No employee will be required to take it, but those who do will see a premium sharing reduction of up to 50% from the NJEHP.

WHAT PLANS WILL BE AVAILABLE TO ME AS OF JAN. 1, 2021?

All new employees hired on or after July 1, 2020 must take the NJEHP as of Jan. 1, 2021. All employees hired prior to July 1, 2020 will be given the opportunity to select the NJEHP starting Jan. 1, 2021 during an enrollment period prior to that date. Regardless of what premium sharing is required in a local contract, employees selecting the NJEHP will pay only the premium sharing required for that plan.

Those plans that have been collectively negotiated in your district will continue to be offered.

When the voluntary GSHP is offered, all employees, may opt to choose it and pay only the lower premium sharing required by that plan.

WHAT WILL THE PREMIUM SHARING BE FOR MY HEALTH INSURANCE?

Those plans that have been collectively negotiated in your district will continue to be offered. The premium sharing for these plans will be based on what Ch. 78, Tier 4 levels or whatever other rate has been negotiated in your contract. The premium sharing for those plans remains negotiable.

Premium sharing for the NJEHP will be based on a percentage of salary set in the law. For full details, please review the charts on pages 57-60.

When it is offered, premium sharing for the GSHP will be up to 50% less than the NJEHP.

HOW IS THE NJEHP DIFFERENT FROM MY CURRENT PLANS?

The NJEHP is valued as a platinum level. While it is easy to compare this plan to the SEHBP program, it is not easy for the approximately 400 districts that do not participate in the SEHBP. Each non-SEHBP plan has a unique set of benefits. You should work with your local president and your NJEA UniServ field representative to determine how the NJEHP compares to your current plan or plans.

WHAT HAPPENS TO MY HEALTH BENEFITS ON JAN. 1, 2028?

All plans offered under your collective bargaining agreement, the NJEHP, and the GSHP become fully negotiable.

WHAT OTHER HEALTH INSURANCE PLANS CAN MY LOCAL BARGAIN BESIDES THE ONES CURRENTLY OFFERED IN OUR CONTRACT, THE NJEHP AND THE GSHP?

Only those plans required by the law or offered through your collective bargaining agreement prior to Jan. 1, 2021 can be offered through Dec. 31, 2027, unless the new plan results in a lower cost to your employer than the NJEHP.

On Jan. 1, 2028, the NJEHP and its premium sharing chart become the new status quo and can be bargained like the rest of the plans offered under your collective bargaining agreement. Employees hired on or after July 1, 2020 who were limited to the NJEHP will be free to select any plan that is allowed under their collective bargaining agreement.

As always, your local association should work with your NJEA UniServ field representative to review what is permissible to bargain.

General information for all districts/employers open enrollment

IF I AM HIRED PRIOR TO JAN. 1, 2021, WHAT INSURANCE DO I RECEIVE?

All new employees hired after on or after July 1, 2020 must take the NJEHP as of Jan. 1, 2021. If you are hired after July 1, 2020, but prior to December 31, 2020, you will receive the health benefits that a new employee is entitled to under the collective bargaining agreement. When Jan. 1, 2021 comes, you will be enrolled in the NJEHP.

HOW WILL I KNOW WHICH PLAN IS RIGHT FOR ME?

The law requires the SEHBP to develop a guidance tool to provide employees and retirees with confidential consultations about the employee's or retiree's decision to select a plan during open enrollment.

Districts that do not participate in the SEHBP are not required to offer a guidance tool to their employees. NJEA will provide extensive materials and guidance to help members make the appropriate selection.

HOW SHOULD I CHOOSE A PLAN?

Based on your medical needs, there are two primary factors that you should consider:

1. Compare the plan design of your current health insurance against the benefits offered in the NJEHP.
2. Calculate the percentage of salary that you would pay if enrolled in the NJEHP, then compare that to your current premium sharing.

CAN MY EMPLOYER STILL ENTER AND LEAVE THE SEHBP WITH THE PROPER NOTIFICATION TO ITS CURRENT PROVIDER?

Yes. Nothing in the law changes the ability for an employer to select the carrier. Employers must continue to honor the terms and conditions in the collective bargaining agreement.

WILL THERE BE AN OPEN ENROLLMENT PERIOD?

Yes. The law mandates that all school employers, whether participating in the SEHBP or not, must offer an open enrollment prior to Jan. 1, 2021.

SHOULD I PARTICIPATE IN OPEN ENROLLMENT?

Open enrollment provides you with a better understanding of your

benefits and the cost for those benefits. If you do not participate in the open enrollment, you will be automatically enrolled in the NJEHP.

CAN I TRY THE NJEHP FOR A YEAR?

It depends. All new employees hired on or after July 1, 2020 must participate in the NJEHP or the GSHP. Employees hired prior to July 1, 2020 have the right to move between the NJEHP and their collectively bargained insurance plans during open enrollments offered at least once a year by their employer.

WHEN THE GSHP IS AVAILABLE, CAN I TRY IT FOR A YEAR?

Yes. All new employees hired on or after July 1, 2020 must participate in the NJEHP or the GSHP. Employees hired prior to July 1, 2020 have the right to move between the NJEHP, GSHP and their collectively bargained insurance plans during open enrollments offered at least once a year by their employer.

MY EMPLOYER DOESN'T CURRENTLY OFFER CERTAIN PLANS TO CERTAIN EMPLOYEES. WILL I HAVE THOSE PLANS AS AN OPTION IN OPEN ENROLLMENT?

No. The law does not override what your association has collectively bargained regarding who is covered, as long as it does not conflict with this law. If a local has grandfathered certain members in certain plans, that will continue. However, all employees will be eligible to select either the NJEHP or GSHP, even if they are currently restricted from selecting other plans offered by their employer.

WILL THIS LAW AFFECT MY ABILITY TO SELECT A BENEFITS WAIVER INSTEAD OF INSURANCE?

No. The new law does not modify the payment for those that select a waiver over health insurance.

IF I TAKE AN UNPAID LEAVE OF ABSENCE, WILL I BE A "NEW" EMPLOYEE WHEN I RETURN?

No, only employees with a break in service would be considered new employees.

HOW MUCH MONEY WILL I SAVE IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE NJEHP?

The law guarantees your contribution in the NJEHP will be less than or equal to what you would have paid under P.L. 2011, Ch. 78. In most cases, even where a local has negotiated a reduced premium sharing for another plan, a member will save a significant amount of money if they select the NJEHP. Examples of savings are shown on Page 59.

You may reach out to your local president or UniServ field representative for help calculating what you can save by switching to a new plan.

NJEHP plan design

WHAT IF MY DISTRICT CURRENTLY OFFERS A PLAN TO A GROUP OF MEMBERS THAT COSTS LESS THAN THE NJEHP? DO THEY STILL HAVE TO OFFER NJEHP?

If a negotiated agreement in effect on the effective date of the legislation is found to have a net cost to the employer that is lower than the cost to the employer under the NJEHP, the employer and the majority representative are required to engage in collective negotiations over the financial impact of the difference.

CAN I STILL SEE MY DOCTOR IN THE NJEHP?

Yes. The SEHBP NJEHP will use the same network of doctors in the state and outside of the state as the Direct 10 and Direct 15 plans. If you receive your benefits from a carrier outside the SEHBP, the network must be nationally established and substantially equivalent to the SEHBP network.

WHAT IS A CLOSED FORMULARY?

When there are multiple medications available to treat the same medical condition, a prescription company creates a closed formulary list, which directs prescriptions to more cost-effective, clinically equivalent medications. The medications are determined by a team of physicians and pharmacists who review all medications on a regular basis.

WHAT IF I CAN'T TAKE THE GENERIC MEDICATION?

If you have tried using generic medication without success, there is an appeal process. You should contact your provider's office to discuss it. If your appeal is approved, you will not pay the difference.

WHAT IS THE OUT-OF-NETWORK REIMBURSEMENT RATE IN THE NJEHP?

Network providers have agreed to a certain fee schedule. If you use out-of-network providers, they can charge whatever they want. The plan sets an out-of-network reimbursement rate of 200% of the Medicare reimbursement for covered services. If a provider's charge is more than the plan allowance, this is called a "balance bill." The difference between what the plan allows and the out-of-network provider charges is the responsibility of the patient if the provider chooses to bill the patient.

WHAT IS AN OUT-OF-POCKET MAXIMUM?

The out-of-pocket maximum refers to the most you will pay in co-payments and coinsurance before the plan will pay 100%. This does not include any balance billing that the out-of-network provider may charge.

DOES THE NEW LAW REQUIRE ALL DISTRICTS TO OFFER A WELLNESS PLAN?

Yes. The law requires the SEHBP to offer a comprehensive health and wellness program to its members that deals with issues such as chronic-condition coaching and smoking cessation services. The law requires the SEHBP to allow districts that do not participate in the SEHBP to access the program at the same cost as districts that do participate in the SEHBP. It is not mandatory that a non-SEHBP district participate in this program.

Savings

HOW MUCH IS THE LAW SUPPOSED TO SAVE?

To ensure savings, state actuaries are required to validate a net annualized savings from the implementation of the NJEHP and the GSHP of at least \$300 million comparing plan years 2020, 2021, and 2022. This savings includes money saved by school districts and county colleges that participate in the SEHBP and those that do not participate in the SEHBP, pre-Medicare retirees paid for by the state, and from the value of early plan design changes implemented in Fiscal Year 2020 by the SEHBP.

ARE THERE ANY RESTRICTIONS ON HOW THE EMPLOYER CAN SPEND THE SAVINGS RESULTING FROM MEMBERS ENROLLED IN THE NJEHP OR GSHP?

Yes, districts that are spending "over adequacy" as determined by the NJDOE must use all savings realized from this statute for tax relief. This will be done by reducing their maximum tax levy increase as calculated by the NJDOE. Your local association should work with your NJEA UniServ office to determine how this may affect your district.

WHAT IF A MINIMUM OF \$300 MILLION IS NOT SAVED BY DEC. 31, 2023?

If the annualized net savings is less than \$300 million, the SEHBP is required to make plan design changes, or adjustments to employee

contributions, or a combination of both, to make up the estimated shortfall before Dec. 31, 2027. The SEHBP Commission, which includes NJEA representation, will have the opportunity to determine what those changes, if any, are.

HOW WILL THE STATE TRACK THE SAVINGS?

To enable tracking of health care cost savings by employer, each employer is required to submit annual data to the state. This data will be used to determine the savings statewide.

Retirees – Non-MEDICARE

IF I RETIRE NOW, CAN I STILL GET DIRECT 10 OR DIRECT 15 IN RETIREMENT?

No. All retirees who are currently retired or who retire after the effective date of the legislation, and who are not eligible for Medicare, will be placed into the NJEHP.

I AM/WILL BE PAYING TOWARD THE RETIREE HEALTH BENEFIT PREMIUM. IF I AM NOT ON MEDICARE, BUT MY SPOUSE/PARTNER IS, AM I PAYING A PERCENT OF PREMIUM OR A PERCENT OF SALARY?

If the retiree is not on Medicare and in the NJEHP, they will be paying on the percent of salary chart unless they would pay less on the Ch. 78 chart. Once the retiree becomes Medicare eligible, they will pay a percent of premium in accordance with the Ch. 78 chart.

WILL RETIREES ENROLLED IN THE SEHPB HAVE TO ENROLL IN NJEHP?

On Jan. 1, 2021, retirees who are not on Medicare with health benefits in retirement will be automatically enrolled in the NJEHP. Retirees who are on Medicare will not see a change in their benefits. Retirees who become Medicare eligible will continue to move to the plan offered to Medicare retirees.

WHY ARE RETIREE BENEFITS BEING CHANGED?

SEHBP retiree health benefits are funded from the state's annual budget on a pay-as-you-go-basis. While these benefits are considered an earned benefit, the benefit level is not protected under state law. Benefit modifications can be made through legislation or the SEHBP Design Committee. No major changes to the non-Medicare benefit plans have been made in over 13 years. This new plan secures this new high level of benefits by law until Dec. 31, 2027.

I HAVE SPOUSE/PARTNER COVERAGE, BUT ONE OF US IS NOT MEDICARE-ELIGIBLE. WHAT HAPPENS TO OUR COVERAGE?

All members and spouses who are not Medicare-eligible will be transferred to the NJEHP.



Visit njea.org/jobjustice which is updated regularly, based on your questions. You'll also find PDFs of the charts printed in this Special Section and more.

SCHOOL EMPLOYEES' HEALTH BENEFITS PROGRAM

COMPARISON OF PLANS

ACTIVE EMPLOYEES	Direct 10	Direct 15	NJEHP
Employee Premium Sharing	Chapter 78 or locally negotiated amount	Chapter 78 or locally negotiated amount	Percent of salary (see chart on other side)

NETWORK: National network – NOT limited to NJ doctors and facilities			
Deductible (Single/Family)	None	None	None
In-Network Coinsurance	10%	10%	10%
Primary Care Physician Copayment	\$10	\$15	\$10
Specialist Copayment	\$10	\$15	\$15
Emergency Room Copayment	\$25	\$50	\$125
Total In-Network Coinsurance and Copayment Maximum (Single/Family)	\$400/\$1,000	\$6,520/\$13,040 ¹	\$500/\$1,000

Deductible (Single/Family)	\$100/\$250	\$100/\$250	\$350/\$700
Out-of-Network Coinsurance	20%	30%	30%
Total Out-of-Network, Out-of-Pocket Maximum (Single/Family)	\$2,000/\$5,000	\$2,000/\$5,000	\$2,000/\$5,000
Maximum Provider Reimbursement (Reasonable and Customary)	90% of Fair Health ²	90% of Fair Health ²	200% of Medicare ²

Retail – Generic	\$3	\$3	\$5
Retail – Brand w/ No Generic Available	\$10	\$10	\$10
Retail – Brand w/ Generic Available	\$10	\$10	Member pays the difference ³
Mail – Generic	\$5	\$5	\$10
Mail – Brand w/ No Generic Available	\$15	\$15	\$20
Mail – Brand w/ Generic Equivalent	\$15	\$15	Member pays the difference ³

¹ Coinsurance is capped at \$400/\$1,000 (Single/Family)

² In many instances, 200% of Medicare produces lower payment to providers than 90% of Fair Health. This can result in a larger balance billing liability for the patient when utilizing out-of-network services. When a provider bills more than the maximum reimbursement, the member is responsible for 100% of the difference between the billed amount and the maximum reimbursement. Chiropractic, acupuncture, and physical therapy have a different fee schedule that will apply equally to all plans. Chiropractic: \$35/visit or 75% of the in-network cost per visit, whichever is less. Acupuncture \$60/visit or 75% of the in-network cost per visit, whichever is less. Physical therapy: in-network cost per visit. Currently \$52.

³ The prescription drug plan will be OptumRx Premium Formulary, which directs prescriptions to more cost-effective, clinically equivalent medications. For brand-name drugs with generic equivalents available, the plan will pay the cost of the generic equivalent. Members who choose to fill the prescription with the brand-name drug will be responsible for the difference in the cost of the prescription. A medical appeal process is available.

NJ EDUCATORS HEALTH PLAN

		NJEHP
IN-NETWORK	NETWORK: National network - NOT limited to NJ doctors and facilities	
	Deductible (Single/Family)	None
	In-Network Coinsurance	10%
	Primary Care Physician Copayment	\$10
	Specialist Copayment	\$15
	Emergency Room Copayment	\$125
	Total In-Network Coinsurance and Copayment Out-of-Pocket Maximum (Single/Family)	\$500/\$1,000
OUT-OF-NETWORK	Deductible (Single/Family)	\$350/\$700
	Out-of-Network Coinsurance	30%
	Total Out-of-Network, Out-of-Pocket Maximum (Single/Family)	\$2,000/\$5,000
	Maximum Provider Reimbursement (Reasonable and Customary)	200% of Medicare*
PRESCRIPTION DRUG	Retail – Generic	\$5
	Retail – Brand w/ No Generic Available	\$10
	Retail – Brand w/ Generic Available	Member pays the difference**
	Mail – Generic	\$10
	Mail – Brand w/ No Generic Available	\$20
	Mail – Brand w/ Generic Equivalent	Member pays the difference**

* Chiropractic: \$35/visit or 75% of the in-network cost per visit, whichever is less. Acupuncture \$60/visit or 75% of the in-network cost per visit, whichever is less. Physical therapy: in-network cost per visit. Currently \$52.

** For brand-name drugs with generic equivalents available, the plan will pay the cost of the generic equivalent. Members who choose to fill the prescription with the brand-name drug will be responsible for the difference in the cost of the prescription. A medical appeal process is available.

CONTRIBUTION SCHEDULE¹

BASE SALARY OR PENSION² AMOUNT	LEVEL OF COVERAGE/PERCENTAGE OF SALARY			
	<u>Single</u>	<u>Parent/child(ren)</u>	<u>Two Adults</u>	<u>Family</u>
Up to - \$40,000	1.7%	2.2%	2.8%	3.3%
\$40,001 - \$50,000	1.9%	2.5%	3.3%	3.9%
\$50,001 - \$60,000	2.2%	2.8%	3.9%	4.4%
\$60,001 - \$70,000	2.5%	3.0%	4.4%	5.0%
\$70,001 - \$80,000	2.8%	3.3%	5.0%	5.5%
\$80,001 - \$90,000	3.0%	3.6%	5.5%	6.0%
\$90,001 - \$100,000	3.3%	3.9%	6.0%	6.6%
\$100,001 - \$125,000 ³	3.6%	4.4%	6.6%	7.2%

¹ This contribution cannot exceed the previous Ch. 78 contribution. In every case, the lower contribution applies.

² Only applicable to retirees required to contribute under Ch. 78. Retirees currently receiving or eligible to receive premium-free health benefits will continue to do so.

³ For any employee earning a base salary above \$125,000, the maximum contribution will be based on a salary of \$125,000.

NJEHP SAMPLE SAVINGS CHART

(FOR ACTIVE EMPLOYEES)

SALARY
35,000

COVERAGE	SINGLE	PARENT/CHILD(REN)	TWO ADULTS	FAMILY
Direct 10 Member pays	\$1,451	\$1,718	\$1,847	\$2,264
NJEHP Member pays	\$595	\$770	\$980	\$1,155
Member saves	\$856	\$948	\$867	\$1,109

SALARY
55,000

COVERAGE	SINGLE	PARENT/CHILD(REN)	TWO ADULTS	FAMILY
Direct 10 Member pays	\$3,035	\$4,172	\$4,486	\$5,283
NJEHP Member pays	\$1,210	\$1,540	\$2,145	\$2,420
Member saves	\$1,825	\$2,632	\$2,341	\$2,863

SALARY
75,000

COVERAGE	SINGLE	PARENT/CHILD(REN)	TWO ADULTS	FAMILY
Direct 10 Member pays	\$4,354	\$6,626	\$7,125	\$8,679
NJEHP Member pays	\$2,100	\$2,475	\$3,750	\$4,125
Member saves	\$2,254	\$4,151	\$3,375	\$4,554

SALARY
95,000

COVERAGE	SINGLE	PARENT/CHILD(REN)	TWO ADULTS	FAMILY
Direct 10 Member pays	\$4,618	\$7,362	\$7,917	\$10,943
NJEHP Member pays	\$3,135	\$3,705	\$5,700	\$6,270
Member saves	\$1,483	\$3,657	\$2,217	\$4,673

Comparison based on 2020 NJ Direct 10 w/ prescription card with the member contributing at Ch. 78 Tier 4 rates vs. NJEHP w/ prescription card, with the member contributing the statutory percentage of salary. Individual savings may vary where locals have negotiated different plans or contribution rates.

For the sample savings chart for non-medicare retirees go to njea.org/jobjustice

NJ EDUCATORS HEALTH PLAN CONTRIBUTION SCHEDULE¹

BASE SALARY OR PENSION² AMOUNT

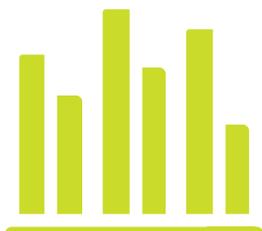
LEVEL OF COVERAGE/PERCENTAGE OF SALARY

	<u>Single</u>	<u>Parent/child(ren)</u>	<u>Two Adults</u>	<u>Family</u>
Up to - \$40,000	1.7%	2.2%	2.8%	3.3%
\$40,001 - \$50,000	1.9%	2.5%	3.3%	3.9%
\$50,001 - \$60,000	2.2%	2.8%	3.9%	4.4%
\$60,001 - \$70,000	2.5%	3.0%	4.4%	5.0%
\$70,001 - \$80,000	2.8%	3.3%	5.0%	5.5%
\$80,001 - \$90,000	3.0%	3.6%	5.5%	6.0%
\$90,001 - \$100,000	3.3%	3.9%	6.0%	6.6%
\$100,001 - \$125,000 ³	3.6%	4.4%	6.6%	7.2%

¹ This contribution cannot exceed the previous Ch. 78 contribution. In every case, the lower contribution applies.

² Only applicable to retirees required to contribute under Ch. 78. Retirees currently receiving or eligible to receive premium-free health benefits will continue to do so.

³ For any employee earning a base salary above \$125,000, the maximum contribution will be based on a salary of \$125,000.



Note: Visit njea.org/jobjustice which is updated regularly, based on your questions. You'll also find PDFs of the charts printed in this Special Section and more.

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WE'RE OPEN OR WE'RE NOT OPEN. NOW WHAT?

USE THE SCIENCE, AND BASIC PRINCIPLES

BY DOROTHY WIGMORE

What does “safe” or “healthy” mean for students and staff and their communities during a pandemic?

As of press time, it was not yet clear whether or how New Jersey school buildings would open in September and if they did open what form the opening would take. Districts were to prepare a “Restart and Recovery” plan with community stakeholders, using the state’s *The Road Back* document with mandatory requirements and guidelines about “anticipated minimum standards.”

By the time this article arrives in mailboxes, readers will know what is happening, or not happening, in their school districts and in districts across the state. Whatever the status of schools in September, the only certainty is that uncertainty will remain.

In addition to this article, and others in this edition of the Review, visit njea.org/covid for the latest guidance.

WHAT DO WE (NOT) KNOW?

We’re still learning about the SARS-CoV2 virus behind COVID-19. From pre-pandemic studies, earlier epidemics, and new research, we know:

- The contagious virus gets into the air when people with it sneeze, cough, shout, sing, and/or talk. Sometimes it’s just infected people breathing.
- Long-established science shows small respiratory particles (“aerosols”) matter. Floating easily in the air, they can get into the lungs.

- At least 40% of people with the virus may share it without having symptoms.
- The longer and closer we are to an infected person (in poorly ventilated spaces), the more likely we will inhale it.
- Effective widespread testing, contact tracing and isolation/quarantine is essential to reduce cases.
- A recent study found students aged 10 to 19 spread the virus like adults do.
- It’s still unclear if children and teens are affected as often as adults, how they react, and how long it will take to find an effective vaccine for all.

WHAT ABOUT CLEANING AND DISINFECTING?

Inexpensive soap and water disable the virus, stopping its spread. Studies show absenteeism and disease go down when children wash their hands regularly with soap and water. Children should not use commercial cleaning products or disinfecting wipes, given the hazards.

Disinfect **only** after cleaning and when it’s necessary, using the least toxic products. The district **must** supply them, not individuals. (See njea.org/cleaning-to-fight-covid-19-in-schools-and-at-home.)

Procurement policies should require contractors use the least-toxic products and procedures and purchase them for staff. They should ban fogging with disinfectant; it’s hazardous, costly and ineffective.

PRINCIPLES AND OTHER ESSENTIALS FOR PLANS

Pandemic experiences vary by community. A specialist who has examined many reopening recommendations says districts could consider this when there are:

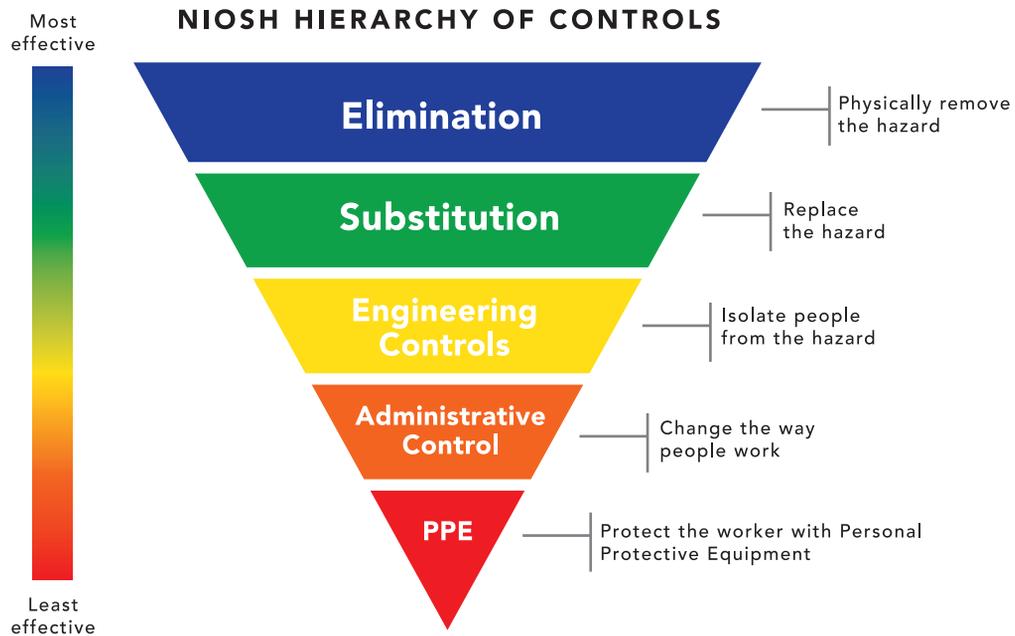
- Five new cases (or fewer) daily *per 100,000* population, locally.
- Decreasing cases for the last 14 days in the area
- Local hospitals have at least 25% extra capacity to handle more cases.

“Don’t hold ourselves accountable to be normal,” Dr. Michael Osterholm, the University of Minnesota’s Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy (CIDRAP) director, said in a July podcast. “Hold ourselves accountable to get through it with as much grace, as much wisdom and as much... fortitude as possible.”

District plans should be guided by principles and approaches including:

- Accept that 2020-21 is a “COVID year.” Remember, schools in Louisiana redid the year after Hurricane Katrina.
- Decisions must be driven by data **and** the precautionary principle when the science is not clear.
- Take time. Allow for changes with new information.
- We must live with the virus for now. If schools reopen, students and staff will be infected. Policies and procedures to deal with infections must exist **before** they return.
- Be flexible and creative, fitting solutions to multiple needs (e.g., school buses can be internet “hot spots,” driven to areas where WiFi is needed.)
- Recognize the importance of mental health for staff, students and parents, with appropriate supports.

Dorothy Wigmore is a long-time health and safety specialist, trained in occupational hygiene, ergonomics, “stress” and education. A Canadian, she has worked also in the U.S. and Mozambique. Her focus is on solving job-related hazards through prevention and worker participation.



The most effective protection against a hazard is the elimination of the hazard. This National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) graphic identifies protections from most effective to least effective.

PPE IS THE LEAST EFFECTIVE PROTECTION

The most effective protections cover everyone. They don't depend on an individual's behavior, knowledge or protective gear that must fit. In this pandemic, effective measures include:

- Using outdoor spaces
- Fewer people in every room
- Barriers
- Physical distancing (at least six feet until the local case rate is very low)—sometimes with strategic placement of furniture
- Properly maintained ventilation providing all-fresh or well-filtered air
- Portable air-purifying machines with HEPA filters

Districts also need good sick leave and anti-retaliation policies, one-way “traffic” and universal easy access to hand-washing supplies and spaces. Everyone needs time for the extra measures.

Personal protective equipment (PPE) limits harm to the **user**. Face coverings are **not** PPE, they are a helpful precaution that can protect **others** around the user. Workers will still need PPE (e.g., gloves, respirator when using toxic products).

EQUITY AND REAL PARTICIPATION MATTER TOO

Effective measures cost money. Without sufficient funds, many school districts cannot

do what's needed, creating serious equity issues. They come to light when workers, unions, parents and communities are real partners in **all** planning, implementation and evaluation of reopening plans, policies and procedures. They must be engaged, educated and comfortable speaking truth to power.

NJEA members also can use their collective bargaining agreements (njea.org/planning-for-back-to-school), the state's indoor air quality standard (<https://bit.ly/njdohiaq>), and their right to refuse without retaliation—be sure to consult with your association representative and local president before acting. Members need information and training to do this effectively.

Resources

NJEA, Education recovery plan: njea.org/njea-releases-education-recovery-plan

New Jersey Department of Education, The Road Back. Restart and recovery plan for education: nj.gov/education/reopening/NJDOETheRoadBack.pdf.

Coalition for Healthier Schools and WEC. National call to action. <https://bit.ly/3chscta>

American Federation of Teachers, A plan to safely reopen America's schools and communities, other resources: aft.org/coronavirus

University of Minnesota Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy: cidrap.umn.edu

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All Courses Now Online Until We Can Safely Return

FIFTEEN DIGITAL GEMS FOR YOUR REMOTE PLANNING SUCCESS

by *Lizandaa Alburg, NJEA Teacher Leader Academy (TLA) consultant, and Sharon Ortiz, TLA participant; with additional contributions made by TLA participants Charlene Gerbig and Megan King; and Shaye Brown, technology educator at Paterson's Dr. Frank Napier Jr. School of Technology*

Welcome back! During the past few months, many of us scrambled to develop technology skills, identify valuable digital resources, and continue student learning remotely as our workplace moved from brick-and-mortar schools to our kitchen tables, couches, or any available space. Gone were the days of group seating arrangements and interactive white boards. Instead, platforms and resources such as Google, Zoom, BrainPOP, and Newsela became instructional staples statewide.

It's now September and your district may have opted to begin this new school year with a hybrid or all-remote instructional model. You may need to increase your student engagement, diversify your instruction and heighten your use of 21st-century skills even more. Consider using some of the following technology gems to ensure that you have a successful 2020-2021 academic year.

TECHNOLOGY ESSENTIALS

Flip Grid

flipgrid.com
Free

Flipgrid is styled to embody popular social media sites and contains discussion starters from Wonderopolis, NearPod, Conversations about Race, Equity and Justice, The Met, Flocabulary, Skype, MSN Kids, Learning from HOME and more.

Kahoot

kahoot.com
Free/paid

Kahoot is a game-like assessment tool with high student engagement. It gives the teacher the ability to implement a formative assessment of the whole class at one time without putting students on the spot. Gimkit (*gimkit.com*) is a paid site similar to Kahoot that allows for differentiation.

Padlet

padlet.com
Free/paid

Padlets are user-friendly "virtual walls" that

can be used for hosting introductions, posting writing prompts, questions, exit tickets, videos, links, pictures, collaborative research, literature discussions, peer critiques, presentations, project progress and more.

Nearpod

nearpod.com
Free

The only dashboard you need for interactive instruction. Nearpod offers live participation, student-paced and front-of-the-class options. You can also find lesson plans, games, videos, assessments, and more on the site.

THE ARTS

Google Arts & Culture

artsandculture.google.com
Free

Google Arts & Culture offers virtual field trips, museums, scavenger hunts and other ideas.

LANGUAGE ARTS

Storytime Online

youtube.com/user/StorylineOnline/videos
Free
Celebrities reading aloud.

Wonderopolis

wonderopolis.org
Free

A great site for inquiry, reading comprehension, vocabulary development and extension activities.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Talking Points

talkingpoints.org
Free

Talking Points is a two-way communication tool used with ELL students and their families. Typed messages can be translated to and from English to 100+ languages.

MATH

Didax

didax.com/math/virtual-manipulatives.html
Free

A collection of virtual math manipulatives including dice, unifix cubes, spinners, number lines, pattern blocks, geoboards, and more.

MISCELLANEOUS

Daily Caring

bit.ly/dailycaringft
Free
Virtual field trips

Conversation Starters World

conversationstartersworld.com/would-you-rather-questions-for-kids
Free
Would You Rather... and other conversation-starting questions.

SCIENCE

NGSS Phenomena

ngssphenomena.com
Free

Short GIFs of science phenomenon can be used as bell ringers or conversation starters. Virtual science education cards are also positive resources.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Rewordify

Rewordify.com
Free

Helps with reading comprehension and vocabulary development by simplifying English to a lower reading level. It lets you reword a sentence or reword a paragraph. It will simplify English by reducing text complexity. It's an important part of reading instruction and vocabulary instruction for ELL students, students with reading disabilities, student with a learning disability, or anyone who wants to improve reading skills!

SOCIAL STUDIES

ProCon.org

procon.org
Free

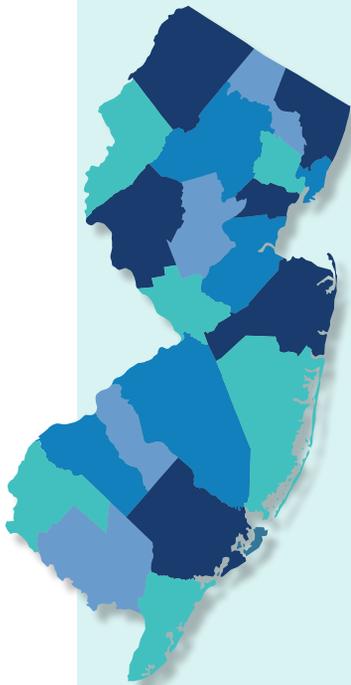
Students analyze the pros and cons of current events. Useful for rigorous discussion, debates and citing evidence.

Teachrock

teachrock.org/lesson-plan-collections
Free

This amazing resource has music-based lesson plans related to most content areas and grade levels.

SUSSEX TO CAPE MAY



BREAKING BIAS: LESSONS FROM THE AMISTAD

Breaking Bias: Lessons from the Amistad, the New Jersey State Bar Foundation's (NJSBF) newest curriculum, is coming soon.

Among other questions, the curriculum will seek to answer:

- What is race?
- What have been the consequences of social constructs about race in our country?
- How did enslaved people and other African Americans resist oppression and bring about positive change?

A sneak peek at this curriculum will be launched at njsbf.org in the coming months. The date will be announced on the NJSBF social media platforms.

Follow NJSBF on:

Twitter – @NJStateBarFdn

Facebook – facebook.com/NJStateBarFdn

Instagram – instagram.com/njstatebarfdn

LinkedIn – Search the foundation name

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AT LEARNING. NJEA.ORG

The NJEA Professional Development and Instructional Issues Division has developed guidance on a number of issues and has recorded a series of webinars addressing a wide variety of issues being brought forth by our members.

The webinars address a variety of topics, including but not limited to:

- Conversations on equity and inclusivity (Freestyle Fridays)
- Professional growth
- Health and safety
- Tools for working remotely
- Information management
- Working safely and maintaining privacy in a remote environment
- Online pedagogy

All topic areas have webinars designed for educational support professionals (ESPs), certificated staff, or both. Live presentations are recorded and stored at learning.njea.org as a professional development resource.

Members seeking to earn a certificate of attendance for participating in a live webinar, should log on to njea.org to ensure that their profiles are up-to-date, especially your email address. Certificates will be automatically added to your “My PD Transcript.”

Later, when signing into WebEx, provide your full name and email address matching the information in your NJEA profile. Remain for the duration of the event. For certificated staff, be sure to work with your district administrator/supervisor to update your Professional Development Plan (PDP) to include webinar content.

To access the webinars and resources, visit learning.njea.org.

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Pet Insur.	(see website)
Real Estate	(see website)
Solar Elec.	800-558-1920
	*Online 24/7

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RETHINKING NATIVE MASCOTS IN NJ SCHOOLS

BY LEAH JEROME

In 2006, I had my first experience exploring a reservation. In a minivan loaded with my college peers, we drove from Fordham University to the Navajo Nation. Our journey introduced us to Nelson, a Navajo elder. He took us to a sweat lodge, a ceremonial round house and to a high school graduation party where we played basketball with Navajo children. We learned that we had so much in common, yet there was such a difference in the lives we led. The poverty of the reservation was ever apparent in the remote deserts of southern Utah.

Historically, the colonial and American governments foresaw no coexistence between the Native Americans and European settlers. “Manifest Destiny” was the phrase to describe westward expansion, a euphemism for imperialism. Policies that led to broken treaties, linguicide, culturicide and religious oppression accompanied by massacres and forced assimilation are part of Native American history. In New Jersey, European colonialism and

Leah Jerome is a history teacher at Pascack Valley Regional High School, the 2019-20 Bergen County Teacher of the Year and a 2013 James Madison Fellow.

increased greed for land, coupled with Old World diseases, created conditions that gradually forced the indigenous Leni Lenape peoples from their land.

Where Native American villages and communities thrived for thousands of years, there are now mascot heads on sports T-shirts.

I proudly teach at Pascack Valley High School where an Indian mascot represented the school until the board of education recently voted unanimously to replace it. This mascot was woven into the fabric of the school, but its continued use was misguided. To negate the mascot does not mean a negation of the school's past; rather, it shows an enlightened approach to educating our students in the present. I implore other New Jersey schools to consider this path.

Over one hundred years ago, Indian boarding schools became the federal government's attempt at assimilating Native American children. Native children were kidnapped from their homes and forced to abandon any vestige of their Native identity. Long braids were cut off and European American clothing replaced traditional garments. Children were abused and forced to renounce their Native culture.

Through Native American mascots, we teach our children that it is our right to appropriate those same images. Mascots are monolithic representations of thousands of peoples and cultures. Consider using any other marginalized group as a mascot and the notion seems outrageous. As educators, we have the moral responsibility to learn about appropriate ways to honor Native Americans. The often-claimed,

yet unsubstantiated, notion that mascots honor Indians is an unjustifiable attempt at absolution.

Along with my colleague, Marisa Mathias, we take students to several reservations in South Dakota every summer. Our students spend time at a youth center on the Cheyenne River Reservation, where they are amazed at the beauty of Lakota culture. To wear an Indian mascot to the Cheyenne River Reservation would be to show our Lakota friends that we have reduced all Native people to an image.

Indians are often depicted as a “noble savage” with characteristic warrior features. This concept has become part of American folklore and has been romanticized in a way that erases a history of maltreatment and genocidal policies against Native people. Native mascots showcase an Indian from the past and relegate Native Americans to people of our American past even though they still exist.

The use of Indian mascots is deemed appropriate by some because it is seen through the same lens as Vikings and Knights, which are warriors of the past. Indians are not a people of the past. They are a people of the present whose long history should be honored, not commodified. Unlike other mascots that represent people, American government policies against Indian people were genocidal. Mascots are the ultimate conquest of Natives, the perpetuation of the settler colonial narrative.

If our goal is to honor, let us choose to honor Native peoples through educating our students about who they are, not what some of them might have looked like.



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EDUCATION AS ACTIVISM

HOW STUDENT TEACHERS CAN PREPARE FOR THE UNKNOWN

BY HEATHER HARRIS, RUTGERS GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

To an aspiring educator, your student teaching experience is a rite of passage. It is the bridge between the college student you are and the teacher you want to be. January 2020 marked the beginning of my student teaching journey, in a 10th grade U.S. History II classroom.

At the start of March 2020, I was preparing a lesson on Post World War II America. I printed out the activity instructions, bookmarked the sources I would need to project from my laptop, and color-coded the discussion questions I wanted to ask my students during the lesson. I didn't prepare for that to be the last time of the school year that I would walk through my classroom door.

The worksheets have since been discarded, my color-coded notes have remained untouched in my backpack, and I've closed the tabs on my computer. COVID-19 went from a concerning news item to the center of American life.

I left campus and returned to my childhood home to wait out what my cooperating teacher assumed would be an "extended spring break period, at most." I settled into the love of my family and cherished my ability to safely stay home and do my part. Days turned to weeks, weeks turned to months, and months turned into the end of my semester and senior year. The pandemic changed the face of schooling forever. Simultaneously, it pulled back the curtain on the festering inequalities facing our school system and country.

I quietly mourned my beautiful student teaching experience, my college graduation, and my entire way of life that collectively slipped away. Unable to assist with any virtual learning efforts, my classes, my students, and my livelihood turned into just memories. In comparison to all the lives lost during this pandemic, my student teaching experience is minute.

Juxtaposed against the devastating impact of the coronavirus have been the brutal murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd and Tony McDade. An international movement has erupted in support of Black Lives Matter. Pride Month got off to a harrowing start with the murders of two black transgender women, Riah Milton and Dominique Fells. It has continued to

include an attempt by the Trump administration to erase transgender health care access. Anti-black racism, misogynoir (where misogyny intersects with race), police violence and brutality, transphobia, white supremacy, and generations of systemic racism are just some of the issues that have prompted weeks of mass peaceful protests and an unprecedented public response. Now, more than ever, activism and change are needed on every level to enact long-lasting systemic changes.

It is critical that we all take this time to analyze ourselves, the systems we participate in, and the ways in which they are having an impact on our students and schools. As tumultuous as the year has been, our students are experiencing it too. At a time when we were still anxiously awaiting news of how school would look this fall, it was easy to feel powerless. But we are far from powerless.

As educators, we are in the fortunate position of being part of the future, trusted to educate the future in our classrooms. Education in our country will never look the same as it did before 2020, and that is OK. We are now part of the rebuilding and reimagining of an equitable education for all children, regardless of their race, socioeconomic status, or ZIP code. We need to be able to support our students, our cooperating teachers, and ourselves.

Take this time get uncomfortable. Challenge yourself to study, pay attention and listen. Open your mind to the process of unlearning your own biases, perspectives and assumptions. Be mindful of the stress you're feeling and consider how it is affecting your students.

Author Harriet Jackson Brown wrote, "The best preparation for tomorrow is doing your best today." As aspiring educators, we are most comfortable when we can overly plan and meticulously prepare. We have no idea what tomorrow will look like, but today we can dedicate ourselves to just trying our best. Our students are watching. 🏠

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Education in our country will never look the same as it did before 2020, and that is OK. We are now part of the rebuilding and reimagining of an equitable education for all children, regardless of their race, socioeconomic status, or ZIP code.



Classroom Close-up NJ presents

Reimagination Garden

When the Harrison Township Elementary School butterfly garden fell into disrepair, several kindergarten teachers applied for an NJEA Frederick L. Hipp Grant to upcycle it and create the Reimagination Garden.

School and community volunteers worked with kindergarten students to plan, create and maintain sections of the garden. The yearlong project ended with a butterfly parade.



Over its 25-year run, NJEA's Classroom Close-up NJ has won 16 Emmy® Awards. While it is no longer producing new episodes, it has a treasure trove of content that inspires and educates the public about the great things happening in New Jersey public schools – and it is a valuable resource for educators.

Watch Classroom Close-up on NJTV. The show airs on Sundays at 7:30 a.m., 12:30 p.m., and 7:30 p.m. Follow @CCUNJ on Twitter and Facebook at [facebook.com/crcunj](https://www.facebook.com/crcunj) and visit www.classroomcloseup.org.



CH. 78 RELIEF BILL PASSES!

Includes relief for many retirees

On Thursday, July 2, Gov. Phil Murphy signed the long-sought Ch. 78 relief bill into law. Just three days earlier, it had unanimously passed the New Jersey General Assembly, following its earlier unanimous passage by the New Jersey Senate in March.

After nearly two years of sustained member organizing and lobbying, it was a major victory for all members who have suffered since 2011 under the unfair and unsustainable burden of Ch. 78's ever-rising health care contributions.

Much of that lobbying work was led by NJREA members, particularly during Lobby Days at the Legislature held while school was in session.

The new law, *PL. 2020, Ch. 44*, makes two primary changes. First, it reduces the premium contribution for those retirees not yet eligible for Medicare who are required to pay a portion of the premium cost of their benefits out of their pensions. And second, it replaces the existing SEHBP plan options, including the Direct 10 plan used by many non-Medicare retirees, with a new plan called the New Jersey Educator Health Plan (NJEHP).

The new law does not apply to Medicare-eligible retirees. It makes no changes to the current Medicare Advantage plans.

PREMIUM CONTRIBUTIONS REDUCED

NJREA members who are not yet eligible for Medicare are among the major beneficiaries of the new law. Due to another provision of Ch. 78, all retirees who did not have 20 years of pension credit prior to June 28, 2011, have been required to pay a portion of the premium cost of their benefits out of their pensions. With no cost of living adjustment (COLA) in the pension, every time the premium increased, the contribution went up and those retirees' take-home pension amounts went down.

Though NJEA had sued to overturn that part of the law, the courts had sided with the state and those unsustainable contributions remained in place.

Until, that is, the passage of Ch. 44. Under the new premium-sharing rules, retirees, like active members, will no longer pay a percentage of an unpredictable and rising premium amount. Instead, the contribution will be based on a percentage of pension, just like active members will pay a percentage of salary.

In many cases, the savings will be significant.

A single retiree with a pension of \$35,000 who is required to contribute to their post-retirement health benefits pays \$1,684 for those benefits this year. Under Ch. 44, that contribution falls to \$595, a savings of \$1,089. See Page 60 for a more detailed contribution chart.

Others will save even more. A retiree with family coverage and a \$45,000 pension will save \$1,661 next year compared to this year.

And a non-Medicare-eligible retiree with spouse or partner coverage and a pension of \$55,000 will save a whopping \$3,527 in 2021. Those required contributions will not change unless pensions increase. Unlike Ch. 78, contributions under Ch. 44 do not increase automatically even if health insurance premiums rise.

While it is likely that most retirees' required contributions will be lower under the new contribution charts, in the unlikely event that the new contribution is higher than the previous Ch. 78 contribution, the retiree will continue to pay the lower of the two contribution amounts.

NEW JERSEY EDUCATOR HEALTH PLAN

The NJEHP, like the NJ Direct 10, is valued at a platinum level plan and is similar to Direct 10. It uses the same large national network of providers and facilities, so members who use in-network

doctors will have no reason to change unless those providers move out of network at a later date.

The notable changes in the NJEHP are an increase in copayment for the emergency room visits that do not result in a hospital admission, the out-of-network deductible and coinsurance, and a different reimbursement schedule for out-of-network providers.

For prescription drugs there will be a change in the coverage for brand name drugs from a preferred/nonpreferred to a mandatory generic with a closed formulary platform. For more information on this aspect of the NJEHP see "What if I can't take the generic medication?" and "What is a closed formulary?" under Frequently Asked Questions on Page 56.

For full details, see pages 45-60.

A HIGH-LEVEL OF BENEFITS SECURED

While the largest monetary benefits accrue to those members who pay toward their post-retirement health benefits, those who are not required to contribute will benefit as well.

SEHBP retiree health benefits are funded from the state's annual budget on a pay-as-you-go-basis. While these benefits are considered an earned benefit, the benefit level is not protected under state law. Benefit modifications can be made through legislation or the SEHBP Design Committee. No major changes to the non-Medicare benefit plans have been made in over 13 years. This new plan secures a high level of benefits by law until Dec. 31, 2027.

This new law was a hard-won victory, and NJREA members deserve a great deal of credit for helping to get it passed. As a result of your hard work, thousands of current and future retirees will see their net take-home pension amounts rise dramatically, and all non-Medicare retirees can rest assured that they will have many more years of high-quality, affordable health insurance in retirement.



The new plan does not apply to Medicare-eligible retirees. The law makes no changes to the current Medicare Advantage plans.

Around the counties

Due to COVID-19 concerns and restrictions, all meetings/events subject to change. For questions, call your county REA. For trip details, check the county newsletter.

BERGEN COUNTY REA'S next meeting/luncheon will be held on Tuesday, Oct. 13 at Seasons in Washington Township. To attend, call Camille Coppa at 201-343-3056.

MERCER COUNTY REA'S fall meeting/luncheon will be held on Wednesday, Oct. 21 at the Mercer Oaks Country Club in West Windsor. NJEA staff will be the guest speakers. The cost is \$27. To attend, call Susan Karolkiewicz at 609-223-2570.

MIDDLESEX COUNTY REA invites you to its upcoming meeting/luncheon on Thursday, Oct. 1 at the Grand Marquis in Old Bridge. MCREA officers will be installed, and local Middlesex County legislators will be the guest speakers. The cost is \$34. To attend, call Anne Chomko at 732-675-1734.

Join **MORRIS COUNTY REA** for its fall meeting/luncheon on Wednesday, October 7 at the Birchwood Manor in Whippany. The cost is \$35. To attend, call John Beekman at 973-514-1080.

OCEAN COUNTY REA'S next meeting/luncheon will be held on Thursday, Oct. 8 at the Clarion Hotel in Toms River. The cost is \$28. To attend, call Janice Sovinee at 732-477-1711.

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STAFF NEWS

HIRES AND PROMOTIONS



NJEA congratulates **DENISE POLICASTRO** on her promotion to director of the Research and Economic Services Division on Aug. 1. Policastro initially joined full-time staff on July 1, 2013, as a UniServ field representative in the Region 21 office in Livingston. In February 2017, she transferred to the Research and Economic Services Division specializing in negotiation assistance. In addition, Policastro served as a mentor for the NJEA Bolivar L. Graham Practicing Apprentice Program.

From 2008 to 2013, Policastro was a part-time UniServ consultant in the Region 13 office in Flemington.

From 1998, Policastro was a mathematics teacher in the Bernards Township School District, where she was co-president of the Bernards Township Education Association. She also served BTEA as negotiations chair as well as in other leadership positions in the association. Policastro had been the recording secretary of the Somerset County Education Association and a member of the NJEA Budget and Elections committees, as well as the Delegate Assembly.

Policastro lives in Kinnelon with her husband, Andy, who is an NJEA member.



NJEA congratulates **AL BEAVER** on his promotion to director of the Government Relations Division on June 15. Beaver initially joined full-time staff on Oct. 26, 2009, as a field representative in the UniServ Region 2 office, serving Gloucester, Salem and Cumberland counties. Prior to joining full-time NJEA staff, Beaver worked as a part-time UniServ consultant in the same region for the five previous years.

In addition to his employment as a field representative in Region 2, Beaver worked in field-based organizing at NJEA headquarters in Trenton. He has also previously served as interim UniServ regional director in the Northeast and Central regions.

From 2002, Beaver had been a history teacher in the Kingsway Regional High School District, during which he served as Kingsway Education Association president, negotiations chair, grievance chair, and in many other advocacy positions. Prior to his employment at Kingsway, Beaver taught history in the Pennsville School District.

Beaver lives in Woolwich Township, with his wife, Kathy, who is an NJEA member, and their three children, A.J., Michael, and Mary Kate.

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for more information go to NJEA.org

SEPTEMBER & beyond

9/1

Tuesday

NJEA statewide officer candidate petitions available

9/11

Friday

NJEA Executive Committee and County Presidents' Council meetings

9/12

Saturday

NJEA Delegate Assembly meeting

10/13

Tuesday

Voter Registration Deadline

10/14

Wednesday

NJEA Executive Committee meeting

10/24

Saturday

Jim George Collective Bargaining Summit

11/3

Tuesday

Election Day

11/4

Wednesday

NJEA Executive Committee and County Presidents' Council meetings

11/5-6

Thurs & Fri

NJEA Convention (remote)

11/7

Saturday

Delegate Assembly meeting

MEMBER BENEFIT PLAN REPORT AVAILABLE

This is a summary of the annual report for the NJEA Member Benefit Fund, Employer Identification Number 21-0524390, Plan No. 510 for the period from Oct. 1, 2018 to Sept. 30, 2019. The plan provides for group insurance and other welfare benefits. The annual report has been filed with the Employee Benefits Security Administration, as required under the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA).

INSURANCE INFORMATION

The plan sponsor, NJEA, has a group contract with Prudential Insurance Company of America to pay temporary and long-term disability claims incurred under the terms of the plan. The premiums under this contract are paid by those NJEA members who chose to select coverage under the contract. The total premiums paid for the plan year ending Sept. 30, 2019, were \$35,957,396.

BASIC FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

The value of plan assets, after subtracting liabilities of the plan was \$2,239,828 as of Sept. 30, 2019, compared to \$2,207,973 as of Oct. 1, 2018. During the plan year, the plan experienced an increase in

its net assets of \$31,855. During the plan year, the plan had total income of \$440,171, including earnings from investments of \$20,588 and other income of \$419,583.

Plan expenses were \$408,316. These expenses included \$58,284 in administrative expenses and \$350,032 in membership benefits paid on behalf of participants and beneficiaries.

YOUR RIGHTS TO ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

You have the right to receive a copy of the full annual report, or any part thereof, on request. The items listed here are included in that report: an accountant's report; financial information and information on payments to service providers; insurance information, including sales commissions paid by insurance carriers; assets held for investment; and transactions in excess of 5% of plan assets.

To obtain a copy of the full annual report, or any part thereof, write or call the office of Lorraine Jones, NJEA, Member Benefit Fund, 180 W. State Street, Trenton, NJ 08607-1211, Phone: 609- 599-4561, ext. 2222. The charge to cover copying costs

will be \$5 for the full annual report, or \$0.15 per page for any part thereof.

You also have the right to receive from the plan administrator, on request and at no charge, a statement of the assets and liabilities of the plan and accompanying notes, or both. If you request a copy of the full annual report from the plan administrator, these two statements and accompanying notes will be included as part of that report. The charge to cover the copying costs given above does not include a charge for the copying of these portions of the report because these portions are furnished without charge.

You also have the legally protected right to examine the annual report at the main office of the plan at the address above or at the U.S. Department of Labor in Washington, D.C., or to obtain a copy from the U.S. Department of Labor upon payment of copying costs. Requests to the Department of Labor should be addressed to Public Disclosure Room N 1513, Employee Benefits Security Administration, U.S. Department of Labor, 200 Constitution Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20210.

NJEA MEMBERS PROVIDE STABILITY IN AN UNCERTAIN TIME

“We are living in the future, and it’s turned out differently from what we’d planned.”

That line from Michael Cunningham’s novel, *A Home at the End of the World*, seems apropos to the current situation. No aspect of life has been left untouched by the pandemic: how we work, how we play, how we teach, how we learn, where we go, and whom we see. So much of life that was routine now requires a second and a third thought.

And as the September edition of the *Review* was going to press in mid-August, envisioning even the near future—the first day of school—was an almost impossible task. It was still unclear, with just two weeks to go, what school would look like across New Jersey by the time by the time this magazine showed up in NJEA members’ mailboxes.

In the first few days after the governor’s announcement, over 70 districts indicated their intention to begin the school year remotely. At press time on Aug. 19, that number was continuing to grow. Most others were still planning for a hybrid of in-person and remote instruction. It’s the reality of the year in which we’re living that predicting what school will look like from week to week, from day to day, or even from hour to hour is a crapsheet.

Of course, we’re not total strangers to this uncertainty. NJEA members helped students, families, colleagues and communities regain their footing after 9/11 and Superstorm Sandy. And as we live through this pandemic, teachers and educational support professionals (ESPs) are again going above and beyond to help their communities—to create some measure stability and joy in an unpredictable and unhappy time.

The website NJEA created to gather the stories and photos sent in by members about how they were facing the crisis, njeatogether.org, is a testament to your resilience and your generosity.

From the day school buildings closed in March, NJEA and its members focused on what needed to be done. It was nothing less than a miracle that we reinvented school overnight and completed the school year—you were the miracle workers. You

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NJEA members have shown that schools, whether in-person or remote, are central to helping families and communities move into a future that none of us could have planned.

also focused on what your students needed in their own remote situations, making sure they were fed, and working to provide whatever supports were possible under strict lockdown conditions. And when that wasn’t enough, you found a way to do the impossible.

Local associations and their members worked alongside administrators and boards of education to find ways to restore some measure of normalcy to students’ lives. They joined their districts’ reopening teams and struggled together with administrators and community partners to find ways to return to in-person instruction without endangering their students and colleagues.

But as the summer wore on, we all saw example after example of COVID clusters among young people who continued to make the mistake of gathering indoors. We could not help but think of our own classrooms, cafeterias, hallways and buses. We watched the governor rightly reverse course and impose greater restrictions on indoor gatherings. We saw indoor dining promised and then delayed indefinitely because, even with the

highest safety standards, the risk to restaurant employees and patrons was too great.

By August, it was clear that no level of planning, caution and care would guarantee the safety of students and staff. And even if a school opened with a hybrid plan, the scenarios that were contemplated—no group work, cafeterias closed, wearing masks and sheltering behind plexiglass unable to approach students for individual instruction—revealed that students would not be coming back to anything they would recognize as school.

That’s why NJEA—joined by the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association and the New Jersey Association of School Administrators—ultimately took the position that all schools should open remotely. Spending the precious few weeks left of summer planning complex hybrid reopenings, only to have to scrap them and go all-remote a few days or weeks into the year, was not a wise path. The time would have been better spent doing everything possible to make remote learning—while never as good as in-person instruction—the best it could be.

Knowing in advance that schools would open remotely would have helped parents as well. Teachers and ESPs are parents too and know that childcare is a challenge—especially for those deemed essential workers who cannot not stay home with their children. Parents could have spent those last weeks of summer planning for childcare in an all-remote environment, rather than juggling their children’s remote and in-person days and scheduling childcare around them, only to repeat the last-minute chaos of March if their schools go all-remote with little to no notice early in the fall.

So much is unknown about the progress of this pandemic, including how long we will be forced to stay apart to stay safe and stay alive. But under these challenging circumstances, NJEA members have shown that schools, whether in-person or remote, are central to helping families and communities move into a future that none of us could have planned. 🌱

Academic Success. Ready to Go!

Whether school is in session, virtual, or a combination of the two, New Jersey students are more prepared to learn when the obstacle of hunger is eliminated. That's a constant truth that has remained through these unprecedented times.

As an educator, your support for school nutrition programs has been vital, and the payoff - long-term student success - is the goal we're all striving to achieve.

Thank you for all you do on behalf of children, and for ensuring school meals are part of their academic day. Contact us for support at: schools@milk4u.org



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