

NEW JERSEY EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

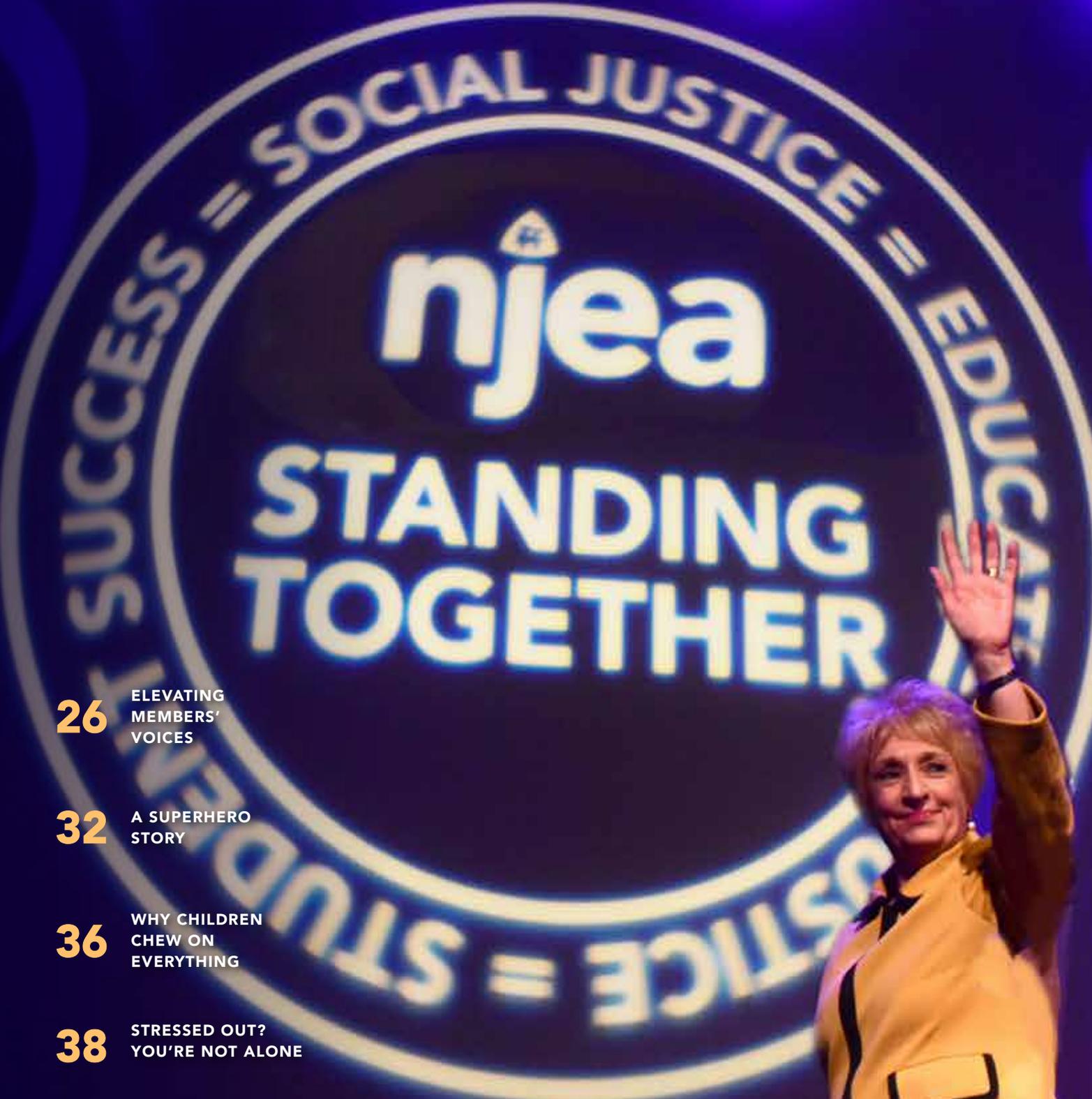
REVIEW

JUNE 2021

njea.org



an education and advocacy resource



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ELEVATING MEMBERS' VOICES

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A SUPERHERO STORY

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WHY CHILDREN CHEW ON EVERYTHING

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STRESSED OUT? YOU'RE NOT ALONE

The **njea**[®]
Jack Bertolino
Summer
Leadership
Conference

SAVE THE DATE!

August 7-10,
2021

Online registration begins June 15.

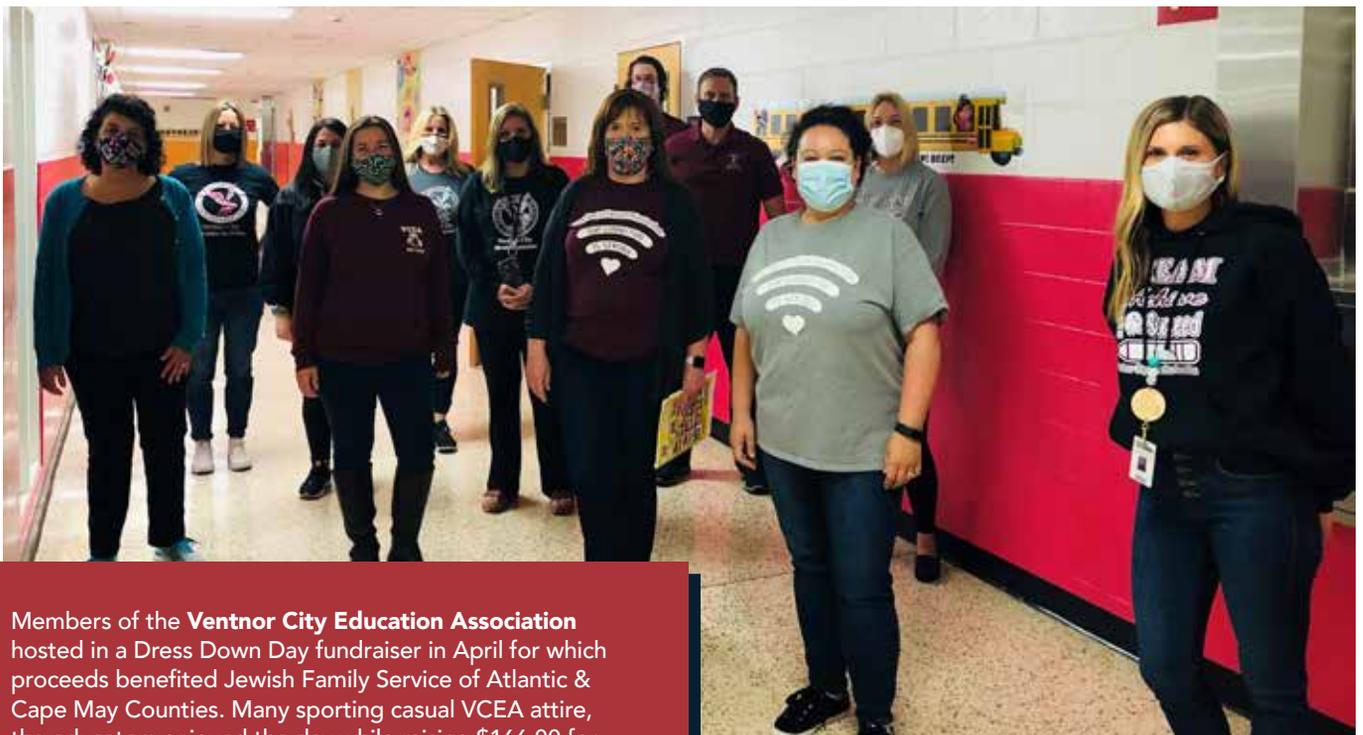
Visit njea.org/slc2021 for more information and to register.

This virtual conference is free to members.

Questions?

Email: slc@njea.org

Clockwise from top left: NEA and NJEA ESP of the Year **Kimberly Scott-Hayden**, Atlantic County Teacher of the Year **Philip Pallitto**, Union High School Teacher **Nicholas Ferroni**, and Hudson County Teacher of the Year **Alicia Vilas**, were panelists on *Think Tank with Steve Adubato*. The segment aired in May, but you can view it at bit.ly/njeamay21.



Members of the **Ventnor City Education Association** hosted in a Dress Down Day fundraiser in April for which proceeds benefited Jewish Family Service of Atlantic & Cape May Counties. Many sporting casual VCEA attire, the educators enjoyed the day while raising \$166.00 for JFS. Twice a month, VCEA hosts a Dress Down Day with proceeds earmarked for organizations in the communities where they live and work.

FEATURES



26 | ELEVATING MEMBERS' VOICES

This August, NJEA President Marie Blistan will have completed 12 years of transformative leadership of NJEA. Blistan discusses her four years as president of NJEA and her 12 years as a statewide officer. Blistan's stories are anchored in the relationships that helped move NJEA and public education forward.

BY PATRICK RUMAKER



36 | WHY CHILDREN CHEW ON EVERYTHING

As we work with children, they seem to always have something in their mouths. How many times have you said to the same child to "take that out of your mouth" or "stop chewing on your pen" or "spit out that gum"? Perhaps you've asked a child to stop chewing on paper because it is dirty or that chewing the paper will make the child sick. But chewing on an item is a physical need, not an act of defiance.

BY DR. PAMELA COOPER, M.A., MBA, PH.D.



32 | A SUPERHERO STORY

As the pandemic progressed, we found heroes in our doctors, nurses, scientists, frontline workers, teachers and school cafeteria workers. They responded to our cries with the same bravery and tenacity that comic book and cinema superheroes would have shown. In this context, do we continue only to teach students how to read about heroes or do we let them learn how to be one?

BY JAMI CENTRELLA AND STUDENTS



38 | STRESSED OUT? YOU'RE NOT ALONE

Recent surveys in New Jersey, Canada and the United Kingdom have similar messages: Many education workers' workload has increased. Anxiety or stress levels are going through the roof. Most educators are spending their own money on supplies, including protective gear. Many schools are not effectively protecting staff and students or providing them with information about pandemic health and safety protections.

BY DOROTHY WIGMORE

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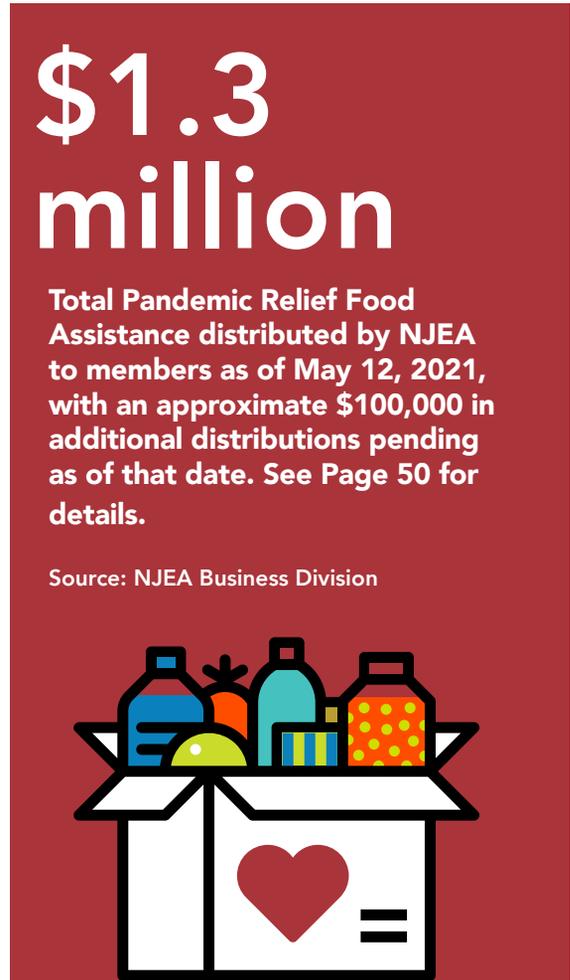
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Members support one another



\$1.3 million

Total Pandemic Relief Food Assistance distributed by NJEA to members as of May 12, 2021, with an approximate \$100,000 in additional distributions pending as of that date. See Page 50 for details.

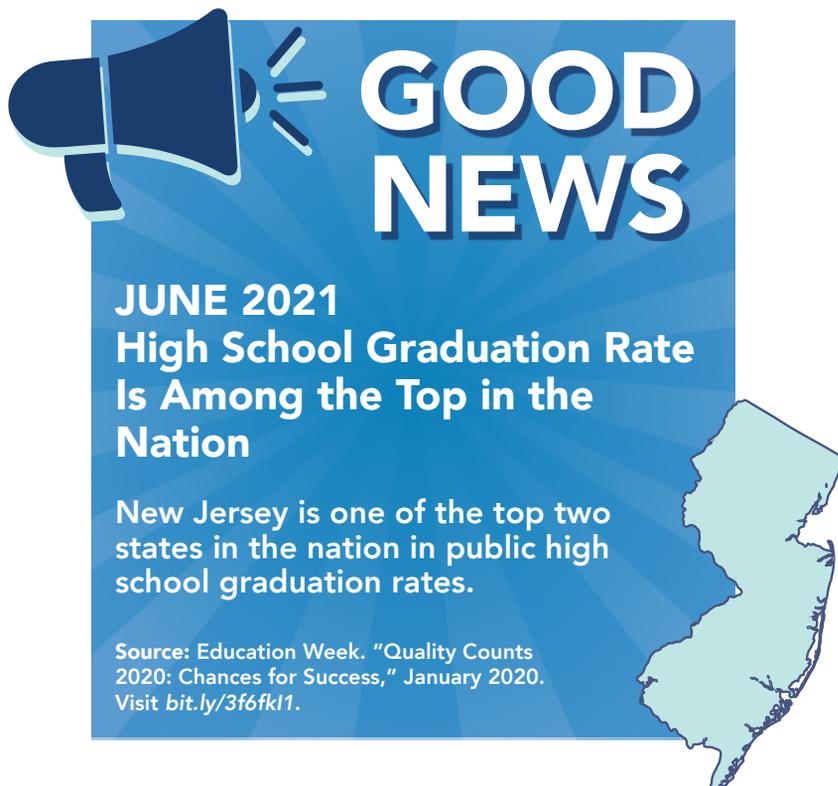
Source: NJEA Business Division

On the cover

NJEA President Marie Blistan at the 2019 NJEA Convention. This August, Blistan will complete her second term as president and her twelfth year as an NJEA officer. Read more about her years in statewide leadership beginning on Page 26.



PHOTO BY
I. George Bilyk



GOOD NEWS

JUNE 2021
High School Graduation Rate Is Among the Top in the Nation

New Jersey is one of the top two states in the nation in public high school graduation rates.

Source: Education Week. "Quality Counts 2020: Chances for Success," January 2020. Visit bit.ly/3f6fk11.

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Active professional: \$991 (full time); \$198.20 (full time *low-earner); \$495.50 (part time); \$495.50 (on leave); \$198.20 (part time *low-earner). Active supportive \$483 (full time); \$96.60 (full time *low-earner); \$241.50 (part time); \$96.60 (part time *low-earner); \$241.50 (on leave). Retired professional: \$87; \$1,080 (retired life). Retired ESP: \$60; \$675 (retired ESP life); Preservice \$32. General professional (outside N.J. public education employment): \$250. Subscribing \$250. Only those in education positions in N.J. public schools and colleges are eligible for active membership. Payment of annual dues entitles a member to receive the *Review* for one year, from January through December. Dues include \$5 for the *NJEA Review*. *Low earner threshold 2020-21 is \$21,200.



BEGINNINGS, ENDINGS, AND ACHIEVEMENTS

June is a month of possibilities; the school year ends and a new season begins, students graduate and move on to new adventures, and colleagues retire and begin new chapters.

This issue of the *NJEA Review* is the last one in which I will address you as president. A new trio of officers begins their terms in September, marking a new era for our organization. I am so proud of the team that will be taking office in September: Sean M. Spiller, NJEA president; Steve Beatty, vice president; and Petal Robinson, secretary-treasurer.

I also am very proud of the work that I have done over these past 12 years as an officer, and particularly the last four as president. In that time, we set a goal to fight for Chapter 78 relief for our members, and we achieved that goal. We sought Job Justice for educational support professionals, and we won new protections and consideration for them and the valuable work they do. We worked diligently with Gov. Murphy to fully fund the pension, and thanks to those efforts, we achieved a full payment a year ahead of schedule.

In countless other ways, we worked to improve the lives of NJEA members, their families and the students we serve. We put greater emphasis on social, racial and economic justice. We contributed to charitable and community-building efforts statewide. We advocated for a common-sense approach to standardized testing and evaluation. We instituted the Teacher Leader Academy and helped many educators find a path that satisfied their personal and professional goals.

These are all proud achievements, but the thing that I will remember from my years as an NJEA member, leader and officer will be you—the members I got to know through the course of my work and who impressed me continuously with their passion, commitment and dedication to our students.

NJEA members have built the best system of public education in the nation, as recognized by *Education Week* and *U.S. News & World Report*.

I will always be proud of the work that we have done together, and I will always hold a special place in my heart for my colleagues in education. Thank you for your support and encouragement, your advocacy and diligence, and your compassion and commitment.

In unity,

Marie Blistan



NJEA President Marie Blistan with her family on the day she was ceremonially sworn in as president of NJEA at the Sept. 9, 2017 Delegate Assembly meeting.

OFFICERS ONLINE

MARIE BLISTAN

Twitter

@MarieBlistan: Elections matter. Thank you, President Biden & VP Harris for your commitment to helping our country emerge from this pandemic and your priority for our children's welfare!

On April 28, Blistan tweeted her praise for President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris after NEA released a report detailing the profound impact that President Biden's first 100 days in office have had on public education. Blistan celebrated the president's commitment to children as the cases of COVID-19 began to decrease across the country.

SEAN M. SPILLER

Twitter

@SpillerforNJEA: I just wrote a @theactionnet letter: Urge the federal government to grant NJ's assessment waiver request. Write one here.

On March 27, Sean M. Spiller shared with his Twitter followers that he just completed an online action, led by NJEA, that urged the federal government to cancel standardized tests in New Jersey this year. In response, the USDOE approved a proposal to administer the Start Strong assessment this fall, rather than the NJSLA this spring. The Start Strong assessment is less of a disruption to teaching and learning and provides immediate results on which educators can act.

STEVE BEATTY

Facebook

@Steve BeattyNJEA: Fantastic evening spent honoring the ESPs from the Jersey City Para-Professionals Association! The backbone of our schools and communities in so many ways—we could not do what we do without all of you. Congratulations to all of the honorees—a great presentation by JCPPEA and president Keith Olkewicz!

On May 7, Steve Beatty shared photos from the Jersey City Para-Professionals Education Association's (JCPPEA) Para-Professional of the Year event. The event, which all three NJEA officers and NEA Vice President Princess Moss attended, honored the ESPs of the JCPPEA. In his Facebook post, Beatty celebrated the essential role that ESPs play in schools and communities and shared his praise for JCPPEA president, Keith Olkewicz.

KNOW. LEAD. ACT.

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, 2022.

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. 29, 2021.

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.

YOUR TURN

Praxis exams demonstrate knowledge of subject matter

Re: "The Praxis Exams – Are They a Fair Requirement for Teacher Licensure?" by Kynise Morris published in the May 2021 edition of the *NJEA Review*

While I agree that Ms. Morris experienced an extraordinary difficulty in passing her Praxis exams, her diagnosis of dyscalculia explains that difficulty. I wish her the best as she pursues her license via Alternate Route. Her experience, however, does not negate the need for Praxis exams. Demonstrating content knowledge is one of the keys to effective teaching.

Ms. Morris states, "There is a risk of losing excellent future teachers for a test that is not about pedagogy." Granting teachers licenses to teach without demonstrating content knowledge risks allowing teachers into classrooms who don't adequately know their subjects. Pedagogy is but one aspect of teaching; it doesn't trump knowing one's subject matter. Think of Praxis as akin to the Bar exam or Board certifications for physicians. They are a measurement of preparedness and qualification.

Credit Praxis exams for being partly responsible for New Jersey's public schools ranking so high nationally in delivering quality education. Contrary to Morris's statement that the Praxis exams don't "demonstrate the knowledge necessary to teach students," they do just that. As a parent, I want educators in the classroom who've mastered the material they are teaching. As an educator, Praxis exams confirm my belief that I know my subjects. Teachers should be as proud of their subject mastery as they are of being versed in pedagogy. Pedagogy is the means by which we impart knowledge and fuel passions. If teachers lack the knowledge to begin with, the pedagogy is for naught.

Keeping the rigorous standards of Praxis ensures licensing teachers who bring measured value to the classroom. To lower the bar by eliminating Praxis or reducing its rigor is to risk reducing the high quality of N.J.'s public schools.

Sincerely,

Anita Soja
English Department
Kearny High School

NJEA ELECTION RESULTS

NJEA elections were held in April for NJEA secretary-treasurer, NJEA Executive Committee, NJEA Delegate Assembly, NEA Representative Assembly delegates, NJEA Delegate Assembly-Alternates and county association offices.

At its April 29 meeting, the NJEA Elections Committee certified the results, which are posted at njea.org/NJEAelections.

NOMINATE A LOCAL ASSOCIATION FOR BARGAINING EXCELLENCE

A local association that has demonstrated excellence in negotiations will be honored at the Jim George Collective Bargaining Summit with the 2021 Jim George Collective Bargaining Award. Those nominated will also be recognized. This year, the summit will be held virtually on Oct. 23.

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 2021 Jim George Collective Bargaining Award, settlements must be ratified by both parties between July 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021.

Nominations are due Sept. 10, 2021.

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COOL STUFF



PREGNANCY LOSS AND INFERTILITY SUPPORT RESOURCES

Start Healing Together is a group of staff members from Eastern Regional High School in Voorhees Township, Camden County. Some members have personally experienced infertility or pregnancy loss, which has affected their personal relationships, and others simply want to offer their support. The goal for Start Healing Together is trifold: to make members aware of their rights, to offer emotional support and to direct them to helpful resources.

This kind of grief can be very difficult to navigate, especially considering the stigma surrounding infertility, miscarriage, stillbirth and neonatal loss. To help alleviate the stigma, Start Healing encourages open dialogue and hopes that the information from the group can provide comfort to those who need it most. You'll find a host of resources gathered by Start Healing Together at starhealingtogether.com.

For more information about Start Healing Together, send your questions to info@starhealingtogether.com. If you would like to begin a Start Healing Together chapter at your school, please contact Jackie Mancinelli at jackie@starhealingtogether.com.



CHECK OUT JERSEY BLUECLAWS BASEBALL

The Jersey BlueClaws baseball team and NJEA have partnered on a special program for NJEA members. Pick your game and purchase your tickets at the special NJEA discounted price of just \$12. The BlueClaws are the Single-A affiliate of the Philadelphia Phillies with a beautiful stadium in Lakewood, New Jersey. Purchasing tickets through FEVO allows you to invite other colleagues, friends, and family to purchase their own tickets to the same game. To learn more and to check out the five NJEA nights, visit njea.org/partnerships.

WATCH A NATURALIZATION CEREMONY

The Monmouth Vicinage will host a U.S. Naturalization Ceremony on the South Lawn at the courthouse in observance of Flag Day and the Law Day theme. This event will take place on June 14 at 12:30 p.m. This is a closed event and guests may participate by invitation only. It can be viewed by members of the public via livestream.

To obtain information on how to observe the livestream of this program please email MonLawDay.Mailbox@njcourts.gov.

JOIN TEAM NJEA FOR THE MORE THAN PINK WALK!

The virtual Susan G. Komen More Than Pink Walk event begins with an online ceremony at 8:30 a.m. on Oct 3, 2021. On that day, all are invited to join the online ceremony to hear stories from survivors and those living with breast cancer, to learn about the impact of Komen's research discoveries, public policy advocacy and direct patient support services, and to celebrate your fundraising success. Then, participants will be encouraged to set out on the sidewalks of their own neighborhoods to earn your Virtual Finisher Medal by walking 6,000 steps for their commitment to end breast cancer.

If you prefer to sleep in or want to complete your walk a different day, go right ahead! Registration is free! To join Team NJEA, visit bit.ly/komen-teamnjea.



TOUGH TIMES? AID-NJEA CAN HELP

The AID-NJEA helpline has served NJEA members and their families for over 10 years. NJEA members and their families have access to this free and confidential service 24 hours a day and seven days a week. Educators and school counselors are on the line from noon until 8 p.m. Monday through Thursday, and until 6 p.m. on Fridays to provide peer-to-peer support and information to callers. In addition, University Behavioral Health Care provides mental health professionals who answer the helpline during all other hours for 24/7 coverage.

Callers seeking help from AID-NJEA can count on:

- Help from a staff of Education Support Specialists experienced in education and trained in behavioral health
- Immediate personal response — a “real voice” with no buttons to push
- Access to thousands of resources from the AID-NJEA Information Directory
- High quality help by telephone with personal, family and school-related demands.

Why handle tough times alone? Whether you are a new teacher, a support staff member, or a retired school employee, AID-NJEA has people on the line who can provide guidance and information to help. Dial 866-AID-NJEA (243-6532) or email helpline@njea.org.

AID-NJEA is a program or partnership between the New Jersey Education Association and Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care.

STATEWIDE STANDARDIZED ASSESSMENT

WHAT'S BEHIND US AND WHAT'S BEFORE US

BY KAITLYN DUNPHY, ESQ. AND DR. CHRISTINE MILES

Research has shown that an overemphasis on standardized testing is not beneficial for students or their learning. This is in the best of times. In current times, over-testing would only add unnecessary stress to an already stressful year, without seeing a return in terms of either assessing or addressing student needs. That is why NJEA is pleased its educators will have more time this spring to focus on providing instruction, services, social-emotional supports and the types of informal assessment that occur every day.

Earlier this year, the state decided to waive the exit-testing requirement for graduating seniors who had not already completed it, as well as delay the typical testing windows. In the meantime, NJEA and our members continued advocacy efforts with the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE), legislators, our fellow public-sector education unions and other stakeholders in support of submitting an application to the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) to waive the spring assessment required under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

In large part due to the advocacy of our members, New Jersey announced on Feb. 19, that it would be seeking a waiver from USDOE. Members wrote over 15,000 letters in support of the waiver application, urging the federal government to grant that request. NJEA also submitted a letter

Kaitlyn Dunphy is an associate director of NJEA Legal Services and Member Rights in the NJEA Executive Office. She can be reached at kdunphy@njea.org.

Dr. Christine Miles is an associate director in the NJEA Professional Development and Instructional Issues Division. She can be reached at cmiles@njea.org.

“

Members wrote over 15,000 letters in support of the waiver application, urging the federal government to grant that request.

in support of that application to USDOE and advocated with members of the state and federal legislatures.

On April 6, the USDOE issued a response to New Jersey's waiver request indicating that the state did not need a waiver in order to forge ahead with the state's assessment plan. As a result, most of the usual spring assessments were cancelled, with a few exceptions. The New Jersey Student Learning Assessment (NJSLA, formerly named PARCC) has been cancelled for the 2020-21 school year and will be replaced by the Start Strong Assessment to be administered in fall 2021. However, the Dynamic Learning Map (DLM) for our students with the most significant disabilities and the ACCESS for English Language Learners have continued to take place, in person, this spring. There are no penalties for students, educators and districts when families choose to opt out of the DLM and ACCESS assessments.

The cancellation of the NJSLA this spring is a significant benefit for students, parents, and educators. Districts did not need to scramble to collect, disinfect and prepare all of the currently

deployed devices for testing. Students and educators have minimally gained 5.5 to 10 hours of instructional time to dedicate to attending to students' just-in-time needs. Rote "test-prep" that regularly eats up a significant portion of time throughout districts up and down the state is now being dedicated to identifying and supporting student academic, social, emotional, health and safety needs.

In place of the typical spring assessments, schools will take on much less time-consuming and labor-intensive assessments called "Start Strong" in the fall. The Start Strong assessments are derived from current NJSLA items. They can be administered in 45-60 minutes per subject area (English/language arts, mathematics, science), representing a significant decrease in the time required to administer the assessments.

In addition, results from the assessment are immediate; educators and districts will be able to access and utilize the data as soon as students conclude the assessment. This is a significant shift from the NJSLA, which historically requires more than six months following the assessment administration for results to be usable. The Start Strong assessment administration will be available to districts from Sept. 13, 2021 through Oct. 22, 2021.

Finally, in light of the USDOE's response to NJDOE's assessment waiver request, no waiver is needed for this plan. While a federal requirement for statewide standardized assessment remains in place, this paves the way for the state to shift away from NJSLA and toward Start Strong beyond the fall of 2021. 📍

SAVE THE DATES

RISE and Conference for Hope and Healing



NJEA RISE Conference: July 14

The Radical Imagination Summit for Educators (RISE) was NJEA's first large-scale virtual gathering following the global pandemic and mandatory quarantine of 2020. Originally planned to convene in-person, RISE would invite members to learn at the most prominent intersecting issues of our time—equity and technology. The TechStock Conference and Summer Professional Learning Institute that used

to take place in July were combined to create RISE.

Our program in July 2020 was unapologetic, introducing bold new language and content to NJEA professional learning spaces in an attempt to push the aspirational boundaries of our collective imagination:

- Creating Racial Equity in Public Schools and Black Liberation
- Debunking the Model Minority Myth: Asian and Pacific Islanders
- Decolonizing Curriculum: Indigenous, Hispanic and Latino/a/x

- The Freedom School Movement: Past, Present and Future
- Unpacking White Supremacy Culture in Schools
- Keynote: Abolitionist Teaching by Dr. Bettina Love

Building on the momentum created by Freestyle Fridays (the original virtual equity conversations hosted by NJEA), RISE 2020, the growing REAL Movement for racial equity, affirmation and literacy, our RISE 2021 virtual summit promises to be something special. We will have a variety of speakers, workshops, poetry, and music to inspire us toward the pinnacle of our essential question: How can education evolve into a lifelong liberatory process?

Here is a quick glance at the topics:

- Disrupting the School-to-Prison and Schools-to-Deportation Pipeline
- Thinking Global and Acting Local: Supporting Mutual Aid Networks
- Rethinking Schools: Teacher Unions and Social Justice
- The EduColor Movement and Digital Organizing
- The REAL Movement Beyond 2021
- Dance Party with DJ Ome
- And much more!

Keep an eye out on real.njea.org for the registration link coming soon.



NJEA Conference for Hope and Healing: July 15

NJEA began its journey on becoming trauma-informed in 2016, when Dave Ellis presented a workshop on adverse childhood experiences (ACES) at the NJEA Convention. The following year, at the 2017 Urban Education Symposium, Dave Ellis and Laura Porter presented a program on how toxic stress impacts our brain development, the Adverse

Childhood Experiences Study and how to build self-healing communities. At that conference over 200 members spent four hours that day in self-organized conversations based on what they learned. The outcomes of those conversations made it very clear that New Jersey educators wanted to learn more about how to better serve students who need more hope and healing.

In 2018, a cohort of 30 NJEA staff and consultants were trained in the ACE Interface Curriculum and presented it to NJEA members in all 21 counties. The 20 schools in the NJEA Priority Schools Initiative have been trained and coached through an action plan. Those schools have moved from learning about what trauma is and how it affects us to considering how to become “healing-centered.” Dr. Shawn Ginwright, who coined the term “healing-centered engagement,” spoke to those schools about how to become “teacher activists that employ healing strategies in schools and work to reverse negative impacts on academic achievement and civic engagement,

supporting their students to become powerful civic actors.”

Dr. Ginwright, whose research examines the ways in which youth in urban communities navigate through the constraints of poverty and struggle to create equality and justice in their schools and communities, argues that healing a community is a form of political action, and emphasizes the need to place healing and hope at the center of our educational and political strategies. This spring, NJEA consultants are training educators in 26 schools that are participating in a Healing Centered Engagement Pilot organized by the Foundation for Educational Administration (FEA) using the ACE Interface curriculum.

So we are honored to hold the first NJEA Conference for Hope and Healing on July 15, 2021, where Dr. Ginwright will be back to speak about hope and healing. He will be joined by Dr. Camara Jones, an American physician, epidemiologist, and anti-racism activist who specializes in the effects of racism and social inequalities on health. DJ Ome’ will spin up our energy for our Joy in Justice Lunch.

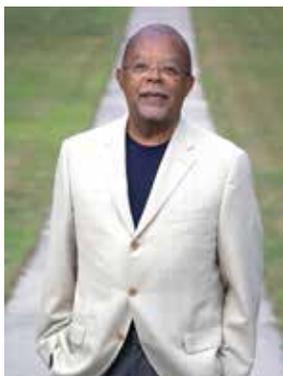
There will be an assortment of breakout sessions that focus on resilience building, protective systems at work, including:

- Examples of community resilience
- Healing partnerships with school nurses
- Building self-healing communities
- How to become a trauma-informed school
- Organizing around community schools
- Building partnerships with parents
- The injustice of intergenerational trauma

Keep an eye out on njea.org for the registration link coming soon.

HENRY LOUIS GATES, SONIA MANZANO, ERIC LIU TO HEADLINE NJEA CONVENTION

The convention is currently slated to occur at the Atlantic City Convention Center on Nov. 4-5, depending upon public health considerations. Regardless of how the NJEA Convention is presented, all keynote speakers will also be accessible to NJEA members online via the virtual convention site.



Harvard University professor **HENRY LOUIS GATES** has authored or co-authored twenty-five books and created twenty-three documentary films, including *Wonders of the African World*, *African American Lives*, *Faces of America*, *Black in Latin America*, *Black America Since MLK: And Still I Rise*, and *Africa's Great Civilizations*.

"Finding Your Roots," Gates' groundbreaking genealogy series now in its seventh season on PBS, has been called "one of the deepest and wisest series

ever on television," leveraging "the inherent entertainment capacity of the medium to educate millions of Americans about the histories and cultures of our nation and the world."

His series "Reconstruction: America after the Civil War" (PBS, 2019) was a winner of the Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Award, and his related book, *Stony the Road: Reconstruction, White Supremacy, and the Rise of Jim Crow* (Penguin Random House, 2019), was a *New York Times* Notable Book of 2019. Gates's newest film series is "The Black Church: This Is Our Story, This Is Our Song" (PBS, 2021), with a Penguin Random House published a companion book under the same title.



For over 40 years, **SONIA MANZANO** inspired, educated, and delighted children and families as "Maria" on "Sesame Street." Named among the 25 Greatest Latino Role Models Ever by *Latina Magazine*, Manzano broke ground as one of the first Hispanic characters on national television. Throughout her career, she has continued to contribute to enriching diversity on television, on the stage, and in the educational realm. A first generation American of Latin descent, Manzano's tale is one of perseverance

and courage as she overcame countless obstacles to become one of the most influential Latinas in television.

Recently, Scholastic and Manzano partnered to launch two middle-grade novels and two picture books. Some of Manzano's other books include her memoir, *Becoming Maria: Love and Chaos in the South Bronx* (Scholastic), and a Christmas picture book, *Miracle of 133rd Street* (Simon & Schuster). *Becoming Maria* was praised by Kirkus Reviews for its "lyrical and unflinching account of her tough Nuyorican upbringing in the South Bronx," and calls it a touching memoir. Kirkus Reviews says "Manzano lovingly details life-changing moments," with a "stark and heartbreaking contrast to her Sesame Street character." Manzano's latest book, *A World Together* aims to promote unity by celebrating cultural and generational diversity.



"Democracy works only when enough of us believe democracy works," says **ERIC LIU**. How do we rekindle that belief? How do we, as individuals, organizations, communities, corporations, and professions reinvigorate the meaning and spirit of citizenship in America? These are the questions civic evangelist Eric Liu explores in his compelling, acclaimed talks—talks that celebrate our shared values and challenge Americans to live up to them. Liu is one of the country's most sought-after speakers

on citizen power, civic health, the future of democracy, and American identity.

Liu, son of Chinese immigrants and former White House speechwriter, is the CEO of Citizen University, a nonprofit working to foster a culture of powerful, responsible citizenship. He also directs the Aspen Institute's Citizenship and American Identity program and is a correspondent at *TheAtlantic.com*. His eight books include *You're More Powerful Than You Think: A Citizen's Guide to Making Change Happen*, and the national best-sellers *The Gardens of Democracy* and *True Patriot*.



NJEA Report

Spiller, Beatty, Robertson to lead NJEA



From left: NJEA's incoming president, secretary-treasurer, and vice president – Sean M. Spiller, Petal Robertson and Steve Beatty.

Sean M. Spiller, Steve Beatty and Petal Robertson have been elected president, vice president and secretary-treasurer of NJEA for two-year terms beginning Sept. 1, 2021. Spiller, a science teacher in Wayne, previously served as secretary-treasurer from 2013-2017 and is currently completing his second two-year term as vice president. Beatty, a social studies teacher in Bridgewater-Raritan, has served as secretary-treasurer since 2017. Robertson, an English teacher in Montclair, currently serves as president of the Montclair Education Association.

NJEA officers are elected by a popular vote of NJEA's 200,000 members. Spiller and Beatty ran unopposed for their offices, while Robertson received the most votes from a field of three candidates. NJEA officers are elected to two-year terms that begin on Sept. 1. NJEA President Marie Blistan, along with Spiller and Beatty, will continue in their current roles until Aug. 31, 2021.

Blistan congratulated the incoming team of officers.

"NJEA members made a great choice in this election," said Blistan. "I've known and worked with Sean, Steve and Petal for many years and I know they will continue to be outstanding leaders in their new roles. I look forward

to working with them for the rest of my term to ensure a smooth transition on Sept. 1. We have built up a lot of momentum together and we are not going to slow down one bit!"

Spiller, who will become the first Black man to serve as NJEA president, said he looks forward to the challenge.

"It's been a great honor to spend the last eight years advocating alongside NJEA members for our shared values," Spiller said. "Marie, Steve and I have worked hard to build NJEA into a justice-centered union that makes a difference beyond the walls of our schools. I look forward to working with Steve and Petal to continue that growth and transformation and I thank NJEA members for entrusting me with that responsibility."

Beatty also thanked NJEA members for their continued support.

"I'm proud of the work we have done over the last four years to make our union more a more powerful and effective advocate

for racial, social and economic justice," Beatty

said. "Sean, Petal and I share a vision that includes continuing that work and ensuring that NJEA members have the opportunities and resources they need to fully participate in that mission. I'm grateful for the opportunity to continue serving in this new role."

Robertson echoed that enthusiasm for the opportunities ahead.

"I ran for this office because I believe our association is strongest when all members take ownership to lead and provide voice," Robertson said. "I have watched Marie, Sean and Steve guide NJEA to unprecedented opportunities for educators statewide because of their unwavering commitment to ensuring power and voice for our membership. As president of the Montclair Education Association, I shared that belief and I look forward to continuing that as NJEA secretary-treasurer. I am honored and humbled to be given this opportunity, and I pledge to lead with passion and purpose to continue to ensure that our association remains the inclusive voice of its membership."

In addition to electing new NJEA officers, NJEA members also elected members to hundreds of other positions at the state and county levels. Full election results can be found at njea.org/njea-elections.

Former NJEA president, Betty Kraemer, passes

Betty Kraemer, who served as president of NJEA from 1989 to 1993, passed away at home in North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, on April 4. Kramer also served as NJEA's vice president from and secretary-treasurer in addition to other state, county and local association leadership positions.

"Betty was an NJEA officer, a county president, a Delegate Assembly member, and political force, but the one title that always guided her was 'teacher,'" said NJEA President Marie Blistan. "Her leadership continues to guide this association."

Born and raised in Jersey City, Kraemer's family took public service very seriously. Her father, William Ringle, was a well-known local politician and her whole family was involved in the community. It was no surprise that Kraemer chose teaching as her career.

Kraemer taught elementary school—mostly fourth grade—in Berkeley Township, Ocean County. She soon became active in her local and county associations. She served as president of the Ocean County Council of Education Associations and was elected president of the County Presidents Council. She also served on the Delegate Assembly.

During her presidency Kraemer led the fight to maintain teachers' and educational support professionals' pensions. She fought against reducing funding to public schools; and encouraged local associations to support school board candidates who would ensure positive funding levels for public schools.

Kraemer knew the importance of getting families and communities involved in public education. She was an advocate for what she called Community Learning Centers. She believed that schools should be the centerpiece of the neighborhood and serve as a resource for all families. She foresaw a day when schools could support struggling families with healthy foods, medical and health resources, workshops and programs for parents, and partnerships with businesses and community groups.

One of Kraemer's proudest achievements was the creation of the Frederick L. Hipp Foundation for Excellence in Education. Kraemer recognized the talent of NJEA members. But as a teacher she knew firsthand what it was like to have great ideas hamstrung by a lack of funds. She approached the NJEA Communications Division with an idea for a grant program that

would nurture members' creativity, support local school districts, and give students access to high-quality learning experiences. With the help of staff, the Hipp Foundation was born. Over the years, the foundation has awarded \$2.3 million to 435 projects.

When Kraemer finished her two terms as president, she went back to teaching in Berkeley Township before eventually retiring and moving with her family to North Myrtle Beach.

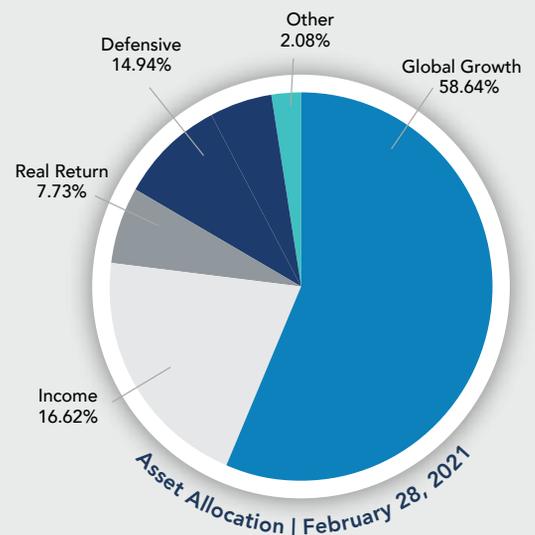


PENSION UPDATE

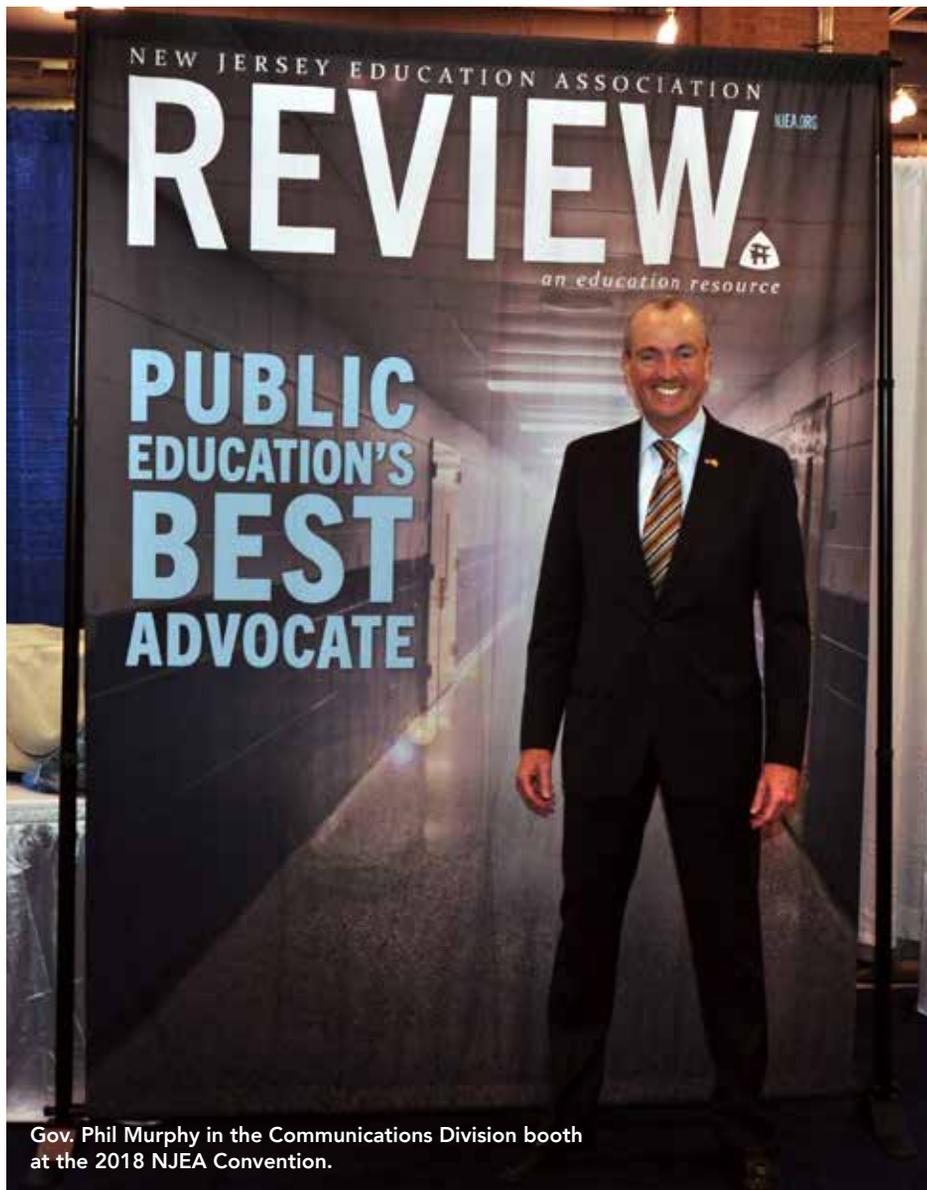
TOTAL PENSION FUND: \$85.80 BILLION

The totals below reflect market values as of Feb. 28, 2021, and for comparison, Dec. 31, 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.

	Feb. 28, 2021		Dec. 31, 2020	
	Market Value (\$ billions)	Asset Allocation	Market Value (\$ billions)	Asset Allocation
Global Growth	\$50.31	58.64%	\$50.85	60.08%
Income	\$14.26	16.62%	\$14.40	17.02%
Real Return	\$6.63	7.73%	\$6.64	7.85%
Defensive	\$12.82	14.94%	\$10.83	12.80%
Other	\$1.78	2.08%	\$1.91	2.25%
Total	\$85.80	100%	\$84.64	100%



NJEA endorses Phil Murphy in June 8 primary



Gov. Phil Murphy in the Communications Division booth at the 2018 NJEA Convention.

Last October, the 125-member NJEA PAC Operating Committee (NJEA PAC) voted overwhelmingly to endorse Gov. Phil Murphy in the 2021 Democratic Primary.

“Gov. Murphy has demonstrated time and time again that he keeps his promises,” said NJEA President Marie Blistan. “It is so vital to the success of our students and our members that we have a governor who listens to education experts and works with us to develop solutions that work for all of us. He has shown that, regardless of job description, he respects the contributions of every school employee, and he has signed legislation to ensure fairer working conditions.”

“We are at a tipping point in our society and the question is, who will lead our state to a future that works for everyone?” said NJEA Vice President Sean M. Spiller. “Gov. Murphy shares our commitment to social justice. He knows

there is much work to be done and he is eager to work with us and other partners to diversify our workforce and our curriculum. That’s the kind of leadership we need in order to make long-lasting change that benefits everyone.”

“There is no governor in the nation who has worked as closely and collaboratively with public employee unions than Gov. Murphy,” said NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Steve Beatty. “Gov. Murphy is committed to putting New Jersey on a strong financial footing and he has done that by addressing inequality and exploitation of working families. He shares our vision of a New Jersey that respects and supports the people who make this state run and make our public schools the very best in the nation.”

NJEA PAC cited Gov. Murphy’s strong record on the issues that matter most to NJEA members, their students, and their families. These include:

- Ch. 78 relief, which reduced health care premium costs for members while saving the state millions of dollars.
- Protecting educational support professionals whose jobs were at-risk due to COVID-19 school closings.
- Working with NJEA to improve health and safety conditions and to hold districts accountable when they fall short.
- Due process rights for educational support professionals.
- Subcontracting protections for educational support professional positions.
- Three of the largest consecutive pension payments in New Jersey history.
- Education funding that supports the unique needs of school districts, even in a pandemic.
- Making college more affordable through the Community College Opportunity Grant program.
- Working to diversify the curriculum, including implementation of the Amistad curriculum.
- Diversifying the workforce in our public schools and providing the funding to do so.
- Appointing New Jersey educators to serve as Commissioner of Education.
- Expanding Pre-K programs, a key indicator of lifelong success.
- Signing legislation that pays workers equally, regardless of gender.

In May, candidates in the Republican gubernatorial primary were invited to participate in NJEA PAC’s screening process. Based on the results of that screening, the NJEA PAC Operating Committee did not endorse any candidate for governor in the Republican primary.

NJEA PAC announces endorsements in NJ's 2021 primary legislative races

NJEA's 125-member political action committee (NJEA PAC) has voted to endorse four legislative candidates in the 2021 primary election, which will be held on June 8, 2021. In Oct. 2020, NJEA PAC endorsed Gov. Phil Murphy for governor in the Democratic primary.

In Legislative District 16, NJEA PAC has endorsed Andrew Zwicker for Senate and Roy Freiman for the Assembly in the Democratic primary. In Legislative District 26, NJEA PAC has endorsed BettyLou DeCroce in the Republican primary. NJEA PAC had earlier endorsed Joe Cryan for Senate in the Legislative District 20 Democratic primary.

"We are proud to support both Republicans and Democrats in their respective primaries," said NJEA President Marie Blistan. "Our members look at results, and all of these candidates are proven advocates for students and public schools. Our endorsement comes with a commitment to work for these candidates because we know action speaks louder than words."

"BettyLou DeCroce is a solution seeker," said NJEA Vice President Sean M. Spiller. "Her door is open, and she cares about her constituents. Educators in her district know they can approach her with ideas and she will listen. We need more of that in our politics, so we are proud to support her again."

"Andrew Zwicker and Roy Frieman have partnered in the Assembly for the last two terms to keep our schools strong and to advocate for students," said NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Steve Beatty. "NJEA members are supporting them in their primary races for Senate and Assembly because they have

demonstrated their commitment to our shared values."

Assemblywoman DeCroce sponsored Ch. 44 and Assemblyman Freiman co-sponsored the bill that provided much-needed relief on skyrocketing health care costs for public school employees and has the potential to save \$1 billion a year. All three of the endorsed candidates voted in favor of the bill.

Both Assemblyman Zwicker and Assemblyman Freiman were prime sponsors of the educational support professional subcontracting bill that NJEA vigorously supported. All three of the endorsed candidates voted in favor of the bill.

All three endorsed candidates were co-sponsors of the just-cause arbitration bill and voted in favor of the bill.

All 120 legislative seats are up in the 2021 general election, as well as the governor's seat.

Despite the challenges posed 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 legislative district. The screening committee made recommendations to the full NJEA PAC, which voted on their recommendations.



LD 16 Andrew Zwicker for Senate

As the son and spouse of public school educators, I know our teachers and educational support professionals are critical to the success of our children and communities. Our innovative educators tackled the unprecedented challenges of remote and hybrid learning with exceptional creativity and dedication in the face of their

own personal challenges. I am grateful for NJEA's endorsement as we work together to ensure that our students and staff have the resources they need so that New Jersey continues to have the best public schools in the U.S.



Roy Freiman for Assembly

As the spouse of a retired teacher, I know firsthand that investing in our schools means investing in our future. I am committed to continuing my fierce advocacy for educational professionals as they work to overcome the unprecedented adversity they have faced over the past year. Our education professionals, students, and their families have my voice in Trenton fighting for what they need to come back to the classroom more successful than ever.



LD 20 Joe Cryan for Senate

Our public educators provide our children with the tools they need to be successful and are proven leaders in our communities. The work they've done on the front lines adapting to these unprecedented times is unmatched, and I'm extremely proud to continue working in partnership with every one of these heroes.



BettyLou DeCroce for Assembly

Thank you to NJEA and its membership for their support not just this year but over my nine years in the New Jersey Assembly. Nothing is more important than educating and preparing our children and their children for the future. By working together, we can ensure that bright future for all our kids. Thank you again for the support!

The Praxis is a poor tool to predict vocational educator success

By Brian Ward



Vocational educator Brian Ward's auto shop at the Sussex County Vocational-Technical School.

On the surface, the certification process for vocational instructors appears to be an accurate tool to gauge prospective instructors' understanding of their core content areas. While that may be true for certain concentrations, such as academic content, this may not be as accurate for vocational instruction. In reality, the Praxis is counterproductive in the effort to determine whether a prospective vocational instructor meets the standards necessary to prepare students for successful careers.

Many years ago, when I left the trades to embark on my journey as an automotive instructor, I had to meet certain criteria when applying for my teaching certification. One criterion was that I needed to prove I was an expert in my field. I needed to have a minimum number of years of experience and hold a professional license or certification. Because I did not have a college degree I was required to enroll in the alternate route to certification program as required by the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE). Along with this program I received a mentor who helped guide me through the early years of my career.

I can attest to the validity, the rigor and depth of that process. I am a better instructor than I was when I started because of such a program.

Today, that process has changed dramatically. Several years ago, the NJDOE changed the alternate route program and started requiring vocational instructors to take the core content of the Praxis. I have seen, firsthand, the struggle teachers have with this assessment.

For an academic teacher just out of college, this is an easier transition because the content is still fresh and easily recalled. But many vocational

instructors do not follow the same path as their academic counterparts. Most vocational instructors do not graduate college and go directly into teaching. We must first spend countless years mastering our trade, honing our skills, and becoming subject matter experts.

During this time, we usually receive industry credentials, certifications and/or professional licenses validating our knowledge and skills. The time needed to master the trade comes with a price: several years have gone by and what is current for individuals fresh out of college has become foreign to most trade professionals. We have become experts in our fields, which include industry-related math, technical writing, and reading skills but these may be far from what is assessed on a Praxis test.

A TALE OF TWO PROFESSIONS

I would like to give you two scenarios to put this in perspective.

An individual who went to school and became a registered nurse works for many years in the

emergency room saving countless lives. If you were rushed to the emergency room and that individual administered lifesaving CPR to you, would you, with your last breath, ask them if they passed the Praxis? And what if they didn't? Would you ask them to stop?

But if that individual decided to take their expertise and become a vocational instructor in a medical arts program, they would have to take the Praxis and pass it in order to obtain their teaching certification. If they could not pass the Praxis, they would not be able to teach our students and would have to leave that profession. They can save our lives but not teach others how to do the same.

The second scenario is an individual who is a licensed electrician. This individual went through an apprenticeship program for many years as a journeyman and moved up through the ranks to become a professional licensed electrical contractor. If this individual wants to become an instructor and pass along their knowledge to others, they must follow the same path and pass the same exam.

This is the same individual that we call to come to our homes to rewire them. We trust them with our most prized possession, our home, and we trust them with our family's well-being. We trust them to safely wire our homes—in essence, with our children's lives—but if they do not pass the Praxis we cannot trust them to teach our children to also become skilled electricians.

In each scenario, it is the students who lose. The Praxis exam is not an accurate measurement of a vocational instructor's ability to teach, convey information and prepare our students for industry.

I understand why the state decided to go this route. It wanted to ensure new teachers would be well-rounded individuals with basic core skills. I personally know many highly educated individuals with advanced degrees who have purchased furniture or equipment that needed to be assembled.

Brian Ward is an automotive/diesel technology instructor at Sussex County Technical School in Sparta. He is president of the Sussex County Vocational-Technical Education Association.

Some of them fared well on assembly but most nontechnical individuals struggle with the assembly process.

If vocational instructors need to take an academic skills assessment, why don't all teachers have to take basic technical training and be assessed on those skills? Is one more valuable than the other? Of course not. They are just different but equally important.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AT A CROSSROADS

The fact is we are losing great vocational instructors who are struggling to pass the Praxis. It's not because they are not intelligent, but, rather because those skills being tested are not required or used in their field. The old adage applies here: what you don't use, you lose or forget.

Vocational education is at a crossroads. There is a large group of veteran vocational instructors nearing their retirement. Who will fill these critical and vital roles? Who will educate, train and prepare our students to be work-ready? What if great instructors who have the passion, desire and drive to become instructors are suddenly told they don't possess the necessary skills to be instructors because they cannot pass an assessment outside of their field.

Public banks promote public good

By Nikki Baker and Brandon Castro

If the COVID19 pandemic has shown us anything, it is that some of our school districts—particularly in affluent communities—are deemed more valuable to our financial system than others. Public banking can help us fix that.

Nowhere has this been more evident than in our state's public schools.

Since COVID, the appalling state of HVAC systems and indoor air quality in some of our schools, particularly those in low-income communities and communities of color, has become terribly apparent.

In Paterson schools, teachers and students are being called back to school buildings with dated ventilation and HVAC systems that require third-party air filters to regulate, and walls and ceilings with leaking and severe mold issues. Maintenance and janitorial work in the district, which would normally be responsible for fixing these issues, has been privatized, and has been inadequate in addressing these issues.

Pre-pandemic, classroom size was already an issue in Paterson schools as well. According to the Paterson Press, in 2019, more than 3,000 classes in Paterson Public Schools exceeded maximum number of students set by state regulations for high-poverty districts, while the district faced a \$64 million dollars gap in its budget. (See njersy.co/3gZQsnS.) Social distancing under these circumstances, even with the measures taken, is impossible.

All these issues urban districts face are due to a lack of capital. Exacerbated income inequality in the U.S. has resulted in almost no tax base for us to invest meaningfully in public projects that benefit an entire community.

The results of this situation speak for themselves, as a look at photos from the Paterson Education Association's recent health and safety walkthroughs will tell you. They are posted at paterson.org/walkthrough-photos.

These conditions would be unacceptable in an affluent, white district—but in Paterson, even before COVID-19, this has been the standard. Wall Street sees these issues, often issues that the ultra-rich have caused, as opportunities for exploitation and profit.

Nikki Baker is an instructional aide at Dale Avenue School in Paterson and an Educational Support Professional co-chair for the Paterson Education Association. Baker represents Passaic County on the NJEA Delegate Assembly and the NJEA ESP Committee.

Brandon Castro is the Public Need Program organizer for NJ Work Environment Council. For more information visit njwec.org.

While the Praxis may be appropriate for the academic professions, it is not a valid measuring tool for all trades. I believe there are other more accurate assessments that could be utilized.

One such test is the adult NOCTI. This exam is specific to each trade. It still requires one to be proficient in math, language arts and writing skills, but as they relate to industry standards. Also, professional licenses and certifications can be utilized in conjunction with an instructor training program such as the alternate route. There are other assessments that are available and utilized by other states. Our focus should be on retaining and acquiring highly skilled professionals.

In May, I testified before the State Board of Education, urging it to take time to reconsider the evaluation and assessment tools, policies and procedures that are in place. I also asked the board provide extensions for instructors who are being forced to resign this year because of a failure to pass the Praxis, leaving them with expiring provisional certifications.

New Jersey, especially our students, cannot afford to lose the talent of current and future vocational educators.

According to a 2019 article in *NJ Spotlight* (bit.ly/3nNOIVH), New Jersey public school districts average about \$5,100 dollars in debt per student, borrowed from Wall Street and other nefarious sources, and that the SDA had issued in \$10.8 billion dollars in bonds. When borrowing from the private sector, state projects can often double or even *triple* their costs in debt service fees and interest.

We need the state to invest money into accomplishing good things for the public. To do that most effectively, we need a state-chartered public bank in New Jersey, and we need it fast because it can provide the resources we need quickly and efficiently, and it can help break the vicious cycle of Wall Street's plundering of our school districts and our economy.

So how would a public bank work?

Today, New Jersey, along with every other state except North Dakota deposits revenue into private banks that then invest our public dollars in whatever they see fit, wherever they want (read: not us). The banks' profits often come from activities that are not in the public interest. They keep the fees; they keep the profits—and they leave the state with no meaningful say in how the money is put to work.

A public bank is different because, by definition, it puts the public first. The state charters a bank in which it can deposit state funds then uses that capital to invest in, get this, *New Jersey*.

By investing in public school infrastructure, a public bank can help to alleviate these problems, while also creating good union construction and maintenance jobs inside of low-income communities—a win for school faculty and staff, a win for students, and a win for the community at large.

It should be noted that this bank needs to be chartered democratically. The bank's entire portfolio should be visible to the public, and its board should be composed of stakeholders and elected representatives.

A public bank makes sense for New Jersey. It lets our state invest its own money, and it can move those funds quickly and efficiently—with clear and transparent goals. If you are a hedge fund manager, or profit enormously from state deposits into your bank, this probably all sounds bad. For the rest of us, though, it is time we moved ahead—fast.

For the public need

Learn more about how a public bank would work and its benefits at bit.ly/3eUNgHB.

NJREA Life Member wins California Casualty jackpot



NJREA Life Member Angela MaCarron joined a congratulatory Zoom call with NJREA President Judy Perkins and California Casualty and NJEA staff.

NJREA member Angela MaCarron is a California Casualty \$2,500 Educator Jackpot Winner. MaCarron is also a member of the Bergen County Retirees' Education Association.

A life member of NJREA, the 93-year-old MaCarron taught fourth and fifth grades in Teaneck. During a virtual presentation, she said she was overwhelmed and pleasantly surprised to win the contest. She also wanted to share some advice to anyone interested in joining the field of education.

"If you love what you do, it will never feel like work," MaCarron said.

NJEA members still have a chance to win their own \$2,500 Jackpot. Enter today at bit.ly/3dG1mNu.

California Casualty is an NJEA Member Benefits partner offering home and auto insurance protection. The NJEA and NEA sponsored program is not available to the general public and provides \$500 personal property coverage, vehicle vandalism and collision waived deductibles on school property, \$500 fundraising money coverage, \$3,000 personal property at school coverage, and special rates/generous discounts. Call 866-680-5142 or visit memberbenefits.njea.org/home-auto to learn more.

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Together, we'll do this.

New Jersey school employee health plan offers equivalent benefits at significant savings

NJEA members scored a significant win in July 2020 when after nine long years of skyrocketing payroll deductions, the association negotiated with legislators to create the New Jersey Educators Health Plan (NJEHP). Members who signed up for the plan during the open enrollment that followed reaped a significant increase in take-home pay when the new plan took effect on Jan. 1, 2021.

That's because NJEHP severed the link between the employee's contribution and the cost of the premium, instead linking employee contribution to a percentage of salary. Better yet, the NJEHP is still valued at a platinum level plan and is similar to Direct 10 and Direct 15.

If you have not switched to the NJEHP, the next open enrollment period for districts in the SEHBP will be in October. For members in a private health care plan, please check with your district on the dates of your next open enrollment.

Of the many questions you may have concerning the NJEHP, below are the most frequently asked questions. Have other questions? Visit njea.org/jobjustice and scroll down to Ch. 44 FAQ.

My district is in the School Employee Health Benefits Program. How is the 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.

My district has a private plan. 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 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 is based on a percentage of salary set in the law. For full details, see the chart on the next page.

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.

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.

Will I have to change my doctors in the NJEHP?

No. 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.

The NJEHP requires the mandatory use of generic drugs (when they are available.) 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.

Will my prescription drugs be covered?

The NJEHP covers prescription drugs and uses 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. You should consult with your doctor for alternatives if your current prescription is not covered.

The NJEHP requires the mandatory use of generic drugs (when they are available.) 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.

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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.

Lenape District Support Staff Association builds community through Pride



LDSSA volunteers with Operation Yellow Ribbon President David Silver (kneeling, left) and December Giberson-Shover (standing center, in black). LDSSA President Marijean Andl is standing fourth from left, and LDSSA Pride Chair Brian Margerum is standing at left.

On a chilly, damp morning in late March, the school bus drivers, custodians and grounds, maintenance, and mechanics staff who comprise the Lenape District Support Staff Association (LDSSA) masked up and met in the parking lot of A Rose in December. The popular Medford flower shop is owned by December Giberson-Shover, whose son Zachary Shover joined the army after graduating from Seneca High School in 2015. LDSSA was there to help stuff two buses with supplies for soldiers deployed overseas for a local charity known as Operation Yellow Ribbon.

The members of the LDSSA are well-known in Lenape Regional community, which spans eight townships in Burlington County and includes four high schools. LDSSA's applications for grants from the NJEA Pride in Public Education program is key to its community outreach.

"We do about six or seven events a year, and we receive about \$7,000 a year in Pride grants," said LDSSA Pride Chair Brian Margerum.

Margerum explained that LDSSA's annual events typically include a Back to School Night table, a Halloween Trunk or Treat, a winter charity event, a toy drive, and a Martin Luther King Day fundraiser for a Burlington County shelter. At the end of the year, LDSSA invites the community to a "We Thank You" barbecue.

The events usually have a theme, Jackie Robel, the association's secretary and events coordinator said. Last year's Trunk or Treat had a barnyard theme, for example, and Robel is already thinking about next year's themes.

"We do everything to show the community who we are—that we're more than support staff," Robel said.

OPERATION YELLOW RIBBON

LDSSA President Marijean Andl knows the value of delegation. Margerum is the Pride chair, so when it comes to Pride events, Andl doesn't micromanage the program.

But Operation Yellow Ribbon is different.

"This is my thing—I make them do this," Andl jokes. Andl brought the Operation Yellow Ribbon to the LDSSA Pride program after talking with Giberson-Shover about it.

It's clear from LDSSA members' enthusiasm, that Andl doesn't have to push too hard. There are plenty of volunteers from LDSSA as well as district students, including JROTC cadets, and parents.

Operation Yellow Ribbon's mission is to assemble care packages for U.S. troops serving in the Middle East, explained David Silver, president of Operation Yellow Ribbon. The nonprofit, 100% volunteer organization accepts toiletries, personal items, and nonperishable snack items, powdered beverages and other treats that bring a serving of gratitude and a taste of home to those serving our nation. Operation Yellow Ribbon also accepts cash donations for the purchase of such items.

"I didn't serve, but this is so rewarding," Silver said. "The more you do, the more the troops respond. And the more they respond,

the more you want to do."

LDSSA is a Platinum Sponsor of Operation Yellow Ribbon with its \$750 donation. With Pride funding LDSSA also served bagels and coffee for breakfast and hot dogs, soda and other snacks for lunch. LDSSA also worked with the district to secure buses to stuff with donations.

"The district is awesome about it," Andl said. "We told them we needed one bus. At the last minute we're telling them 'Oh, we need two.' They said, 'No problem.'"

In addition to her pride in LDSSA, Andl is proud of her community.

"The people in this area have been awesome," she said. "About 60 local businesses are giving either monetary donations or supplies on top of what families have donated. Last year, we raised about \$13,000, this year we've raised \$26,000, and we're probably going to have more than we can squeeze into two buses."

Giberson-Shover has a long history of volunteerism in the community. For 11 years, she has worked with the Lenape School District transitional program. She accepts district students with special needs and, through her business, mentors them in life and work skills. But Giberson-Shover goes far beyond the minimum expectations.

"We started doing community projects," she said. "Through the years we've worked the Alicia Rose Victorious Foundation, DECA, the JROTC, and Packages for Patriots." Operation Yellow Ribbon is another one of those projects.

Giberson-Shover continues her mentoring long after the students graduate. For the Operation Yellow Ribbon collection day, she called on one her son's friends, Joe Knecht III, to entertain donors with his electric guitar. The former student with special needs, who first learned to play piano at five years old, ultimately graduated from the Berklee College of Music on a full scholarship. His aim is to one day become a teacher of music to students with special needs. Giberson-Shover aims to help him.

For more information about Operation Yellow Ribbon, visit operationyellowribbon.org. For more about NJEA's pride program, visit njea.org/pride.

Your summer reading list

From the NJEA Professional Development and Instructional Issues Division

Following a year of reinventing ourselves as educators, summer vacation lies just beyond the horizon. The proverbial “sit back and relax” seems more important than ever. For some of us, that includes exploring new ideas through the written word. If that is you, we offer our annual tradition of recommendations for summer reading from the staff on the Professional Development and Instructional Issues Division.

Rich Wilson and Mike Ritzius are both considering ways to engage collective wisdom and understanding to improve our practice. Mike suggests *Making Conversations* by Fred Dust, which focuses on designing conversations with greater intention and purpose. The ideas shared here can be applied to working with both students and colleagues to build more creative learning spaces, more productive PLCs, promote equity, diversity and inclusion and ultimately learn through every challenge together.

Rich's choice also focuses on harnessing the wisdom of all in *Leading Collective Efficacy: Powerful Stories of Achievement and Equity* by Stefani Arzonotti Hite and Jenni Donohoo. Many of us know that John Hattie's research has highlighted the impact of collective efficacy in influencing student learning, and Hite and Donohoo offer practical guidance through real-world stories to help navigate our way to building schools that empower teachers and move student learning forward.

Gabe Tanglao is thinking about the collective wisdom and experience of our students in *Rethinking Ethnic Studies*, A Rethinking Schools Publication, edited by R. Tolteka Cuahtin, Miguel Zavala, Christine Sleeter, and Wayne Au. This meaningful collection of resources expands our awareness of the cultural wealth that our students bring into our public schools and offers tools to integrate ethnic studies to place them at the core of their own learning experience.

Student experience is also on the mind of Dr. Chrissi Miles, who recommends *The Reason I Jump* by Naoki Higashida, a teenage boy with severe autism. The book beautifully demonstrates the inner workings of his mind in this eye-opening and empathy-building memoir. Chrissi believes this is a must read for any educator seeking to better understand the experiences of those living with autism.

It is the inner work of educators working towards social justice that is the focus of Janet Royal's pick, *The Inner Work of Racial Justice: Healing Ourselves and Transforming Our Communities Through Mindfulness*, by Rhonda V. Magee. The author posits that it is only through healing from injustices and dissolving our personal barriers to connection that we develop the ability to view others with compassion and to live in community with people of vastly different backgrounds and viewpoints.

Director Michael Cohan is also considering the personal journey of racial justice work in his pick, *Me and White Supremacy*, by Layla F. Saad, which takes the reader on a 28-day journey using journal prompts to do the vital work that leads to improving race relations by giving readers the language to understand racism and dismantle their own biases.

Amada Adams is also reading about social justice, but from a collective perspective. *Teacher Unions and Social Justice*, edited by Michael Charney, Jesse Hagopian and Bob Peterson is an anthology of more than 60 articles documenting the history and the how-to of social justice unionism. Together, they describe the growing movement to forge multiracial alliances with communities to defend and transform public education.

Elisabeth Yucis brings the lens out a bit wider with her choice, *Caste: The Origins of our Discontents*, by Isabel Wilkerson. This powerful book draws parallels between America, India, and Nazi Germany to argue that we are living not in a free and equal society but in a caste system. By conceptualizing our past and present through the framework of caste, we can identify new strategies for disrupting the status quo and moving toward true equality.

Needing a break from academic texts, Camy Kobylinski decided to revisit a favorite genre—historical fiction. Whether you are a Hamilton enthusiast or not, you should consider reading *The Hamilton Affair* by Elizabeth Cobbs. This well-researched novel covers the complex issues and relationships of revolutionary times in an interesting, fun way.

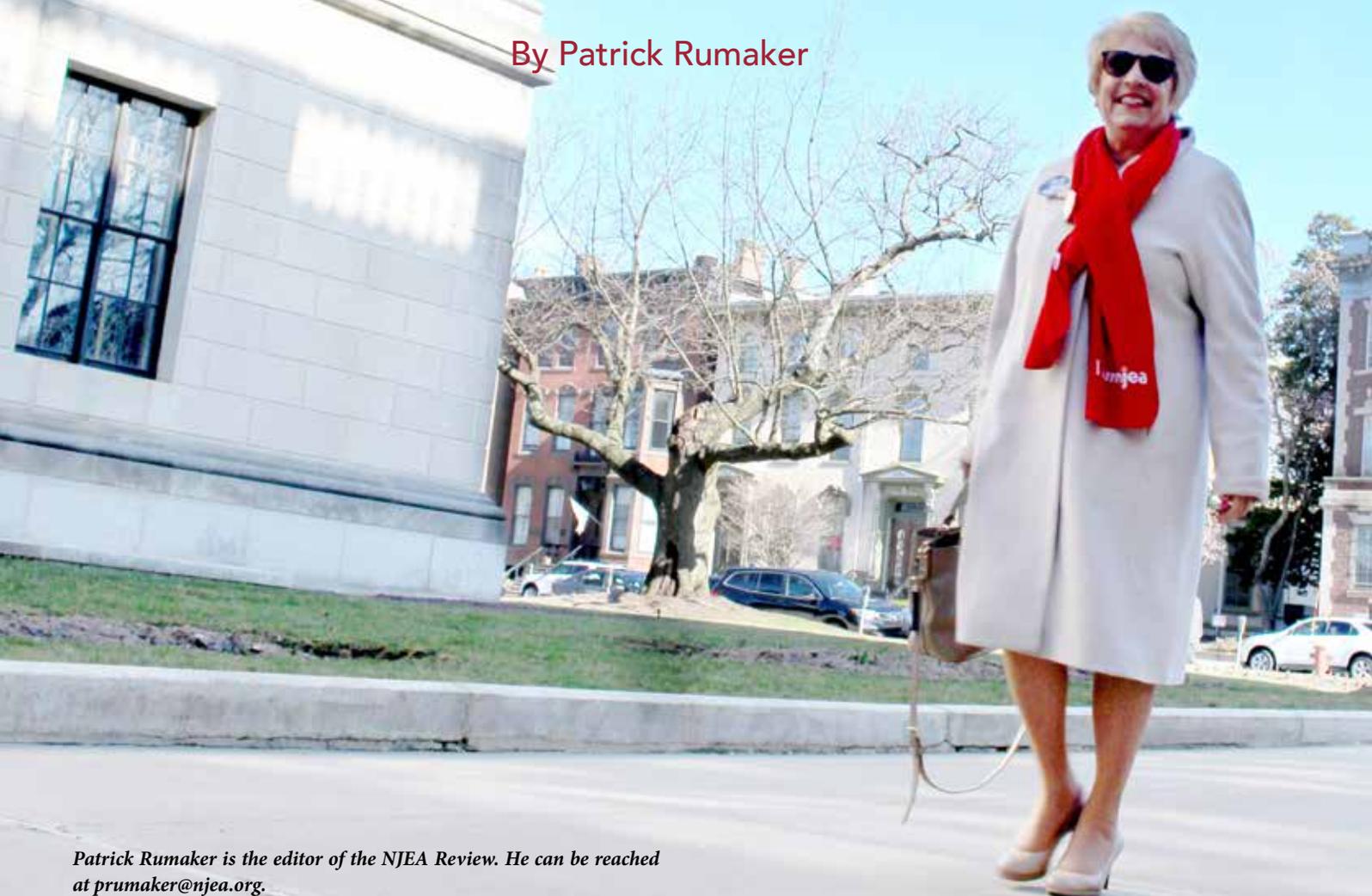
The summer may be a great time to begin our reset to normalcy. One way to do that could be to return to the tradition of grabbing a good book for the summer. It may be that one of the titles here will be the perfect vehicle to begin that journey. 📖



ELEVATING MEMBERS' VOICES

NJEA President Marie Blistan concludes
12 years of transformative leadership

By Patrick Rumaker



Patrick Rumaker is the editor of the NJEA Review. He can be reached at prumaker@njea.org.

To sit with Marie Blistan as she discusses her four years as president of NJEA, and her 12 years as a statewide officer, is to hear a recitation of names: names of her fellow officers, names of local, county, and state association leaders, NJEA staff, the leaders and members of partner organizations and public employee unions, and pro-public education elected leaders at all levels of government.

Blistan's stories of her time as a statewide leader, and as a local and county leader prior to that time, are anchored in the relationships that helped move NJEA and public education forward. Relationships are the starting point for Blistan because she knows that leaders alone are not enough, especially as attacks on public education nationwide, often from both major political parties under the guise of education reform or pension and benefits reform, were gaining a foothold even in New Jersey.

From the time of her early leadership at the local level in the Somerdale Education Association and Washington Township Education Association, Blistan saw the value of relationships with, and activism directed at, school boards, town councils and mayors. When she became president of the Gloucester County Education Association in 2005, the need for her to become more involved in a statewide strategy became more apparent to her.

"I realized how vulnerable we were, and I realized that the voices of officers alone were no longer going to work," Blistan said. "I was committed to raising the voices of rank-and-file members across the state, not only to protect what we had but to gain some ground."

Blistan said it was this drive to raise the voices of members that initially motivated her to run for NJEA secretary-treasurer in 2009.

A CHALLENGING TIME

Blistan became NJEA's secretary-treasurer at a particularly challenging time. Gov. Jon Corzine had lost his bid for reelection to Chris Christie, a governor who would make his mark not only by attacking public education and vilifying union leadership, but by taking pride in publicly attacking individual teachers and educational support professionals (ESPs), as he sought to pit educators against other residents of the state.

Rather than bring all New Jersey residents together in the midst of an international financial crisis, Christie sought to shift the blame for the Great Recession from the risky practices of Wall Street to the salaries, pensions and benefits of New Jersey's educators and other public employees.

"Our world turned upside down, and we were knocked down, but we got up, and they weren't counting on that," Blistan recalled. "And I knew one thing—when we were knocked down, I was getting up, and I was getting up stronger."

But conflict at the Statehouse was not the only challenge.



Marie Blistan during a "Classroom Close-up NJ" segment about the Teacher for a Day program. Logan Township Police Chief James Schmidt spent the day teaching in Jennifer Kelleher's classroom at Center Square School.

SUPERSTORM SANDY AND SANDY GROUND

On Oct. 29, 2012, Superstorm Sandy struck the New Jersey coast, wreaking havoc across the state destroying some schools and closing others for extended periods. The 2012 NJEA Convention was cancelled. Thousands of New Jersey residents were left homeless, including NJEA members and their families.

Blistan noted that this was when NJEA's Disaster Relief Fund was created. While NJEA had previously offered financial assistance to local associations and to members, the relief fund was the first time an assistance program was permanently put into place. That fund served as the template for the Pandemic Relief Fund that was created in response to member crises caused by the statewide shutdown in the wake of COVID-19.

"It was a different way of viewing our union," Blistan said. "For both relief funds, we've hand-delivered the checks and said, 'This is on behalf of 200,000 members. We're here with you.'"

Blistan noted that member-to-member support went beyond financial assistance. Mechanisms were put into place to enable local associations and county associations less affected by Superstorm Sandy to be paired with local associations that were hit particularly hard. Local and county associations worked together with NJEA support to replace needed school supplies for classrooms and buildings that were damaged or destroyed.

In December of 2012, another tragedy bearing the name "Sandy" struck when a lone gunman murdered 20 children, two classroom teachers, a paraprofessional, a school psychologist and the principal at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. Because of its proximity to the New York metropolitan area, New Jersey

educators and residents had many connections to the victims at Sandy Hook.

In response, the New Jersey Firefighters Mutual Benevolent Association (NJFMBA) asked NJEA and other partners to join a project called Sandy Ground: Where Angels Play. The idea was to build new playgrounds in communities in New Jersey, New York and Connecticut that were devastated by Superstorm Sandy. Each playground was a memorial to a victim of the Sandy Hook massacre.

In her role as secretary-treasurer, Blistan took the lead for NJEA, but she did more than sign checks and get funding approvals. She took a personal interest in the project. More than a dozen playgrounds were built in New Jersey. Each groundbreaking ceremony for each new playground was a community event, often including family members from Sandy Hook. Blistan attended every ceremony.

"We connected the communities that needed rebuilding because of the superstorm to each other and to the community at Sandy Hook," Blistan said. "What we were really doing was bringing all of those communities together as one."

TEACHER LEADER ACADEMY

Blistan recalled that her original reason for getting involved with her local association as a first-year teacher was to help the students in her class. Federal funding for special education that was supposed to filter down to her classroom did not show up in her classroom budget. Representing herself before her superintendent as a classroom teacher did not move her superintendent to take a second look at her budget. But when she returned to his office as a newly minted building rep with the power of her local association behind her, he found the funding.



Top: Marie Blistan at a rally in Asbury Park in 2015.
 Middle: Marie Blistan with members in Atlantic County campaigning for Phil Murphy in 2017.
 Bottom: Marie Blistan with Cornel West at the 2019 NJEA Convention.

“Working through my union was an avenue for me to get things done, but I wanted to have a much broader outreach,” Blistan said. “I found that the only way that was going to happen was if I went into administration—but I didn’t want to leave my classroom.”

Getting legislation passed and signed to create the teacher leader endorsement was itself a multiyear process. It took several additional years for the regulatory process in the New Jersey Department of Education to create the endorsement.

Concurrent with the creation of regulations, NJEA set about creating the NJEA Teacher Leader Academy so that the association would be poised to run its own program leading to the endorsement. From the inception of the idea for a teacher leader endorsement to the first meeting of the first cohort of NJEA Teacher Leader Academy spanned Blistan’s 12 years in statewide office.

This year, the candidates from the first class of the NJEA Teacher Leader Academy have earned the endorsement.

HEALTHY SCHOOLS NOW

When Gov. Christie stopped funding capital projects in the poorest school districts in the state, the New Jersey Work Environment Council approached NJEA for help.

“The Schools Development Authority (SDA) was using its money for God only knows what, but it certainly wasn’t for our schools,” Blistan recalled.

With staff, Blistan developed a list of local presidents from the affected districts and potential partner organizations to join a campaign to restore funding for repair and rebuilding projects in the former Abbott districts. It amounted to more than 20 groups and individuals.

The stories of local presidents and photography played a pivotal role in changing the dynamic.

Trenton Central High School, once a shining example of public investment in public education when it opened in 1932, was in a deplorable condition from a crumbling exterior to a leaky, cracked and collapsing interior. But in 2011 there was little appetite in the Christie administration for the public investment required to repair or replace a building once hailed as “an ornament to the city” of Trenton.

“We were going into the SDA every month and telling them about these problems,” Blistan said. “We asked them to come take a look at the schools and they wouldn’t! And Trenton was sitting right there! They wouldn’t go four blocks!”

So NJEA and the Trenton Education Association brought Trenton Central High School to the SDA. With poster-sized photographs held by TEA members showing the deteriorating conditions at the high school, they staged demonstrations and press conferences as one part of a long-term strategy to get funding for SDA projects restored and expanded. Ultimately, through the work of many individuals, community groups and organizations, a newly constructed Trenton Central High School opened its doors in September 2019 and funding was restored for other capital projects around the state.

Photography and local leadership played a role in Orange as well, where the disparity between urban and suburban public schools was illustrated through “A Tale of Two Schools,” a project that followed Blistan’s visit to the city’s schools.

As she toured the conditions at a resource-starved school, Blistan recalled saying, “You know what really disgusts me is that you would never see this in a suburban school.” When an NJEA staff member, one of the dozens named by Blistan over the course of an interview, replied, “You’re right! I went to school in South Orange in a school the same age as this one and it looks nothing like this.”

Out of that conversation, “A Tale of Two Schools” was born.



Marie Blistan with Gov. Phil Murphy at the bill signing for Ch. 78 relief at Union High School.

“ I was committed to raising the voices of rank-and-file members across the state to not only protect what we had but to gain some ground. ”

The booklet contained photos of the crumbling conditions at one school in Orange placed side-by-side with photos of a school about the same age, but in much better condition, about one mile away in West Orange.

“That was a classic example of institutional racism, which I didn’t fully recognize at the time, but I do now,” Blistan said.”

SPECIAL EDUCATION TASK FORCE

A special education teacher herself, Blistan took notice when, early in 2013 the New Jersey Department of Education sought regulatory changes that would enable special education teachers and school counselors to serve as case managers, essentially eliminating child study teams.

Working with the Statewide Parent Advocacy Network and Disability Rights New Jersey, Blistan formed the Special Education Stakeholders Coalition to oppose the elimination of child study teams and other harmful changes in the proposed regulations. With the coalition, NJEA held its first-ever statewide teleconference on April 22, 2013. Nearly 1,000 parents and teachers participated in the call, which also promoted an action plan to halt the proposals.

“Many people thought the changes couldn’t be stopped,” Blistan recalled. “I remember thinking, ‘I don’t know if we’re going to meet with success,

but I know what I have right now. I know what we’ll have if we don’t try, so let’s try. And we were able to stop them.”

ELECTING A NEW GOVERNOR

As eight years under Chris Christie were finally coming to an end, Blistan knew that in order to have a more effective voice in the next administration, NJEA had to get involved early. The NJEA PAC Operating Committee typically met in April in advance of New Jersey’s June primary elections, and in August in advance of the November general election.

In mid-2016, with three Democratic candidates already declaring their intention to run in the June 2017 primary, NJEA’s officers, in consultation with the PAC Operating Committee, decided to screen the candidates six months earlier than usual.

“We got involved early on, and once we announced that we were getting involved in the primary, other unions and organizations started do the same thing,” Blistan recalled.

In October 2016, NJEA announced that then-Ambassador Phil Murphy was its choice as Democratic candidate for governor.

NJEA PAC ran a screening process for the endorsement of a Republican primary candidate, but the only candidate to stand for screening was Lieutenant Gov. Kim Guadagno from the Christie administration.

“We came in early and we made a difference,” Blistan said.

NJEA played a major role in the gubernatorial and legislative races in 2016, running campaigns that caught national attention. NJEA members throughout the state campaigned door-to-door on behalf of NJEA PAC-endorsed candidates that year with several high-profile races that would strain relationships between NJEA and the Legislature and between the governor’s office and the Legislature.

“We stood up for ourselves and it made a difference,” Blistan said. “And now that I was president, I stuck to my number one goal: to elevate the voices of members, to advocate for our profession, and to move public education forward. We were in some dire straits, but I was adamant that I wasn’t getting knocked down. We were not going to be knocked down. We’re going to hold our heads high. The election was over; now we start over.”

CH. 78 RELIEF AND JOB JUSTICE FOR EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS

As the new NJEA president, Blistan met with her new leadership team to establish their goals.

“We needed to go after our members top concern, and it was Chapter 78—there was no question,” Blistan said. “And we had to make sure the state paid its contribution to the pension system.”

Blistan knew that school funding also had to be addressed.

“We were out \$9 billion over those last eight years, and we knew the impact of that,” Blistan said.

Blistan recalled that when she first began teaching she was appalled to learn that ESPs did not have the same job protections that teachers had.

“There has to be respect for our ESPs, and we have to recognize them as true partners in our work,” Blistan said. “There are not extra—they are essential, which is why I so often say *essential* school professionals.”

In what turned out to be a three-year undertaking, NJEA launched an ambitious campaign to secure relief from the crippling payroll deductions caused by Ch. 78 and to demand job justice for ESP.

Ch. 78 was a law passed in 2011 that, among many odious provisions, sharply increased health benefits payroll deductions. The deduction was calculated based on a percentage of the health insurance premium. As a school employee’s salary increased, the contribution percentage increased. This was compounded by the ever-increasing cost of the health insurance premium. Members learned the term “negative net”: every year their take-home pay decreased even if their base salary had increased.

Job Justice for ESPs meant seeking legislation

“

I'm very proud of the fact that we have the best ranked schools in the United States two years in a row, but that's not me; that's our members.



Marie Blistan at the 2018 ESP Conference.

legislators about bills that more directly affected nonretired NJEA members.

“NJREA leadership has been phenomenal,” Blistan said. “We wouldn’t have gotten anywhere in the last 12 years without those retirees.”

After a sustained three-year campaign, and nine years after Ch. 78 had become law, victory was achieved when on July 1, 2020, Gov. Murphy signed Ch. 78 relief. The new law created a comprehensive equivalent health care plan that saved NJEA members thousands of dollars every year by tying health care contributions to a percentage of salary rather than a percentage of the premium—a combined \$403 million savings overall. The plan also saved New Jersey taxpayers \$670 million a year.

Then, on Aug. 13 Murphy signed the first of the two job justice bills, enacting long-awaited job due-process protections for ESPs. On Sept. 12, Murphy signed the anti-privatization bill.

All three pieces of legislation came about because NJEA members never relented in the organizing and advocacy efforts from the start of the member-led campaign. It also was a signal that NJEA’s collective power makes a difference. Political forces that only three years prior appeared to have irreconcilable differences worked together for the benefit of NJEA members, students, and the general public.

PENSION PAYMENTS AND SCHOOL FUNDING

For the first time since 1996, New Jersey is poised to make its full actuarially determined state contribution into the pension system in Fiscal Year 2022. The proposed payment came as a welcome surprise. Fiscal Year (FY) 2022, which begins this July, is the ninth year of what had become a ten-year ramp up to full pension funding. The first full payment wasn’t expected until FY 2023.

“When we talk about empowering members, when we talk about having respect for the profession, when we talk about recognizing what it is our members do every single day, when we talk about holding our elected officials accountable for their promises, that pension payment covers all the bases!” Blistan said.

Blistan said that the fight for pension funding shows the value of membership.

“When we were talking to our members

by going door-to-door in neighborhoods and door-to-door in our school buildings, we were demonstrating the value of this union,” Blistan said. “It was this union that did this work politically, that did this work communally, that did this work at the local, county, state and national levels to get the right people elected and to get their attention about the power that we have, and also about the valuable impact that we have on their children, on our children, and with society, and connecting that all together.”

Blistan connected the ultimate result of that union advocacy to New Jersey’s high-performing schools.

“I’m very proud of the fact that we have the best ranked schools in the United States two years in a row, but that’s not me; that’s our members,” Blistan said. “But we couldn’t do it without the parents, mayors, town councils, legislators, and governors.”

RACIAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

The pivotal role that NJEA can play in the struggle for racial, social, economic and education justice is not a new concept to Blistan.

In 2017, as Blistan became president of NJEA she was interviewed for the *NJEA Review*. During that interview she reflected on the so-called Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia that was occurring at the time. Growing up during the era of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, and Malcolm X, Marie saw parallels to today’s struggles.

“I saw their passion for civil and human rights and the acts of violence that tried stop the progress of those embroiled in the struggle,” Marie said in 2017. “Given what is happening in Charlottesville and elsewhere, it is our mission is to educate our children and pursue racial, social and economic justice to counter the forces of evil in our midst. We must engage and empower members like never before. We must make sure that their voice is the voice of this union.”

Over the course of the last four years, NJEA has embarked on a series of initiatives to help build a more racially just society, such as the Undoing Racism program, and staff and member-led programs such as the NJEA Members of Color Network and NJEA REAL, a movement for racial equity, affirmation, and literacy.

Association staff and members have also considered the ways in which the association itself has through its own history contributed to systemic racism and the work that it needs to do to dismantle it. Blistan noted that the long-standing NJEA Bolivar L. Graham Practicing Apprentices Program has been revamped and expanded into a two-year program. The apprentice program which is aimed at removing barriers to the equitable participation of women and members of color in association leadership and staff employment, provides training and professional opportunities

and experiences.

NJEA has also taken a lead role in strengthening the Amistad mandate, which became law in 2002, establishing the Amistad Commission and requiring public schools to teach about the African slave trade, slavery, and the vestiges of slavery, and the contributions of African Americans to the nation.

In September of 2018, NJEA President Marie Blistan met with representatives from each of the statewide education advocacy organizations and the New Jersey Department of Education to discuss wider and more substantial implementation of the Amistad law. The result was the NJEA Amistad Stakeholder Group, which includes representatives from the groups at that initial meeting and representatives of Amistad Commission. It is working to more fully implement the Amistad law, laying out measurable recommendations to hold itself accountable for the results.

LABOR-MANAGEMENT COLLABORATION

Blistan recalled from her days as a local leader the importance of developing productive relationships with administrators, particularly in areas where the association and the administration could find common ground. She noted that such collaboration, while productive, was rarely systematic. When individual association leaders or administrators moved on, any new collaborative efforts would have to start from scratch.

Research conducted by Professor Saul Rubinstein, a professor in the Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations, revealed that collaboration among labor and management in a school district correlated with student learning. A chance meeting with Rubinstein at a New Jersey School Boards Association task force meeting led to Blistan bringing the concept back to NJEA.

“I understood the value of labor-management collaboration, but before meeting Saul I never connected it to student achievement,” Blistan said.

Blistan, who was vice president of NJEA at the time, proposed that the association work with Rutgers to bring the concept to local associations and their school districts. There are now numerous labor-management collaboratives throughout the state. The program is so successful that the National Education Association has granted NJEA \$500,000 to expand the New Jersey Public School Labor-Management Collaborative and is investing \$3 million over the next three years to expand the program nationwide.

NJEA COMMITTEES AND MEMBER VOICES

As NJEA prepared for what was expected to be an adverse decision from the U.S. Supreme Court in *Janus v. AFSCME* in 2018, the association continued working to ensure that educators understood the value of union membership and

the power of active participation in the union.

“I knew the power of NJEA committees, but I also knew that most members didn’t even know they existed,” Blistan said. “The committee structure had served us well and was intended to bring member voices in, but I felt that we were going to have to reconnect with members who didn’t know that history, so that they would see the committees as an avenue to be seen and heard.”

The NJEA president, in consultation with the NJEA Executive Committee, appoints committee members and committee chairs. Blistan put practices in place to ensure that she was intentional in her committee appointments to increase the number of members serving on association committees and to ensure that they represented the diversity of NJEA members.

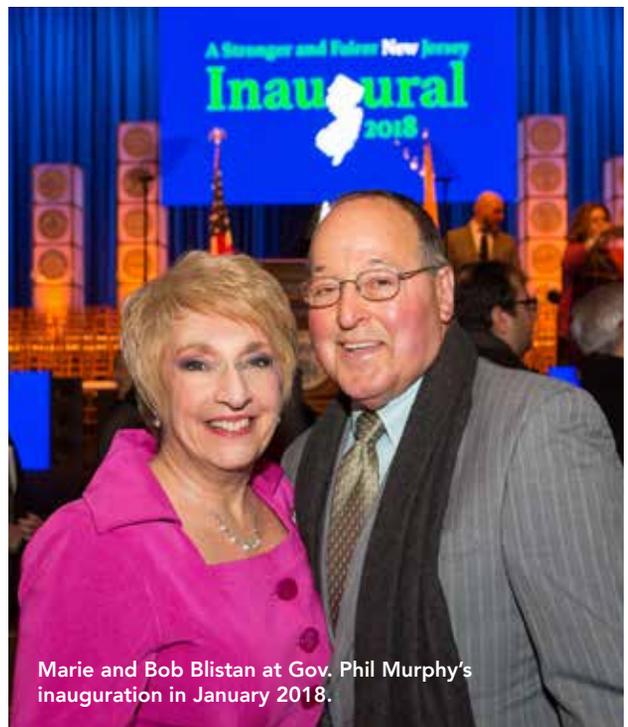
Blistan also charged committee members with the task of strengthening their outreach to the members they represented and tracked the progress committees made to reaching annual goals that reflected that outreach. Committees are currently engaged in a process to revise their charges through the lenses of organizing, diversity, inclusion and equity.

LEADERSHIP IN A PANDEMIC

When the COVID-19 pandemic closed school buildings and moved instruction into a remote, and later a hybrid, environment, public education was second only to public health among the concerns of New Jersey residents. Teachers and ESPs were regarded by the public as heroes during the pandemic, and as parents and educators weighed the risks of when and how to reopen school buildings, NJEA insisted that the health and safety of students and staff be the first consideration.

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

NJEA’s response to the pandemic yields again from Blistan a long recitation of the names of individuals, organizations and elected officials with which the association has forged powerful relationships. The names of local and county association leaders and rank-and-file members and NJEA staff are at the top of Blistan’s stories about educators’ and NJEA’s response to the pandemic.



Marie and Bob Blistan at Gov. Phil Murphy’s inauguration in January 2018.

“I’m extremely proud of our response—and especially of our members’ response—over this tremendously difficult year,” Blistan said.

WHAT’S NEXT FOR BLISTAN?

With her retirement on the horizon, Blistan is looking forward to seeing her family more often.

“I’m especially looking forward to seeing my grandchildren more often,” Blistan said. “All six of my grandchildren have been born during these last 12 years, and there’s been a lot that I’ve missed.”

Blistan’s husband, Bob, himself a retired educator is likely looking forward to Marie’s retirement as well. It was a rare occasion when Bob Blistan was not by Marie’s side at an NJEA event. That he did most of the driving enabled Blistan to conduct association business from the passenger seat as they put tens of thousands of miles on their car annually to meet with members, attend association events, and foster those relationships so central to Blistan’s vision of leadership.

“I couldn’t have done any of this without him,” Blistan said. “He’s been solid, and he has always been my cheerleader.”

As her 12 years in statewide office come to a close, Blistan feels she is leaving the association in good hands.

“I feel like we, collectively, have moved the association and public education to a better place,” Blistan said. “Just as I stand on the shoulders of those who came before me, I am confident that Sean, Steve and Petal are going to continue to move NJEA and public education to another level. I’m going to be proud of the work that they’re going to do, and of what they, and others who come after them, will accomplish.” 🎉

A SUPERHERO STORY

BY:
JAMI CENTRELLA
AND STUDENTS

THE STORY OF HOW ONE SCHOOL FOUND ITS HEROES AMID THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

"A HERO CAN BE ANYONE. EVEN A MAN DOING SOMETHING AS SIMPLE AND REASSURING AS PUTTING A COAT AROUND A LITTLE BOY'S SHOULDER TO LET HIM KNOW THE WORLD HASN'T ENDED." - BATMAN, THE DARK KNIGHT RISES

When the start of the COVID-19 pandemic rocked the world in 2020, it seemed we had been transported to an alternate universe. It was as though we had, overnight, become people of a newly formed Gotham City and were now being terrorized by an invisible villain. We were left searching for our bat signals, hoping that if we all shined them together, they would be just bright enough for someone to come save us all. We were trapped in the ultimate vortex of good versus evil, and more than anything, we longed for a hero.

As the pandemic progressed, we found heroes in our doctors, nurses, scientists, frontline workers, teachers and school cafeteria workers, and while they could not save the world from the gravity of the pandemic, they responded to our cries with the same bravery and tenacity that Batman himself would have brought. They worked tirelessly to help us see that it was not the light of the bat signal that had encouraged them to spring into action, but instead, it was the hope inside each of us that shined brightest of all, and we could not let that hope die.

I have always enjoyed reading stories of heroes and villains with my students. I love to see them explain the traits they admire most in the story's victor. I cherish the empathy they bring to discovering a hero's tragic flaw, and consequently, learn to embrace their own imperfections. However, this year, as a citizen of this new Gotham City, I was faced with the ultimate choice: do I continue to teach my students how to only read about heroes or do I let them learn how to be one?

Jami Centrella is the 2020-21 Gloucester County Teacher of the Year. She is a sixth grade language arts teacher at the Caroline L. Reutter School in Franklin Township. Centrella can be reached at glou.ctoy@gmail.com.



Jami Centrella worked with student council leaders on a fundraiser for Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. From left: Riley Hunter, Centrella, and Neko Faust.

"YOU'RE GOING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE. A LOT OF TIMES IT WON'T BE HUGE, IT WON'T BE VISIBLE EVEN. BUT IT WILL MATTER JUST THE SAME." -COMMISSIONER GORDON, GOTHAM CENTRAL, BOOK 1: IN THE LINE OF DUTY

When I became Gloucester County Teacher of the Year, I wanted the platform to be more than just holding a title. I wanted it to be tangible and visible, not just to my colleagues, administration and community, but most of all to my students. I have always believed that students will never see the value of the content I am teaching them unless they first learn that they hold value, so it was natural for me to take on social and emotional learning as a part of my mission. I wanted to help my students find their place in this world—not

20 years from now—right now. I wanted them to see how they too can fill the role of the heroes that they always admire in the books we read. But how I was going to make this mission actionable, while fighting the villain of Gotham City ... well, that became the challenge.

They say that you will find your place in this world when you discover where the need for compassion meets your greatest passion, so I decided the best place to start my mission was at the place I knew held my own, personal hero.

"IT'S NOT WHO I AM UNDERNEATH, BUT WHAT I DO THAT DEFINES ME." -BATMAN, BATMAN BEGINS

The Leukemia and Lymphoma Society (LLS) is a national organization whose goal is to create a

world without blood cancer. Funds donated to LLS are used to help create a better quality of life for the patients and their families who battle various blood cancers every day. LLS also support research to help find a cure for the, often fatal, disease.

This organization has been near to my heart for some time, after a family member of mine lost his battle to acute myeloid leukemia in 2014. He had been influential in my life, and after he passed away, left me with a great desire to accomplish all he believed I was destined to be. He was, and always will be, my hero.

I knew there had to be a way to bridge my personal hero and my school of heroes, but it wasn't until I stumbled upon LLS's Hero Squad Program that I knew exactly how to make it happen. This community service-based program empowers students to raise funds for LLS both individually and collectively. Students also learn about the way blood cancers affect the body through LLS's extensive STEM+ resources, which are provided to each school with which it partners.

When I first learned about the program, I was instantly ready to get involved. I knew Gotham City was longing for heroes daily, and I knew this was the perfect way to help with the search. I worked with the organization to create a promotional video encouraging schools across the county to



Reutter School staff assist with the fundraiser. From left: School secretary Mary Kate Gereaghty and teachers Dylan Dobzanski, Melissa Marinaro, and Stephanie Rupin. Centrella is standing in the center.



Neko Faust getting ready to deliver orders.

I HAVE ALWAYS BELIEVED THAT STUDENTS WILL NEVER SEE THE VALUE OF THE CONTENT I AM TEACHING THEM UNLESS THEY FIRST LEARN THAT THEY HOLD VALUE.

get involved with the Hero Squad Program. Once I laid the groundwork for all of Gotham City, I knew it was time to get to work with my own school of heroes.

THIS CITY JUST SHOWED YOU THAT IT'S FULL OF PEOPLE READY TO BELIEVE IN GOOD." - BATMAN, THE DARK KNIGHT

I began planning our Hero Squad Fundraiser by meeting with my school's Student Council representatives, Neko Faust and Riley Hunter. I knew that I wanted all aspects of this project to be their ideas and their mission. Given the times in which we live, we met virtually during my office hours one afternoon. I told the two girls about LLS and the Hero Squad Program, and I was met with great enthusiasm when I proposed we

hold a fundraiser for the organization.

We decided we would break the fundraiser into two pieces: a schoolwide pretzel sale and an individual opportunity for students to fundraise in whatever way they were able.

The girls were most excited about coordinating the pretzel fundraiser. They were determined to make this project succeed, and they wanted to be involved in every aspect. They emailed me with ideas, they designed promotional flyers, and they tried to be inclusive of all students and their ability to participate by setting a fair price point for the pretzels.

I was awestruck by Neko and Riley. These girls were truly planning something that was going to make a difference, and they knew it. In a year that was wrapped up in so many things that made these students feel powerless, maybe even a bit hopeless, this project gave them a way to positively impact the world. This project was theirs from the beginning and now its success has become theirs to share.

**"WHY DO WE FALL? SO THAT WE CAN LEARN TO PICK OURSELVES UP."
ALFRED PENNYWORTH, BATMAN BEGINS**

At the time of writing this article, we are in the midst of the individual fundraising efforts by the students in our school. We have held a Hero Squad themed spirit week, and all of our students have learned about the science behind the different blood cancers. Also as of the time of this article, we have raised over \$1,000 for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, well over our schoolwide goal of \$500.

I would be remiss if I didn't note that while Neko and Riley were the face of our Student Council in this project, there was so much support from within my school and at the district level. The morning of the pretzel fundraiser, it seemed as though every teacher in the school was willing to wear a pair of gloves and help distribute pretzels. The Township of Franklin Board of Education, Superintendent Troy Walton, and Reutter Principal Theodore Peters were extremely supportive and involved in the project, and the entire community was so willing to support the cause by buying pretzels. It has been said that every hero needs a squad, and I am truly thankful for all of the support behind this project.

As a society, we are one year into the unprecedented battles of our Gotham City. There are days where it seems the invisible villain has been defeated, and days where it seems that defeat is just the rising of a new enemy. Yet, in a time filled with sickness, social unrest, and a longing for escape, I find myself still hopeful for this new generation. They have not been defeated by the darkness around them, but instead they have brought light to it. They have inspired hope. A hope for rest. A hope for healing. And a hope for the rise of new heroes in Gotham City.

**"YOU ONLY HAVE YOUR THOUGHTS AND DREAMS AHEAD OF YOU. YOU ARE SOMEONE. YOU MEAN SOMETHING."
-BATMAN, BATMAN: BLACK AND WHITE #1**

**BY:
NEKO FAUST
AND
RILEY HUNTER**

Neko Faust and Riley Hunter are sixth graders at Caroline L. Reutter School in Franklinville, Gloucester County. They are two of Reutter School's Student Council representatives.

The Hero Squad Fundraiser was so much fun to plan and to carry out. When one of our super teachers, Ms. Centrella, brought up the idea of doing a fundraiser for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, we nearly jumped out of our skin. The thought of helping so many people was almost incomprehensible. Neko brought up the idea of a pretzel sale. We could both see the idea going over extremely well, so we immediately got to work.

Before anything could begin, we had to bring the idea to the school board. While Ms. Centrella convinced the board to allow us to do it, we both went to work creating flier ideas along with a slogan, as a way to get the school pumped. We hung the fliers around the school, and the school handed out papers for the pretzel orders. Our classes were so excited to participate and to help so many people. During our character assembly, Ms. Centrella talked up the fundraiser and explained how it was much more than just "selling pretzels." Then came the day of handing out the pretzels.

The day we handed out the salty snacks, the school was buzzing with excitement. Teachers, students and parents were ecstatic to get their pretzels. We know of one girl who ordered 15 pretzels and one who ordered 30! Neko helped individually wrap over 750 pretzels. All of the snacks were packed with care and placed on individual carts to be taken to their destination. Each pretzel was labeled perfectly for its student or teacher. Then, one by one, all the pretzels vanished from the cart and into the hands of the heroes that donated to the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. We all felt like superheroes that day.

Personally, we both felt like world changers and realized that although it was something small, if everyone in the world did something like this, the planet would be blooming with love, positivity and well-being. Being a part of the Hero Squad and knowing how much people would benefit from it was truly an amazing honor. How can people not be honored to help those who are hurt and who may be living their last day? How can you not feel good about yourself knowing that somewhere in the world you are helping to make someone's life better? No matter what challenges you face, you can't stop working because you know that people are relying on you, even if they don't know it themselves.

We, of course, had some challenges along the way such as getting the board of education to approve our idea and advertising our fundraiser, but it was worth it because we knew we were making people smile. That was all that mattered. It didn't matter that we might not get credit for it or that we might not get rewarded, because we believe that saving someone's life is a reward all by itself.



WHY CHILDREN CHEW ON EVERYTHING DURING CLASS

by Dr. Pamela Cooper, M.A., M.B.A., Ph.D.

As we work with children, they always seem to have something in their mouths. How many times have you said to the same child “take that out of your mouth” or “stop chewing on your pen” or “spit out that gum”? Perhaps you’ve asked a child to stop chewing on paper because it is dirty or that chewing the paper will make the child sick.

Chewing on an item is a physical need, not an act of defiance.

Some children continue to chew nonfood items well past the mouthing/teething stage. For some children, chewing is a passing phase while other children will always have a need to chew continuing into adulthood.

Because of a psychological or physical need, some children have a written medical diagnosis or a school plan to address these needs. School plans may include chewing accommodations in an individualized educational program (IEP), an individualized health plan (IHP), an intervention referral service plan (I&RS), or a Section 504 plan; much like when a child needs to carry and drink water during the school day.

STRESS AND ANXIETY

The most common explanation for why some children chew is because of stress and/or anxiety. Chewing provides proprioceptive input to the jaw that is calming and self-

organizing. Stress and anxiety are why some children may bite their fingernails when they are nervous, pace back and forth, do deep breathing, tap their feet, or suck their thumbs and fingers. Mouthing, chewing and sucking are self-soothing techniques. They are ways to cope with stress.

The stress children experience may be everyday stress, such as frustration, anger, the inability to perform a task, a change in routine, hunger, foster care placements, group home placements, homelessness, side-effects from a medication, sleepiness (often from playing games on their digital devices in place of sleeping), and other factors. Chewing will typically increase relative to the amount of stress and how well a child deals with stress.

Chewing is an easy way for children to calm themselves because:

- It is a known motor plan (i.e., the ability to organize the body’s actions, knowing what steps to take, and in what order to complete a task.)
- There is always something nearby that the child can chew on, whether it is safe or inappropriate. For example, some children are apt to chew on a piece of clothing, pencil, pen, gum, or something picked up off the floor.
- Children can control what goes in their mouths.

SENSORY NEEDS/STIMMING

Chewing as a calming mechanism is especially true for children who have autism and/or sensory processing disorder (SPD). SPD is also known as sensory integration dysfunction; a condition where multisensory integration is not adequately processed to provide appropriate responses to the demands of the child’s environment.

Children with sensory issues process the world differently and that can often be overwhelming. Lights might be brighter, sounds louder, and touch can be painful. Being stared at might feel threatening to them. Some children wear hoods during class to meet a sensory need. Some children put their heads down within their arms to buffer light or sound and at times pull a clothing item over their mouth or ears.

Stimming is short for self-stimulation. Stimming is one way that children with sensory issues organize themselves and manage the extra sensory information bombarding their systems. Stimming is typically anything repetitive, such as flapping one’s hands, rocking back and forth, spinning things, repeating certain words, chewing, getting up to sharpen a pencil several times and other such behaviors.



Document your observations and notify the parent, school nurse, support service provider and child study team case manager.

BODY AWARENESS/PROPRIOCEPTION

We process the world around us through our senses, one of which is called proprioception. Proprioception is the ability to know where the body is in time and space and how to process input from joints and muscles to move and the position of the body. Children who are struggling with body awareness and position can appear heavy-handed and overly forceful. They may damage items unintentionally, walk into others while looking ahead, or trip over or fall from chairs. These children can display poor motor control, have the “wiggles,” be unable to sit still, lack focus, become easily distracted, and many other symptoms.

Children with poor proprioception would benefit from what is called a “sensory diet” of activities to regulate their systems. Sensory diet activities are developed to independently meet each child’s needs and typically include some sort of heavy work activities. Heavy work activities are any type of action that pushes or pulls against the body, such as:

- Cleaning tables
- Carrying supplies to and from the classroom
- Pushing a friend or sibling on a swing
- Passing out and collecting papers
- Lifting items from a shelf and stacking them at a different location
- Cleaning windows
- Vacuuming or sweeping
- Push-ups, swimming, playing sports
- Using weighted lap pads, vests, or blankets to improve body awareness and to promote a sense of calm.

If a sensory diet is not in place, or if the child is not getting the right amount of compensatory proprioceptive input at any point throughout the day, the child may try to self-regulate on their own. Often children may try to self-satisfy through chewing because it is something that they know, have access to, and can control. Moreover, it provides proprioceptive input to the jaw.

ORAL AWARENESS

Some children have oral hyposensitivity, which is limited sensitivity or no sensation in the mouth.

Imagine that you have decreased sensation in your fingers. To compensate for the decreased fingers sensation, you would probably press on things harder, grip things tighter, or seek out things that are textured that contain a lot of tactile information.

Children with limited oral hyposensitivity awareness may seek out activities that provide increased oral feedback, such as eating crunchy foods, stuffing their mouths with food, grinding their teeth, or chewing on nonfood items.

CONCENTRATION

Chewing can be an effective way to increase focus and block out other distractions, especially since it is a repetitive movement. Chewing activates muscles in the jaw down into the neck, which provides added stability that is grounding, particularly for children with decreased motor planning. Have you ever chewed gum during a test? Or chewed on a pen cap or pencil while trying to concentrate on something? If not, then odds are you know someone who does.

PICA

Characterized by the need or craving not only to chew, but eat nonfood items (paper, clay, sand, etc.). If you suspect that a child is chewing nonfood items in excess, inform the parent, school nurse, counselor and/or child study team case manager to seek medical attention right away.

TEETHING

It is not uncommon to see children chew for relief when their six-year molars start to erupt. If this is the cause, it will likely pass when the teeth are done moving into place. The average

age for loss of these primary molars is 10 to 12 years, with children having at least all their first and second permanent, or adult, molars by 13 to 15 years of age.

G-TUBE

When children cannot eat by mouth, they may still crave or miss the act of chewing. These children are given alternatives to chewing food to help satisfy that need by chewing on a chew tool during tube feedings. A chew tool looks similar to dog chew toy. The school nurse generally changes feeding tubes during the school day.

BOREDOM/HABIT

When a child presents as being bored, there is always something nearby that could potentially be chewed on, safe or not—pencil erasers, paper clips, tissues, etc.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

Document your observations and notify the parent, school nurse, support service provider and/or child study team case manager. Remember, it is not that children WANT to chew, it is that they NEED to chew.

Although biting or chewing can sometimes be behavioral, they are most often sensory-related. As a result, telling the child to stop chewing is not going to work. For one reason or another, children’s body are telling them that they need to chew, and their bodies are adeptly listening. 🗣️

Dr. Pamela Cooper is a learning disabilities teacher-consultant in Winslow Township, Camden County. She can be reached at pamela3068@aol.com.



Chewing on an item is a physical need, not an act of defiance.



STRESSED OUT IN THIS PANDEMIC? YOU'RE NOT ALONE

By Dorothy Wigmore

The evidence is in. The pandemic is taking a huge toll on education workers' mental health. Physical health is next.

Recent surveys in New Jersey, Canada and the United Kingdom have similar messages:

- Many education workers' workload has increased.
- Anxiety or stress levels are going through the roof.
- Most educators are spending their own money on supplies including protective gear.
- Many schools are not effectively protecting staff and students or providing them with information about pandemic health and safety protections.

"Across the board, we found that stress levels for members in their work—and overall life—skyrocketed during COVID," says NJEA

Communications Director Steve Baker. "There was close to doubling of self-reported increases in both categories. On a scale of one to 10, it was 7.9 for job-related stress and 8.1 for things overall."

"It's really important to note that the highest stress levels were from those providing hybrid education—a really challenging and difficult way to work—followed by those fully in person, and only slightly lower were those who were fully remote," Baker adds.

The December survey also found a majority of educators didn't feel safe going to their schools and almost half the members responding had lost income or worried about expenses. People of color, men and educational support professionals were most affected.

In the United Kingdom, surveys keep finding teachers with very high levels of anxiety, high workload and feeling undervalued. Large numbers say they may leave the sector.

The late 2020 survey of Ontario elementary education workers had similar results. "The most striking finding was that the educators' levels of anxiety were higher than for health care workers," occupational hygienist John Oudyk told an April 30 webinar. While co-worker support improved significantly, workload, work pace, role conflict, predictability, burnout and sleep symptoms got much worse.

Oudyk linked anxiety levels to infection control practices (ICPs)—everything from cleaning and wearing barrier face coverings to ventilation and staggered schedules.

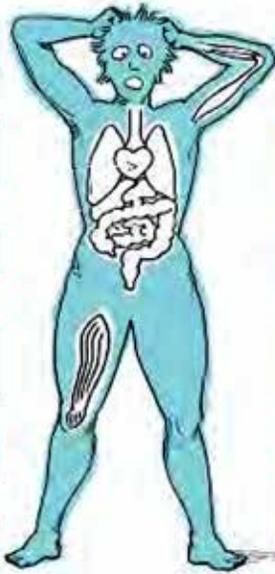
"What a striking difference there was between educators who had all their ICP needs met and those with none met," he said. Twenty-four percent of those who thought their ICP needs were met had moderate or severe anxiety; 70 percent of those who thought they got no ICPs were in that category.

"It's very seldom you see such a dramatic difference. Just providing what's needed for ICPs in schools can make a huge difference to their mental health."

Dorothy Wigmore is a long-time health and safety specialist, trained in occupational hygiene, ergonomics and "stress." A Canadian, she also has worked in the U.S. and Mozambique, focusing on prevention and worker participation to solve job-related hazards..

Strain (long-term) physical effects include ...

- Sleep disorders, insomnia, fatigue, exhaustion
- Headaches, tension, grinding teeth
- Cardiovascular problems (e.g. high blood pressure, heart attacks, other changes to the heart and circulation system)
- Chest pains/problems
- Immune system problems, which make it easier to get sick
- Asthma
- Digestive system problems (e.g. spastic colon, ulcers, impaired digestion, irritable bowel syndrome); weight gain or loss
- Diabetes
- Menstrual disorders
- Sexual dysfunction
- Joint and muscle pains, arthritis
- Burnout

**Strain (long-term) non-physical effects include ...**

- Anxiety, increased tension and fearfulness
- Feeling apathetic, low self-worth, blaming ourselves for our stressed state
- Social isolation, withdrawal at home and work, stop participation in family, sports and community activities
- Inability to concentrate and finish tasks
- Mistrust, blaming others (including "the union"), paranoia
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Conflict with family and friends (sometimes violent), fights with co-workers and supervisors
- Anger, frustration, envy
- Depression, mood changes, constant negativity
- Suicidal thoughts
- Over-reaction, irrational behaviour
- Job dissatisfaction

DEW: May, 2018

STRESSORS TAKE THEIR TOLL – AND CAN MAKE GETTING THE VIRUS WORSE

"Stress" is the short-term reaction to stressors—hazards such as high demands, low control, long hours, bullying, unfair treatment and lack of support.

When the problems continue, the long-term or chronic effects—strain or toxic stress—appear in many body systems. Increased blood pressure can lead to heart attacks and strokes. The immune system responds less effectively, making it harder to fight off infection. Aging seems to accelerate the impact. Coping behaviors can lead to further harm. (See the graphic.)

Job-related stressors can fit into four categories:

- Too many mental and physical demands.
- No control or say about the job (what's done, how, by whom, when).
- No support, from co-workers, supervisors, organizations.
- Lack of respect (e.g., bullying, unfair treatment).

"The pandemic has caused much uncertainty, anxiety, and stress, touching on nearly every aspect of our lives," Marnie Dobson wrote in a recent Healthy Work Campaign blog (see link in sidebar). "Work stressors such as unemployment, underemployment, increased workloads, reduced social support, difficulty attending to personal and family needs, and a blurring of the lines between work and family life have been heightened during this pandemic."

Pandemic-related stressors come on top of what staff already suffer. Previous stress-related health effects—co-morbidities—make people more

vulnerable if they inhale the SARS-CoV2, the virus that causes COVID-19. (That is more likely in enclosed spaces like schools. The airborne virus can spread easily, with close contact, lack of fresh air and effective ventilation, and too many people in a room for too long.) Dobson's blog is based on an article about how co-morbidities put workers "at higher risk for severe symptoms and increased risk of death" in the pandemic.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

As Baker says, "Managing a problem doesn't solve a problem." Stress management—looking after ourselves—is important. But the stressors need attention too: a smaller workload, and more respect, support and control.

The Ontario researchers say education workers need a path to communicate ideas and participate in decisions affecting them, and to know more about health and safety protections. What can NJEA members and their local unions do?

- Set up a health and safety committee. Train and support members to inspect schools, stay on top of pandemic-related policies/

Resources

Healthy Work Campaign

"COVID-19 Pandemic: What has work got to do with it" – bit.ly/2QJG357

Website – healthywork.org

NJEA

Last year's health and safety articles – njea.org/issues/health-safety

NJ Work Environment Council (WEC)

Workshops, webinars and information – njwec.org

Occupational Health Clinic for Ontario Workers (OHCOW)

Mayday, Mayday WMH Series – bit.ly/3eR5h9t

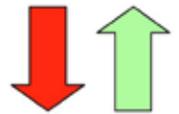
StressAssess survey tools – stressassess.ca

Mental Injury Toolkit – ohcow.on.ca/mental-injury-toolkit.html

programs, and hold the district's feet to the fire (e.g., about "adequate ventilation")

- Survey members; act on the results. See StressAssess and Healthy Work Campaign resources in the sidebar.
- Organize workshops about the survey results and strategize solutions (e.g., Achieving health and safety wins in a pandemic, Health and safety language in the contract). Attend New Jersey Work Environment Council's "WEC Wednesdays."
- Have informal virtual gatherings that give members time to talk about what's bothering them, what others are doing to overcome stressors, etc.
- Use your contract to respond to unfair working conditions. Use survey results and members' suggestions about lessons from the pandemic to improve the next one. 🚩

Job strain is in the red arrows (■).
Active and "stress-free" jobs are in green (■).

**Workload/
demands****Control/
say****Social support/
relations****Respect**



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THE FINANCIAL BURDEN OF BECOMING A TEACHER

BY GIA SALVO, ROWAN UNIVERSITY

Surrounded by excellent teachers, I knew by second grade that I wanted to become a teacher. I would never abandon that dream. That desire, drive and determination are what led me to where I am now. It is surreal to think about how far I have come in my academic career, achieving things that my second grade self wished for. I am a student teacher and about to become a teacher in the real world, not just in my living room.

However, student teaching is not what I always thought it would be, especially as I approach my final clinical placement. I strive for the best experiences in order to feel fully prepared for my own classroom, but there has always seemed to be something that was pulling me backwards. It took some time to figure out what that something was. Most of my college career and time was full of balancing part-time work at an elementary school, college classes and volunteer work. Lately, I have been reflecting on what I have done and what I still have to do.

As I work my way closer to the end of my college career and my final student teaching placement, I credit the weight on my shoulders to the cost of student teaching and ultimately the cost of being a first-year teacher. The issue became clear when I began speaking with more student teachers, first year teachers and veteran teachers. It is not cheap to be a teacher, especially when college expenses are also a worry on your mind.

I, along with many others, are being asked to sacrifice our livelihoods for

almost a whole year—the year before we are out in the real world funding a first year classroom of our own. As my college career continues, I have become increasingly aware of the ways I have to support myself during student teaching, as well as my first year of teaching. I have begun brainstorming ways in which I can support myself while paying for gas, food, tuition, books, supplies and edTPA. Student teachers are expected to meet these expenses while not having the opportunity to have a job or receive any type of funding for student teaching.

As a student teacher, I am being asked to work full time in a classroom, plan lessons, participate in school events, facilitate activities, teach full lessons and more. We are tasked with almost everything a full-time teacher would do, but with additional college courses and the edTPA assessment. While student teaching is an amazing and eye-opening educational experience, it is undercut by the high stress of trying to meet financial responsibilities without an income.

To become a certified teacher in New Jersey is a wonderful accomplishment that I have been looking forward to achieving ever since I was in the second grade. It has been an overwhelming challenge to hold on to that second grade desire of becoming the best teacher I can be when the cost of student teaching—and the cost of being a first year teacher—is a pressing matter on my mind. 🏠



JOIN US AT THE **NJEA TEACHER LEADER ACADEMY**

Teacher leadership is more important than ever

The NJEA Teacher Leader Academy is a one-year, 12-credit program* for candidates seeking to earn the teacher leader endorsement. A new cohort is scheduled to begin in March 2021.

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

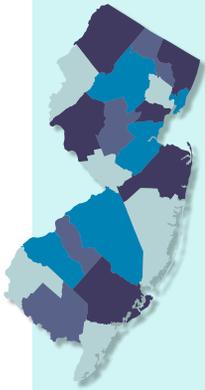
Join our program and collaborate with fellow educators who are finding ways to lead from the classroom as they share ideas, support their colleagues, and work with school and district leaders to create systemic change that will support high-quality teaching and learning.

*12 credits are offered through Thomas Edison State College

njea | Teacher Leader Academy

WEB: <https://www.njea.org/tla/>
EMAIL: teacherleader@njea.org





SUSSEX TO CAPE MAY

YOGI BERRA MUSEUM AND LEARNING CENTER OFFERS VIRTUAL SUMMER PD

In July, the Yogi Berra Museum and Learning Center is offering four workshops themed, “In Search of a Level Playing Field” title “Race and Sports,” “Immigration and Yogi Berra,” “Women in Sports,” and “Financial Literacy in Sports.”

All workshops will be presented by Davida Lindsay-Harewood, Ed.D., an NJEA member and social studies teacher at Montclair High School. Dr. Lindsay-Harewood provides consulting services to organizations that can benefit from her broad range of experiences and knowledge. Areas of focus include curriculum support in African American history, LGBTQ+ and Holocaust education, as well as professional development in education and community engagement.

The fee is \$10 per workshop, and PD credit is available.

Questions?

Contact Jenny Pollack, Education Director Yogi Berra Museum and Learning Center at 718-974-3984 or pollackj@montclair.edu.

Race and Sports

Tuesday, July 20, 2021, 10-11:30 a.m.

In what ways did baseball illustrate and disrupt systems of racial oppression in 20th-century America? Learn about systemic racism in professional baseball and how we introduce young people to the history

of the Negro Leagues, the Great Migration and Jackie Robinson’s role as a change agent.

To register: yogiberramuseum.org/events/pdrace

Immigration and Yogi Berra

Thursday, July 22, 10-11:30 a.m.

How has immigration shaped American life? Learn how to explore with your students the complicated history of American immigration through the lens of Yogi Berra’s family story.

To register: yogiberramuseum.org/events/pdimmigration

Women in Sports

Tuesday July 27, 10-11:30 a.m.

Why don’t women play baseball? Learn how to share the history of women’s role in our national pastime in your classroom. Consider how historical events like the 19th Amendment, World War II and Title IX have affected American women and girls in sports.

To register: yogiberramuseum.org/events/pdwomeninsports

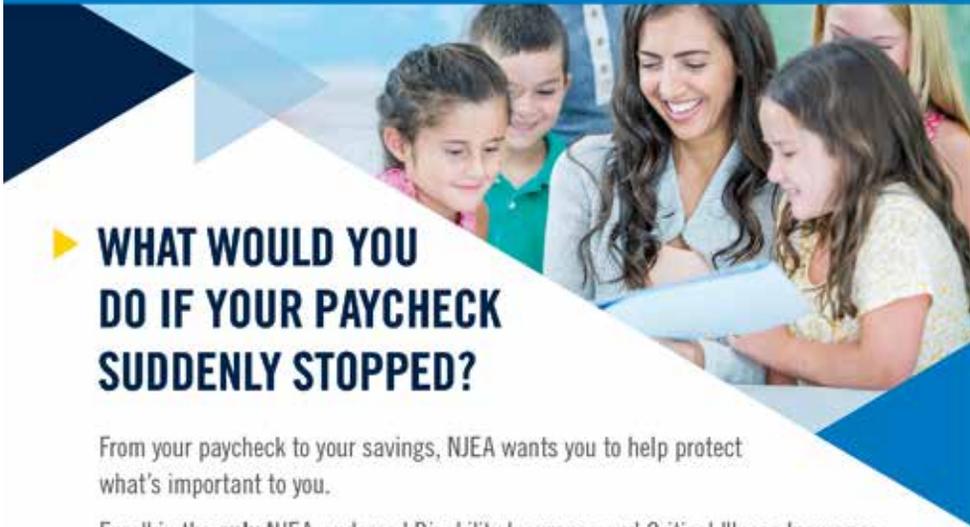
Financial Literacy in Sports

Thursday, July 29, 10-11:30 a.m.

How do athletes manage the financial windfalls that come with professional success? Explore the challenges that sports figures face when their dreams come true. Learn how we teach young people the basics of financial management through the lens of sports.

To register: yogiberramuseum.org/events/pdfinancial

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The teachable moment in a climate emergency

By Bonnie Reed

This is how climate change became real for me: I spent two months in southern Oregon last fall. When I arrived from the East Coast I had to quarantine in my Airbnb because of COVID. Within days, terrible wildfires burnt down two entire towns only a few miles from me. I was alone with my bag by the door in case I was ordered to evacuate. There was no way I could go out because the air outside was rapidly becoming dark and toxic. Then it began seeping through the doors and windows. That's also when reports began coming in of widespread power outages that would make my air purifier useless. It was horrible.

The climate crisis—which has already increased the frequency of transmission of animal to human viral diseases such as COVID, that has also increased the strength and frequency of wildfires, storms and floods, and that has exposed the limited extent to which our housing, electrical grid, health care institutions and other societal infrastructure can protect us—was no longer an abstract idea to me. I might easily have died in that climate-accelerated conflagration in Oregon if by chance the winds had been blowing in a different direction.

Still, what I experienced was nothing compared to the truly catastrophic consequences to human life and well-being that, according to the best scientific minds, will occur within the lifetime of my daughter and my two young grandchildren if the current trajectory of global warming remains unchanged.

I should have known what was coming long ago. I was a teacher and a union rep, and before I retired there were already spring days when my top floor classroom was so hot that we had to evacuate. The littlest children cried it was so bad. I had also listened to Greta Thunberg, the young student activist who launched the worldwide school strike movement for climate action. She was the same age as some of my students who were as concerned as she was about whether they would ever be able to realize their life's dreams because of climate disruption.

But it's not too late. This is a universal teachable moment for all of us, young and old, especially with President Joe Biden preparing to address the climate crisis as central to the security, health and economic well-being of the country. His administration has already rejoined the Paris Climate Agreement, established a Civilian Climate Corps, frozen all new oil and gas drilling on public lands, and announced that the federal government will convert its entire fleet to electric vehicles and double offshore wind energy capacity by 2030.

These are important first steps, but oil and gas interest groups are already organizing to oppose the more substantial legislative, regulatory and diplomatic initiatives that will be necessary within Biden's first term. We need to come together now to make sure that the climate debate remains rooted in science and not partisan politics.

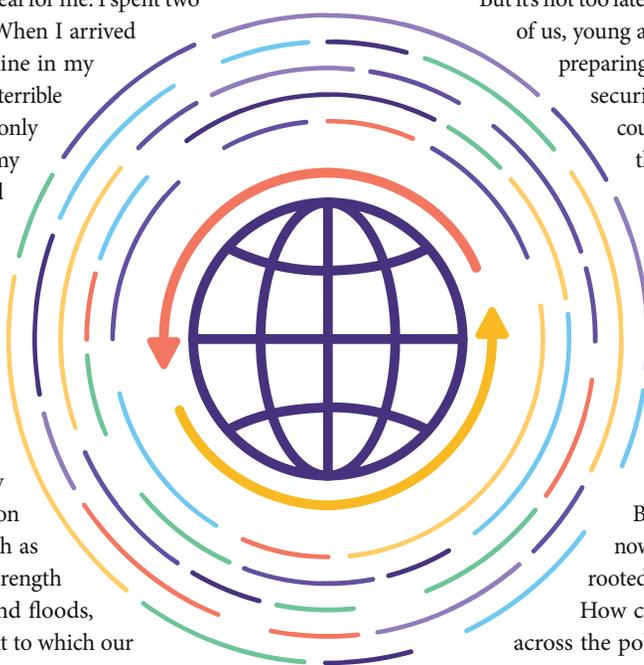
How can we do that? One way is to join hands across the political divide around our common health and economic concerns, as well as our concerns as parents and grandparents for the future health and well-being of our children and grandchildren. This is why NJEA members like me, who are also members of AARP, are working to bring the nonpartisan AARP and its 38 million members—that's more than 10% of the U.S. population—into the climate fight.

The climate emergency is an intergenerational crisis that requires an intergenerational response. Young people are leading the way because their future is on the line. But think of the impact it would have if AARP members from NJREA showed up in every school district in the state, or the state to which they retired, to hold teach-ins on the climate crisis in support of the student climate strikers? Think of the impact we could have on our elected representatives in every state of the union.

SIGN THE PETITION

If you are a member of AARP and would like to help make this happen, please consider signing our petition—[Petition2AARP.org/open](https://petition2AARP.org/open). Our students, our children and our grandchildren are depending on us. This is The Teachable Moment, and it may be one of the most important lessons we will ever present.

As teachers, we can help our students and our communities ground their response to the climate crisis in science. As parents and grandparents, we can take action to leave a legacy for those we love that we can be truly proud of—a livable world. 🌍



Bonnie Reed is an NJREA member. Prior to her retirement, Reed was a member of the Bloomfield Education Association and, over the course of her long and varied career, taught at all levels in the Bloomfield School District. She can be reached at paintb50@comcast.net.



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PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

WRIGHT, SAUSA, BURD, CLEMENTS, DODULIK-SWERN TO TAKE HELM AT NJREA

NJREA Election Results



Joan Wright, currently NJREA first vice president, will become NJREA president on Sept. 1, 2021. From left: Current NJREA President Judy Perkins, Gov. Phil Murphy, Wright, NJEA President Marie Blistan.

It will be a historic first this September when a new leadership team takes the helm of NJREA for the 2021-23 term. Joan Wright will be NJREA's first president of color. She will be joined by Harriet "Kitty" Sausa, Ronald Burd, Mary Clements, and Doriann Dodulik-Swern who will serve as first vice president, second vice president, secretary, and treasurer, respectively.

Wright, Sausa and Dodulik-Swern were unopposed in the bid for their offices.

"I have been blessed to see many firsts and the privilege to blaze the trail with many firsts: the first member of color female leader of my local, the first member of color as retired president in my county and now the first member of color as president of NJREA," Wright said. "Staff and students need our voices, as well as our support and service during these times. Now more than ever, we must stay true to our core values of equal opportunity, a just society, as well as collective action."

Wright retired after 44 years in education from

Conackamack Middle School in 2010, where she taught sixth grade math and served as president of the Piscataway Township Education Association, among other leadership positions. Wright has served as first vice president and secretary of NJREA. She has also served as the president of the Middlesex County Retired Educators' Association.

In 2007, Sausa retired after 35 years in education from North Haledon where she taught middle school health and physical education. In addition to other local leadership positions, Sausa was president of the North Haledon Education Association. In 2017, she was elected as secretary of NJREA and is first vice president of the Passaic County Retired Education Association.

Burd and Clements ran in contested elections. "I am excited about being elected," Burd said.

"I will work to the best of my ability to keep the trust of those who voted for me and work equally hard to earn the trust of those who didn't. I can't wait to get started!"

NJREA elections

In addition to voting for a new officer team, NJREA members elected representatives to the NJEA Delegate Assembly and the NEA-Retired Representative Assembly (RA), and the NEA RA.

NJEA Delegate Assembly

Barbara J. James
Roger Baker
Jacqui Greadington

Delegate Assembly-alternates

Joanne M. Palladino
Joan Jensen
Linda C. Calandra

NEA-R/NEA-RA

Joanne M. Palladino
Anita Schwartz
Betty Meeks Manning
Susan Maurer
Barbara J. James
Susan Jaysnovitch
William Brady
John Zurka
Roger Baker
Ronald Burd
Henry Varriano
David E. Brady
Mary E. Clements
Robert L. Carr
Arlene Pepe
Randy Allshouse

Ethnic-Minority Concerns Delegates to NEA-R/NEA-RA:

Anita Schwartz
Tauheedah Muhammad
Robert L. Carr
Barbara J. James
Betty Meeks-Manning
Barbara Jennings

A complete list of results can be found at njea.org/njrea.

In 2015, Burd retired after 42 years in education from the Lebanon Township School District where he taught middle school science. He currently serves on NJREA Government Relations and Planning committees, and is the chair of the NJEA Frederick L. Hipp Advisory Committee. He is also the president of the Hunterdon County Retired Educators Association (HCREA.)

Clements retired in 2014 from Hamilton Township in Mercer County, where she was a high school English and English as a second language (ESL) teacher. She has served as the Camden County Retirees' Education Association (CCREA) corresponding secretary, spent two summers on NJEA's Fellowship Program, sat on the county's Legislative Action Team (LAT), and was a delegate to the 2020 Democratic National Convention.

"Thank you to all who voted for me," Clements declared. "I am honored and promise to work hard and do my best to serve as your NJREA secretary."

Dodulik-Swern retired in 2016 from the Burlington County Special Services School District, where she was a special education teacher throughout her 40-year career. Using her long-time experience as an association treasurer, Dodulik-Swern has served as the BCREA treasurer since 2018, while also serving as the organization's special events chairperson. She is a member of the NJREA Planning Committee and currently serves as the NJEA Convention Committee's retiree representative.

"I am excited and looking forward to the start of my position of NJREA Treasurer," Dodulik-Swern said. "Even though I'm nervous, I think it's safe to say, 'Once a treasurer, always a treasurer!'"

Judy Perkins, in her final term as NJREA president, knows the power of the organization's membership and credits their ongoing efforts to make a difference.

"The county REA leaders and committee chairs faced numerous challenges this year, but kept members, conducted virtual meetings and supported our efforts to increase NJEA PAC donations and membership," said Perkins. "I thank them and am confident these leaders will continue to promote the goals of our newly-elected officers." 🏠

Around the counties

Due to COVID-19 concerns and restrictions, all meetings/events are subject to change. For questions, call your county REA.

Join **MIDDLESEX COUNTY REA** on Thursday, June 10, for its end-of-the-year meeting/luncheon at the Grand Marquis in Old Bridge. The annual MCREA scholarship awards will be presented. The cost is \$34. To attend, call Anne Chomko at 732-675-1734.

MORRIS COUNTY REA will host its "welcome back" meeting/luncheon on Thursday, Sept. 9 at the Birchwood Manor in Whippany. The cost is \$38. To attend, call John Beekman at 973-514-1080.

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Classroom Close-up NJ looks back at **21st Century School Nurse**

As the pandemic has shown, school nurses are vital to maintaining mentally and physically healthy students.

In this segment from the 2016-17 school year, Lynn Owen of Van Sciver Elementary in Haddon Township is one of more than 73,000 school nurses in the United States.

School nurses lead the way to advance health and to support education by ensuring that students are safe, healthy, and ready to learn. They are managing illnesses as well as achieving wellness and promoting positive academic outcomes.

You can view the segment at classroomcloseup.org/21st-century-school-nurse.



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 and visit www.classroomcloseup.org.



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

JUNE & beyond

Unless otherwise noted, all meetings and events are virtual.

6/4

Friday

**NJEA Executive
Committee
meeting**

6/26

Saturday

**NEA RA
Statewide
Caucus**

6/30-7/3

Wed-Sat

**2021 Virtual
NEA
Representative
Assembly**

7/14

Wednesday

**NJEA R.I.S.E.
Conference**

7/15

Thursday

**NJEA Conference
for Hope and
Healing**

8/5

Thursday

**NJEA PAC
Operating
Committee
meeting**

8/7

Saturday

**NJEA Executive
Committee
meeting**

8/7-10

Sat-Tues

**NJEA Virtual
Summer Leadership
Conference**

9/10

Friday

**NJEA Executive
Committee and
County Presidents
Council meetings**

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Visit [njea.org/jobs](https://www.njea.org/jobs).



LGBTQIA+ EDUCATION JUSTICE FORUM

Save the Dates

Oct. 16, 2021

10 a.m. – 1 p.m.

LGBTQIA+ Education Justice Forum

Sponsored by the NJEA Sexual
Orientation and Gender Identity
(SOGI) Committee

This event will be virtual.



Whether the need is great or small, NJEA members are there for each other

Over a year ago, NJEA, like every other entity in New Jersey and around the nation, ceased doing business as usual. NJEA staff worked from home as NJEA headquarters in Trenton and every field office across the state closed. Meetings with members moved to remote platforms. NJEA's conferences and other events were presented online.

While there were still considerable expenses associated with running remote versions NJEA's larger events, such as the NJEA Summer Leadership Conference and the NJEA Convention, there were nonetheless fewer funds expended than would have been for in-person meetings and events.

At the same time, many members and their families were suffering. Even if the educator member of the family continued to receive a paycheck, household incomes fell if the noneducators in the family lost their jobs or had their hours reduced. Educational support professionals (ESPs) were particularly at risk of lost or reduced incomes even as local, county and state association leaders successfully fought to make sure ESPs continued to be paid by their districts.

From the lessons learned following Superstorm Sandy when NJEA created a Disaster Relief Fund, the NJEA Delegate Assembly established a Pandemic Relief Fund Subcommittee at its Sept. 12, 2020 meeting, directing the subcommittee to investigate and recommend how NJEA could use funds that were unspent because of the pandemic.

The subcommittee acted fast to ensure assistance could be made available as soon as possible, asking the NJEA Executive Committee to put in place an immediate relief program to address food insufficiency. On Dec. 9, 2020, the Executive Committee unanimously approved short-term funding of up to \$100,000.

But it didn't take long to realize that much more assistance would be needed. In just a little over a week after the program was implemented, NJEA approved 68 applications totaling \$62,402. By Dec. 20, NJEA had received 160 additional applications equaling an estimated \$148,800.

The subcommittee recognized that the original allotment of \$100,000 approved by the Executive Committee wasn't nearly enough.

Consequently, the subcommittee went back to the Executive Committee to ask for additional interim funding to meet members' urgent nutritional needs. The Executive Committee, in an emergency session on Dec. 21, voted to allocate an additional \$400,000 in interim funding bringing the amount available for the program up to \$500,000.

On Jan. 9, the Delegate Assembly increased the allocation for the Pandemic Relief Fund to \$1.5 million. The program offers three levels of assistance based on the number of people in a household and based on U.S. Department of Agriculture October 2020 food cost figures.

While the food assistance program was underway, the subcommittee dedicated itself to finding other ways to assist members during the pandemic in the areas of mental health, social services, and finances. AID-NJEA (866-243-6532) is one such resource.

In late May, the first webinar to come out of the subcommittee's efforts, "Debt, Dollars, and Disasters" was presented with the tagline, "Whatever life throws at you, NJEA Member Benefits has the resources to help you take control of your personal finances."

This is what unions do. We stand together always, but especially when times are tough. AID-NJEA was launched in the wake of 9-11, and it's still just a phone call away. The NJEA Disaster Relief Fund was created in the wake of Superstorm Sandy, and it is still assisting members who experience severe property loss because of fires or natural disasters. And now the Pandemic Relief Fund is meeting members needs as they face food insecurity.

This crisis will pass, but what will not pass is NJEA's commitment to its members, and NJEA members' commitment to each other. 🏠

NJEA Pandemic Relief Food Assistance

As of May 12, 2021, the NJEA Pandemic Relief Food Assistance had assisted nearly 1,500 members and their families—affecting over 5,000 individuals—who were experiencing food insecurity as a result of the economic repercussions of COVID-19.

Applicants approved: 1,429
Approximate number of people fed: 5,153
Approximate cost: \$1,332,399
Applications pending: Approx. 100
Pending cost: Approx. \$100,000

Total approved and pending costs:
 Approx. \$1,432,399

Number assisted by county:

Atlantic – 359
 Bergen – 15
 Burlington – 40
 Camden – 19
 Cape May – 17
 Cumberland – 121
 Essex – 71
 Gloucester – 38
 Hudson – 51
 Mercer – 7
 Middlesex – 6
 Monmouth – 49
 Morris – 8
 Ocean – 219
 Passaic – 337
 Somerset – 10
 Sussex – 3
 Union – 56
 Warren – 1

Number assisted by category

ESP – 942
 Professional – 485
 Retirees – 2

Assistance breakdown

Number receiving \$599 – 332
 Number receiving \$930 – 741
 Number receiving \$1,250 – 356

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