

NEW JERSEY EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

# REVIEW

DECEMBER  
2023

njea.org

*an education and advocacy resource*

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'PROBLEM CHILD' MYTH  
MEET NEW JERSEY TEACHER  
OF THE YEAR JOE NAPPI

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**30** THE POSITIVE IMPACT  
OF THE ARTS

**34** NJEA CONVENTION PHOTO GALLERY

*Joe Nappi*

**2023-24 Teacher  
of the Year**





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The NJEA Patriots Alliance holds an annual breakfast at the convention. The Patriots Alliance is for NJEA members who are veterans or currently serving in the U.S. armed forces.



The New Jersey Public School Labor Management Collaborative held a conference in Atlantic City just prior to the NJEA Convention. From left: Catherine MacManiman (Westampton EA), Heather Polk (Clifton EA), Keith Presty (Highland Park EA), Martha Orrok (Clifton EA), and Heather Moran (NJ Principals and Supervisors Assn.)



At the Delegate Assembly meeting on Nov. 11, Jon Coniglio, a Morris County representative to the D.A., offered the inspirational message. Coniglio concluded his message with a proposal to Melissa Matarazzo. She accepted. Both are Dover EA officers: Coniglio is DEA president and Matarazzo is DEA secretary.



# FEATURES



## 22 | TEACHER OF THE YEAR JOE NAPPI

2023-24 New Jersey State Teacher of the Year Joe Nappi knows what it's like to be labeled the "problem child." School was not a great experience for Nappi. So much so that he laughed when his wife suggested he should be a teacher. But after 18 years in the profession, his success shows that those early experiences made him into the teacher all students—including the ones labeled problems—need at the head of the classroom.

BY KATHRYN COULIBALY



## 28 | A LEGO MAKERSPACE

A rarely used, small school hallway that served as a graveyard for old televisions, broken overhead projectors and immovable carts was transformed from an eyesore to a place of creativity and self-directed learning, when it became a Lego makerspace.

BY DOMENICK C. RENZI



## 30 | THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF THE ARTS

Educators in the arts know that when the performing and fine arts are central to a school's curriculum, the benefits extend to every aspect of a student's learning experience. Educators at the Passaic Gifted and Talented Academy know this well, according to the results of interviews conducted by the school's instrumental music teacher.

BY DR. LARISA SKINNER



## 34 | NJEA CONVENTION PHOTO GALLERY

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



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*Support leaders who value  
public education*



## THE NUMBER 224

**The number of local associations that have bargained a \$60,000 or higher starting salary in their current contracts**

The current average starting salary for certificated staff in New Jersey for 2023-24 school year is \$57,775. To date, 224 locals have bargained a starting salary of \$60,000 or higher during the life of their contracts. Read more about salary trends for certificated staff and educational support professionals on pages 18-19.

Sources: NJEA Research and Economic Services Division

## GOOD NEWS

### New Jersey residents support the right to read

By a 65-point margin (80%-15%) voters agree with the statement: "Parents have the right to choose what their children read, but they do not have the right to restrict the reading choices of other children. Banning books limits a parent's right to make informed decisions about what is appropriate for their own children."

**Source:** Public Policy Polling, NJEA-commissioned survey. See [njea.org](http://njea.org).



Joe Nappi, the 2023-24 New Jersey State Teacher of the Year, seeks to break the myth of the "problem child." Saddled with that label when he was a student himself, he has devoted his career to reaching students others may have written off.

**PHOTO BY**  
Kathryn Coulibaly

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NEW JERSEY EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

# REVIEW

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

President: Sean M. Spiller | Vice President: Steve Beatty | Secretary-Treasurer: Petal Robertson

Executive Director: Kevin Kelleher | Deputy Executive Director: Denise Graff Policastro

## Organizational Directory

### NJEA headquarters, Trenton

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### UniServ regional offices

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

#### UniServ South

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

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

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

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

#### UniServ Central

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### UniServ Northeast

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### UniServ Northwest

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

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

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

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

## MEMBERSHIP

Active professional: \$1,038 (full time); \$207.60 (full time \*low-earner); \$519 (part time); \$519 (on leave); \$207.60 (part time \*low-earner). Active supportive: \$505 (full time); \$101 (full time \*low-earner); \$252.50 (part time); \$101 (part time \*low-earner); \$252.50 (on leave). Retired professional: \$93; \$1,170 (retired life). Retired ESP: \$48; \$585 (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 2023-24 is \$22,500.







# PRESIDENT'S *Message*

## Standing with students, partnering with parents

One of the most important things that we do as educators is build relationships with our students and their parents. In order to teach and guide the students entrusted to us, we have to really see them and who they are—and are becoming—as people.

The 2023-24 New Jersey State Teacher of the Year Joe Nappi talks about his high school experience and how he felt unseen and unimportant as a teenager. It led to upheaval, a precarious academic experience, poor mental health and other struggles. His firsthand account of the importance of listening to students and treating them with dignity and respect is powerful, and one that we all should take to heart. It shouldn't be a politically charged decision to listen to students and work toward their best interests, but somehow it has become one.

NJEA recently commissioned a poll conducted by Public Policy Polling to look at voters' attitudes towards several issues that have become hot buttons in the current political climate, from the rights of LGBTQ+ students to the rights of all students to have access to diverse books and curricula.

We were heartened to find that voters overwhelmingly stand with students and understand that teachers, coaches and educational support professionals are good partners to parents in helping their children succeed and live happy, safe and fulfilling lives.

In addition, we found that:

- By a 56-point margin (74%-18%) voters agree with the statement: "Politicians shouldn't force teachers to 'out' a student who is gay or is using a different pronoun. Forced outings can harm students mentally or cause bullying. It should be up to the student, not politicians, to decide when to reveal their gender identity."
- By a 59-point margin (77%-18%) voters agree with the statement: "It's up to a student to decide when they are ready to talk to their parents about their sexual orientation or gender identity."
- By a 65-point margin (80%-15%) voters agree with the statement: "Parents have the right to choose what their children read, but they do not have the right to restrict the reading choices of other children. Banning books limits a parent's right to make informed decisions about what is appropriate for their own children."

In our current polarized political climate, these results demonstrate that New Jersey voters remain deeply committed to the emotional and educational well-being of students. The misinformation and disinformation about our public schools that has been flooding our state has certainly done damage to students, parents and educators alike. But it has not broken the fundamental trust New Jersey residents have in our public schools and our educators. And it certainly has not broken the strong bond we have with the parents who entrust us with their children's education and welfare.

Thank you for all that you do to stand for students, like Joe, and thousands of others throughout the course of your careers who need you to listen, to care and to advocate for them.

In Unity,



## SEAN M. SPILLER

Facebook

@SpillerforNJEA: Wow! The first day of our 2023 #njeaconvention was inspiring, educational, and fun. From incredible, thought-provoking keynote speakers to engaging conversations with hundreds of NJEA members, we had an amazing time growing as educators and learning together. #WEareNJEA #UnionStrong

On Nov. 9, NJEA President Sean M. Spiller shared images from the NJEA Convention. He was pictured with fellow NJEA officers and Gov. Phil Murphy; interviewing the film icon, Spike Lee; standing with actresses turned authors, Karyn Parsons and Emily Hampshire, and social media influencer Nick Ferroni; standing among veterans who are also NJEA members at the Veterans' Breakfast; and a host of other members and special guests.

## STEVE BEATTY

Facebook

@SteveBeattyNJEA: Went to bed looking at some positive preliminary election results. Woke up to an even better reality—one that NJEA members all around the state had an active and large part in shaping. Canvassing, calling, voting in large numbers everywhere! ... clearly, voters have rejected the politics of hate and division towards a better tomorrow all the way down the ballot to council and BOE races!! ... NJEA members, hold your heads high for what we've all accomplished—helping to get proven supporters elected to office! ...

On Nov. 8, NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty shared a photo outside of his voting location, in front of a "VOTE HERE" sign after casting his ballot on Election Day.

## PETAL ROBERTSON

Facebook

@PetalforNJEA: I loved chatting with our future educators. If you know anyone going into our wonderful field of education, be sure you introduce them to our NJEA Preservice crew.

On Nov. 12, NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson shared a photo with members from NJEA Preservice, while visiting their booth at the NJEA Convention. In the shared post, NJEA Preservice noted that a highlight was getting to have a powerful conversation with Robertson about diversity in the field of education.

OFFICERS ONLINE

# The ADVOCATE

## RESOURCES FOR YOUR LOCAL ASSOCIATION

### Post your NJREA Newsletter in your faculty room or break room

Are you an NJREA life member who joined prior to retirement? If so, you should be receiving your NJREA Newsletter along with your NJEA Review in September, December, March and June.

One way to encourage others to join NJREA, either at retirement or as preretirement life members, would be to post the newsletter in your faculty room, office or break room. An opportunity to peruse the NJREA Newsletter will show currently active members the value of joining NJREA.

To learn more NJREA, visit [njea.org/njrea](http://njea.org/njrea).

### Are you interested in running for office?

Do you want to learn more about running for office and campaigning? Think about attending Ready to Run, offered by Rutgers' Center for American Women and Politics. This year, Ready to Run is scheduled for March 15-16, 2024.

NJEA offers scholarships for women to attend the program. This includes registration fees, a dinner meeting in New Brunswick and hotel accommodations (double occupancy) for those who are interested in staying overnight.

The conference is at the Douglass Student Center in New Brunswick. Preconference programs designed by and for Latinas, Black women, and Asian American women are held beginning at noon on Friday, March 15. The conference begins at 4:15 p.m. on Friday with a welcome and plenary session addressing digital strategies for candidates, campaigns and advocates.

Saturday's program offers two tracks: "I'm Ready to Run, Now What?" and "I'm Not Ready to Run Yet, But..." More information is available at [njea.org/readytorun](http://njea.org/readytorun). If your schedule does not permit you to arrive on time on Friday, you are still eligible to apply for a scholarship and attend the program

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## Election 2023 – NJREA Members Left No Vote Behind!

Election 2023 is over! For the first time in many years, NJREA members knew who many of the winners were before they went to bed! In New Jersey, voters are fortunate enough to have an election every year – and this year voters had the opportunity to vote for members of the state legislature – all 40 senators and 80 members of the assembly. NJEA PAC made endorsements in 36 of the 40 legislative districts. NJEA PAC-endorsed candidates were victorious from the bottom to the top of the state. More than 90% of PAC-endorsed Senate candidates and 90% of endorsed Assembly candidates won their election.

NJREA members once again did their part by showing up and getting out the vote. Since the primary election, they were advocating in full force. They sent over 7,000 vote-by-mail reminder postcards, followed up with phone banks for vote-by-mail drives, sent over 10,000 get-out-the-vote postcards for the general election, door-knocked for candidates, volunteered their time in campaign offices for endorsed candidates, increased their PAC contributions, invited PAC-endorsed candidates to their retiree luncheons, attended Legislative Action Team Meet and Greets, supported local association Meet the Candidate Nights, supported active member engagement events, created an NJREA Hustle team, and most importantly, cast their votes for the candidates who best support public employees. Several NJREA members even ran for public office and WON! All in all, their participation in this election pushed NJEA PAC-endorsed candidates over the finish line.

Each and every one of these actions paid off for members as NJREA will once again have a legislature that will support Gov. Murphy as he approaches the end of his final term in office. Building our collective power is critical because this is a governor who has kept his commitment to public employees and public educators. This past June, Gov. Murphy made the third full pension payment into a pension fund that has been severely underfunded and neglected. This payment will begin to stabilize the pension, which is far from where needed in order to restore the COLA. That is why every election matters and every NJREA member needs to be involved.

The awful reality is that NJREA members are still living with the consequences of P.L. 2011,c.78 – the Pension and Health Benefits Reform Law, the law that eliminated COLA. And in order for it to be restored, NJEA active and retired members must elect legislators and future governors who will continue to commit to making full pension payments now and until 2042.

The work for the 2024 election begins now. New Jersey voters will elect a U.S. President, U.S. Senator and all 12 members of Congress. As candidates start to declare their intentions, NJREA and NJEA members will continue to work toward the goal of building the base of voters and activists from this year's campaign and to recruit others who refuse to sit back without having their voices heard. The base that NJEA active and retired members build during the next year must be ready for the 2025 gubernatorial race. Nothing can be taken for granted and no vote can be left behind. There is too much at stake.



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SAVE THE DATE!

Spring luncheon  
April 18, 2024, 10 a.m.  
Masonic Fellowship Center  
1114 Oxmead Road  
Burlington, NJ

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



## MEMBERSHIP CHAIR SPOTLIGHT

### Cherry Hill EA teamwork keeps members engaged

*By Ani McHugh, NJEA Communications Consultant*

When Cherry Hill Education Association President Steve Redfearn assumed his position in 2016, he inherited a binder with membership paperwork—but his local didn't have a dedicated membership chair to process any of it.

Now, eight years later, CHEA has three membership chairs—and it's one of the leading locals in terms of member enrollment and retention. Nearly 98% of the district's 1,200 professional staff are active association members, and this level of engagement is the direct result of ongoing and coordinated efforts by Melissa Reitano, Joy Patterson and John Aiello, who manage every aspect of membership.

Keeping track of and engaging this number of members—who are spread throughout 20 buildings in the district—is no small task, but it's one Melissa Reitano takes great pride in. Over the years, Reitano has developed a strong working relationship with the district's Human Resources Department, and the partnership allows her to access employee information and keep her records current.

According to Redfearn, Reitano has “spreadsheets for everything,” and her commitment to organization helps her process membership applications efficiently, track and follow up with potential members and ensure that staff whose assignments change or who take leaves of absence maintain understand how to maintain their association membership.

Since the district generally hires between 40 and 70 new staff each year, Reitano says that forming relationships with potential members early on is a critical part of CHEA's membership successes. Each summer, CHEA membership chairs organize happy hours and dinners for new staff—sometimes even before the district's first day of new staff orientation—and Reitano takes time at orientation each year to discuss the benefits of membership and distribute applications. She follows up with each potential member to answer their questions, help them become comfortable in their new environment and ensure their association enrollment is processed quickly.

Once members are settled in, they quickly come to know John Aiello and Joy Patterson, CHEA's membership chairs who coordinate social functions. One of the challenges large locals face is their inability to meet as an entire membership, since few spaces can accommodate so many people—but Aiello and Patterson do their best to make sure they provide their members with plenty of opportunities to gather together and build relationships outside of their own buildings. In addition to holiday

parties and happy hours, members can look forward to comedy shows and Phillies, Sixers and Flyers outings that are organized by their membership chairs.

In addition to hosting social functions, CHEA leadership works with district administrators to provide meaningful professional development for members. By contributing to a portion of a speaker's fees, the association is able to have a say in the type and quality of professional development members receive. In October, the district and CHEA joined forces to host Dr. Brad Johnson, an expert in school culture and climate, for an in-service day. Redfearn notes that one of the best ways to highlight the value of membership is to put members' dues to work for them.

A final component in CHEA's success is the association's ability to communicate consistently and effectively with members. In addition to posting information on the local's website and multiple social media accounts, Redfearn sends out a newsletter that highlights important news, updates and upcoming events on the 15th of every month.

Ultimately, it is difficult to overstate the importance of a strong, organized local, and Melissa Reitano, Joy Patterson and John Aiello are proof that membership chairs play a critical role in a local's ultimate success.



### Key takeaways

- Communicate regularly with Human Resources.
- Keep records.
- Organize events for staff.
- Build relationships with potential members early on.
- Take time to follow up.
- Offer regular opportunities for new and experienced members to socialize outside of their own buildings.
- Make sure members see how their dues are put to work for them.
- Communicate, communicate, communicate.

# COOL STUFF



## BRAIN INJURY ALLIANCE SAFE DRIVING PROGRAM FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

Calling all educators working with college students. Join the College Roads and Safety Habits (CRASH) Project, a peer-to-peer program hosted by the Brain Injury Alliance of New Jersey. CRASH empowers students to lead transportation safety campaigns on campus and in their community to reduce car crashes and pedestrian risks, with guidance from a BIANJ adviser. Student groups receive a \$1,000 stipend to help implement their campaign and compete against other colleges for additional prizes. Students gain valuable leadership experience, accrue volunteer hours, and address a critical public safety concern. Projects will be showcased on BIANJ's website and shared with community partners. For more information and to apply, visit [jerseydrives.com/crash-project](http://jerseydrives.com/crash-project).



## AMERICAN REVOLUTION SPEAKERS AND RESOURCES

The New Jersey Society, Sons of the American Revolution (NJSSAR) can help you find qualified speakers for your classroom on various Revolutionary War topics. Topics include colonial life, soldier life, founding documents, spies during the revolution, letter writing, colonial toys, medicine and cooking. Speakers can also talk about local events and New Jersey's role during the revolutionary era. Speakers may be academics, educators, authors, historic site staff or public historians. Some speakers can come dressed in period clothing. NJSSAR can advise educators about field trips to New Jersey, or other TriState Revolutionary War sites. For more information visit [njssar.org/edu-speaker](http://njssar.org/edu-speaker).



## CONVERSATION STARTERS – FOR GRADES 5 AND UP

Articles published in the New Jersey State Bar Foundation's *The Legal Eagle*, *Respect* and *The Informed Citizen* can spark thoughtful classroom conversations during special months, such as Women's History Month, special weeks such as Constitution Week, and on special days, such as Earth Day, throughout the year. Visit [njsbf.org](http://njsbf.org).



## NJSBF SPEAKER'S BUREAU – REQUEST A FREE SPEAKER FOR YOUR SCHOOL OR CLASSROOM

The New Jersey State Bar Foundation offers a free Speakers Bureau, where volunteer attorneys address school groups throughout the state on numerous areas of the law (and on career days). Attorneys typically speak for approximately 60 minutes, including time for questions. Please allow at least 60 days for the arrangement of your request. Flexibility in date selection is appreciated. In-person and virtual options are available. Visit [njsbf.org/school-based-programs/speakers-bureau](http://njsbf.org/school-based-programs/speakers-bureau).



## NJSBF FALL ISSUE OF RESPECT – FOR GRADES 6 AND UP

The fall 2023 edition of *Respect*, the New Jersey State Bar Foundation's diversity and inclusion newsletter is now available. This issue of *Respect* features articles on congressional voting districts, challenges and protections when adopting Native American children and discrimination Muslim women face when wearing hijab. Free copies can be ordered for classroom use or a PDF of the issue can be downloaded. Individual articles can be read and printed from *Respect's* blog, *The Rundown* at [njsbf.org/the-respect-rundown](http://njsbf.org/the-respect-rundown). Print versions can be ordered from [publications.njsbf.org](http://publications.njsbf.org). Braille and audio available.



# A+ EFFORT

## ROBERT SCHULTE NAMED AMERICAN HISTORY TEACHER OF THE YEAR



Hamilton Township teacher Robert N. Schulte is the 2022 Reverend John Witherspoon American History Teacher of the Year.

The New Jersey Society, Sons of the American Revolution, awarded the 2022 Reverend John Witherspoon American History Teacher of the Year Grant to Robert N. Schulte.

"His work inspires the cause of educating our youth about our founding history," wrote the society in announcing his award.

Schulte teaches eighth-grade social studies at Reynolds Middle School in Hamilton Township, Mercer County, focusing on American History from Colonization through Reconstruction. He is a reenactor who participates annually in Washington's Crossing and local battles at Trenton and Princeton. He also works with the American Revolution Institute of the Society of the Cincinnati to present

professional development on teaching the American Revolution to educators nationwide, both online and in person.

Schulte recently published a historical review focusing on the book *Treacherous Beauty: Peggy Shippen, The Woman Behind Benedict Arnold's Plot to Betray America*, where he discussed Shippen's role in Arnold's defection to the British side.

Schulte's award application was forwarded to the Education Director of the National Society, Sons of the American Revolution as New Jersey's candidate for the SAR Dr. Tom and Betty Lawrence History Teacher of the Year Award. On June 21, 2023, he was named the winner in the Middle School category.

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## MEET THE NJEA MEMBERS WHO ARE THE 2023-24 COUNTY TEACHERS OF THE YEAR

NJEA is proud to join with students, school employees, parents and others in congratulating the NJEA members who are the 2023-24 New Jersey County Teachers of the Year.



1.



2.

### 1. Atlantic

Erin Sharpe, science  
Cedar Creek High School, Greater Egg  
Harbor Regional High School District



3.



4.

### 2. Bergen

Gary Whitehead, English language arts  
Tenaflly High School, Tenaflly School  
District



5.



6.

### 3. Burlington

Nicola Recla Fischer, kindergarten  
Captain James Lawrence Elementary  
School, Burlington City School District



7.



8.

### 4. Camden

Ron Smith, environmental science  
Haddonfield Memorial High School,  
Haddonfield School District



9.



10.

### 5. Cape May

Alison Curvan, language arts and social  
studies  
Stone Harbor Elementary School, Avalon  
Stone Harbor School District



11.



12.

### 6. Cumberland

Betsy Harrison, music  
Cumberland Regional High School,  
Cumberland Regional High School District



13.



14.

### 7. Essex

Shamshadeen Mayers, social science  
Bloomfield High School in the Bloomfield  
School District



15.



16.

### 8. Hudson

Jennifer Donnelly, science  
José Martí STEM Academy, Union City  
School District



17.



18.

### 9. Hunterdon

Gargi Adhikari, special education  
Holland Brook School, Readington  
Township School District



19.



20.

### 10. Mercer

Yulieth Le, fourth grade  
Lawrence Intermediate School, Lawrence  
Township School District

### 11. Middlesex

Julie Mercier, English language arts  
North Brunswick Township High School,  
North Brunswick Township School District

### 12. Monmouth

Joe Nappi, social studies  
Monmouth Regional High School,  
Monmouth Regional School District

### 13. Morris

Robin Meyh, health and physical education  
teacher  
Mendham High School, West Morris  
Regional School District

### 14. Ocean

Jaclyn Potochar, English language arts  
and science  
Lake Riviera Middle School, Brick  
Township School District

### 15. Passaic

Amanda Rhodes, fifth grade teacher  
Clifton School 11, Clifton School District

### 16. Salem

Andrea Wendell, science  
Pittsgrove Township Middle School,  
Pittsgrove Township School District

### 17. Somerset

Corinne Laurie, health and physical  
education  
North Plainfield Middle School, North  
Plainfield School District

### 18. Sussex

Tara Scrittore, kindergarten  
Hamburg School, Hamburg School District

### 19. Union

Kristen Hickman, STEAM  
Roselle Park Middle School, Roselle Park  
School District

### 20. Warren

Colleen Grzywacz, vocal music  
Hackettstown Middle School,  
Hackettstown School District



A constant, comforting presence

## Meet 2023 Bergen County ESP of the Year Linda Kerwin



2023 Bergen County ESP of the Year Linda Kerwin (l) with Bergen County EA President Sue McBride.

Linda Kerwin lives across the street from the school where she works as a paraprofessional in Bergenfield. She began her career working for the Fiat Corporation, but after having two daughters, she started working in the school's lunchroom.

"It worked out perfectly because my husband is a custodian in Dumont, and I got to see my daughters at school," Kerwin says.

Slowly, over time, the school took hold of Kerwin's life. She was initially asked to help out with specials for students with special needs. She said "Of course," even as she continued to work in the lunchroom. Then, she was asked to be a teacher's aide in the preschool program. After 16 years, she was asked to be a one-on-one aide with a kindergartener in a wheelchair. Through it all, the lunchroom work was a constant.

After working in the resource room with early elementary students, Kerwin now finds herself working with fourth and fifth graders.

"I really like working with the children," Kerwin says. "Some kids are challenging, but the good outweighs the bad. When I started, some of these kids were so fragile, but now I see them as grown-ups and it's amazing."

Kerwin loves seeing her students grow and thrive.

**When I started, some of these kids were so fragile, but now I see them as grown-ups and it's amazing.**

"One of my preschool students has gone on to become a speech therapist," Kerwin says. "She travels the world for work. She came to the school to do an internship and I couldn't believe that she remembered me. I'm so proud of her!"

Kerwin has seen a lot of changes over the course of her career, and she has become a fierce advocate for educational support professionals.

"People need to see what we do for our students," Kerwin says. "We are doing real, physical labor in a compassionate way. I don't know how many times I was hit or had a chair thrown at me. We have students who wear diapers. Yet so many of our members don't even receive health benefits because the district holds them as 'part-time' employees."

Kerwin is a building representative and serves on the negotiations committee. She fights for all the members, regardless of job category.

"I was shocked when I was named the Bergen County ESP of the Year," Kerwin says. "I'm not one who puts the spotlight on myself. I called up the people who nominated me and asked, 'Why did you do that?' They laughed at me and told me I fight for our members—for everyone—and that I deserve it." 🙏



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# New law mandates school threat assessment teams

*By Katrina Homel, Esq.*

The Threat Assessment Law is a new state law that requires all public school districts and charter and renaissance schools to establish policies and procedures to identify and respond to potential threats in school. Policies must include assessment, intervention and response in situations where a student's behavior may pose a threat to the safety of the school community. Districts were required to comply by the beginning of this school year.

The law also requires districts to provide guidance and training for students and staff on how to identify students of concern, designate specific school officials to whom this information should be reported, and determine how this should be communicated to students and staff. Schools must also create threat assessment teams. These teams assist in identifying potential threats to the school and deliver intervention strategies.

When Gov. Phil Murphy signed the law on Aug. 1, 2022, New Jersey joined a growing group of states that have enacted similar legislation. Virginia, which had already mandated threat assessment teams for colleges and universities, became the first state in 2013 to require these teams at K-12 schools. New Jersey's Threat Assessment Law was introduced in the General Assembly in late May 2022, days after the tragic shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas. NJEA supported the bill, and Assemblyman William Moen Jr., one of the bill's co-sponsors, had reached out to NJEA for substantive input.

Under the law, each school must have a team that includes, at minimum:

- A school psychologist or other employee with expertise in student counseling.
- A teaching staff member.
- A school principal or other senior administrator.
- A school resource officer or other employee who serves as a liaison with law enforcement.
- The designated school safety specialist.

Schools may want to consider including additional staff, such as school nurses.

The New Jersey Department of Education issued guidance that allows districts to develop a central team when individual schools do not have sufficient staffing to meet the law's requirements. Districts may also have both school-based and districtwide teams.

**Threat assessment teams assist in identifying potential threats to the school and deliver intervention strategies.**

Team members receive enhanced training on issues related to school safety and student behavior. NJEA successfully advocated that this include training to ensure that there is no disparate impact for students based on a protected characteristic, such as race, ethnicity and other characteristics included in the law. Team members can be called upon to determine whether student behavior should be considered threatening.

If a district has not yet fully complied with the law, NJEA recommends that the local association contact its NJEA field representative to discuss sending a letter to the superintendent informing them of the district's obligations under the law and stating the association's intent to follow up. Because school violence has an impact on employee safety, it is mandatorily negotiable.

This letter to the superintendent, if it is determined one should be sent after the local association's consultation with its NJEA Field Representative, should not only request/demand prompt promulgation of a district policy and training for all employees, but also request/demand that the local association have meaningful input as to which association members are to be included on the team. Where there is a districtwide threat assessment team, the letter may include a demand/request that policy provides that the team will comprise members from each building in the district.

Additionally, the association should request/demand that immediate notice of each threat be given to the president of the local association and to an association-designated building representative at each building.

Members with questions should contact their NJEA field representative for assistance and questions about this issue. 📧

---

*Katrina Homel is an associate director of NJEA Legal Services and Member Rights in the NJEA Executive Office. She can be reached at [khomel@njea.org](mailto:khomel@njea.org).*

# NJEA Report

## Robbinsville EA wins 2023 NJEA Jim George Collective Bargaining Award



The Robbinsville Education Association is the winner of the 2023 NJEA Jim George Collective Bargaining Award. From left: NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty, former REA membership chair Amy Vera, NJEA Deputy Executive Director Denise Graff Policastro, REA 1st Vice President Sharon Martin, REA Co-Negotiations Chair Laura Foster, Membership Chair Erin Dailey, REA Co-Negotiations Chair Francine Mazzone, NJEA President Sean M. Spiller, REA President Jennie Paulino, NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson, REA Negotiations Team Notetaker Joan Osvart, REA Treasurer Kate Burgess, NJEA UniServ Field Rep Alex DeVicar. (Not pictured: REA Past-President Debi Bella.)

At the 2023 NJEA Jim George Collective Bargaining Summit, held on Oct. 20-21, the Robbinsville Education Association (REA) was named the winner of the Jim George Collective Bargaining Award.

The REA's story, which was covered in detail in the November *NJEA Review*, was a years-long journey for the association, one which saw them fight privatization, develop their community relationships, strengthen their local association and draw on the support and expertise of NJEA staff and consultants, ultimately leading to a strong four-year contract that keeps them near the top of their county.

To thunderous applause, REA President Jennie Paulino accepted the award on behalf of her negotiating team and the entire association.

The awards ceremony was a highlight of the conference, which brought together more than 220 members from across the state to network, share ideas and learn new skills to help them advocate for themselves and their members. This year's conference featured lab style workshops that facilitated discussions on a wide range of topics.

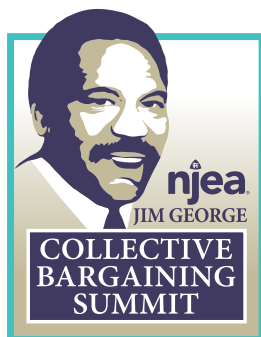
## Jim George Collective Bargaining Award finalists

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

- Bargained one or more new contractual provisions not already found in another affiliate's contract.
- Conducted an extraordinary community organizing effort that resulted in a contract settlement.
- Used the bargaining experience to propel new members into association involvement and leadership positions.
- Achieved a particularly good settlement, in comparison to the state average, in salary increases, health benefits, professional development, and/or member protection.

This year, after reviewing the 22 nominations, five finalists were selected. They were:

- Edgewater Education Association
- Hoboken Education Association
- Jackson Education Association
- Robbinsville Education Association
- Washington Township Schools Support Services Personnel Association



### Who was Jim George?

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

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

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



This year's NJEA Jim George Collective Bargaining Summit featured lab-style workshops that facilitated discussions on a wide range of topics.



# Locals set trends in bargaining

## Starting salaries are increasing

By Crystal Inman

The 2022-23 school year saw some remarkable strides toward raising the starting salaries of certificated staff. Locals reported an average increase of \$1,018 to the starting salary, a 10% increase over the previous year. That momentum has continued into the new school year as, so far, locals have reported an average increase of \$1,071 to starting salaries, an additional 5% increase over 2022-23.

To date, the average starting salary for this school year is \$57,775 and 224 locals have bargained a starting salary of \$60,000 or higher during the life of their contract.

The average number of steps on the guide has remained consistent at 17 for several years, but recently has begun fluctuating between 17 and 16 as each new settlement is reported. It is great to see that locals have not only focused on increasing starting salaries but are also making efforts to reduce the number of steps on the guide. By doing so, they are getting members closer to the maximum salary and increasing the value of each new settlement percentage.

On Jan. 1, 2024, the state minimum wage will increase to \$15.13 per hour. It is the responsibility of the school districts to meet that hourly minimum and it should be met outside of any new settlements. It is important for locals to ensure that all guides, including those calculated

at a yearly salary for an hourly position, meet the minimum wage requirement. To date, the average starting salary of an ESP guide is \$39,188, and the average starting hourly rate is \$20 per hour.

Striving for equity means addressing the disparity between those averages and the salaries of our lowest earning educational support professionals (ESPs). It is encouraging to hear that locals have been focusing on the often subtle ways to negotiate higher salaries, such as stipends for additional responsibilities, qualifications, training and education. Paramount to negotiating stipends, is that locals endeavor to build the extra pay directly into guides through column differentials that reflect the value of the work performed by ESPs.

### Settlement percentages continue to rise

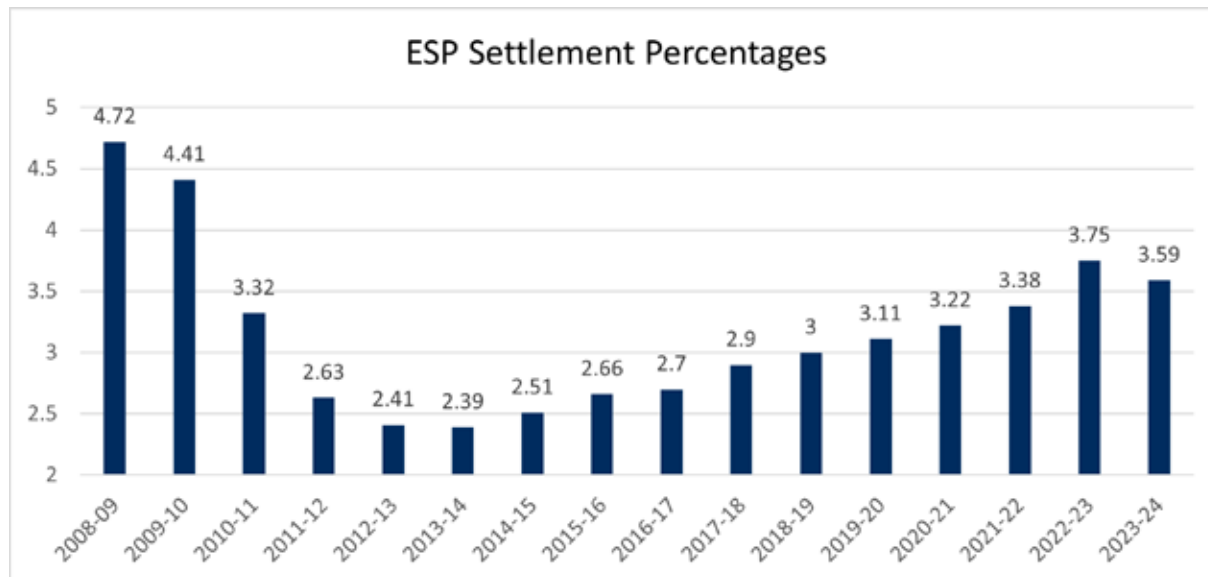
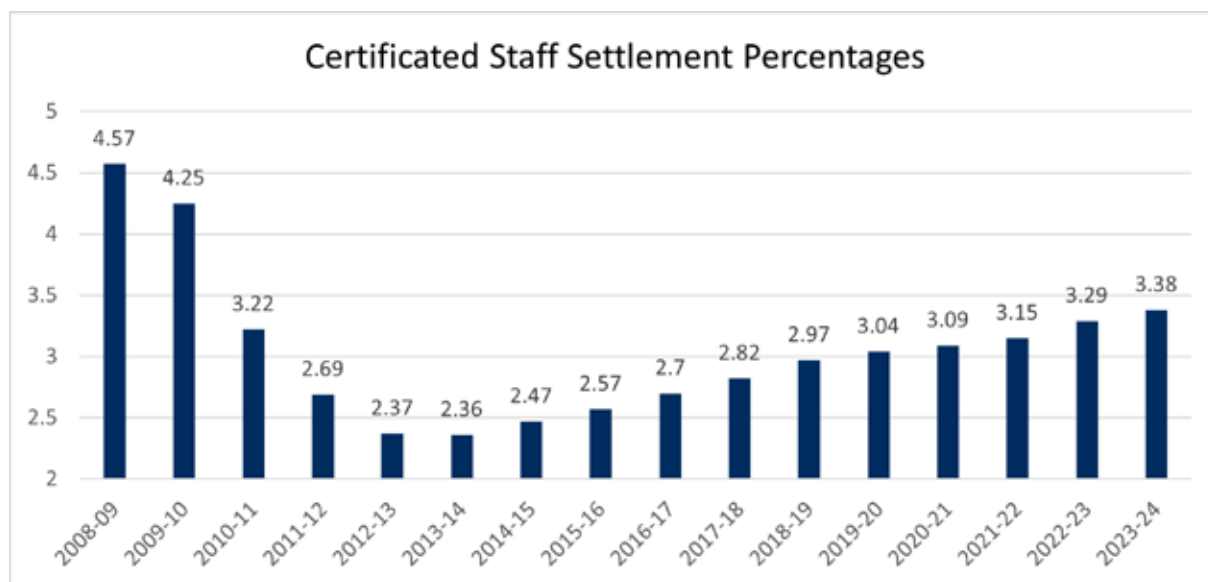
Four and five-year agreements continue to rise. Out of 199 settlements reported in the 2021-22 school year, 13% were 4-year deals and 10% were 5-Year deals. One hundred and sixty-one settlements were reported for the 2022-23 school year of which 15% were 4-year deals and 18% were 5-year deals. Heading into the 2023-24 school year, 78 settlements have been reported. Of those 78 agreements, 22% are 4-year deals and 31% are 5-year deals.



*Crystal Inman is an associate director in the NJEA Research and Economic Services Division. She can be reached at [cinman@njea.org](mailto:cinman@njea.org).*

Settlement percentages continue to rise as well. The 2021-22 school year saw an average settlement of 3.15%, inclusive of increment, for certificated staff across the state. The 2022-23 school year saw an average of 3.29% and, so far, locals have reported an average settlement of 3.38% for 2023-24. For educational support professionals, who

typically report higher settlements than certificated staff, the 2021-22 school year average settlement was 3.38%. This rose significantly in the 2022-23 school year to 3.75% and, so far, locals have reported an average settlement of 3.59% for 2023-24.



The settlement charts on these pages demonstrate the significant impact that participation in local and state elections can have on promoting education and those who educate our children. When members actively engage in the electoral process and elect leaders who prioritize education, positive changes can occur within communities

and the educational system. By voting for pro-education candidates, members can help shape the policies and decisions that directly impact schools, students, educators and their salaries. Let us not lose sight of that and continue the momentum of these bargaining trends into 2024.

# NJEA Frederick L. Hipp Foundation announces 2023-24 grant winners

The NJEA Frederick L. Hipp Foundation for Excellence in Education has announced 17 new grant winners for the 2023-24 school year.

Now in its 30th year, the Hipp Foundation has awarded 460 grants totaling more than \$2.49 million to public school employees across the state for innovative programs that benefit New Jersey's public schoolchildren.

The only foundation of its kind in New Jersey, the Hipp Foundation supports initiatives to promote excellence in education. Grants are awarded from \$500 to \$10,000, depending on the scope of the project.

For more information and to apply for a grant, visit [njea.org/hipp](http://njea.org/hipp). The annual deadline is March 1.



## Who is Dr. Hipp?

The grant program is named in honor of Dr. Frederick L. Hipp, a powerhouse executive director who led NJEA for 32 years and through substantial changes. Under his direction, NJEA membership ballooned from 27,000 to 110,000. Dr. Hipp passed away in 1991 at the age of

83. Two years later, NJEA honored Dr. Hipp's legacy by naming the grant program in his honor.



## NJEA Frederick L. Hipp Foundation announces 2023-24 grant winners

### **Empowering Latino Readers – Family Style! – \$9,248**

The Visions Grant for Social Justice  
Elmwood Park Education Association (Bergen)  
Grantee: Erica Romitelli

### **Discovering Diverse Texts – \$534**

Harrington Park Education Association (Bergen)  
Grantee: Kimberly Weber

### **Here We Grow II – \$3,900**

Northern Valley Education Association (Bergen)  
Grantees: Catherine Troia-Slutzky and Robyn Ivey

### **Outdoor Education, Learning Beyond the Classroom – \$10,000**

Flemington Raritan Education Association (Hunterdon)  
Grantee: Lisa Coster

### **Let's Move! Integrating Sensory Input Through Movement – \$3,600**

Princeton Regional Education Association (Mercer)  
Grantees: Elizabeth Steffee-Marmo, Jessica Fiorentino,  
Janel Stucky, Katherine Yeh, Jennifer Shea, Danielle Mag-  
nus, Rosanna Paco and Dineen Gruchaz

### **Oh the Places We Will Go! – \$2,680**

Middlesex Education Association (Middlesex)  
Grantees: Allison Caamano, Kirsten Vogl and  
Carol Goldman

### **Sensory Shelter – \$5,793**

Howell Township Education Association (Monmouth)  
Grantee: Josh Langenberger

### **Project UNREAL II – \$9,300**

Washington Township Education Association (Morris)  
Grantees: Amanda Miranda, Susan Ort, Kristen Spano,  
Kellianne Zuzuro and Jennifer Karp

### **Heart SMART – \$9,880**

Washington Township Education Association (Morris)  
Grantees: Kathleen Erbe, Kevin Churchill, Patti Ressler  
and Bonnie Hanna

### **Designing, Creating & Building = Constructing Knowledge – \$9,539**

Washington Township Education Association (Morris)  
Grantee: Mary Egan



**Opening the Door to Asian Cultures – \$2,000**

Paterson Education Association (Passaic)

Grantees: Tracy Chuan-chu Hong Syz 洪川筑, Emily Rose, Edred Bien-Aime, Christopher Fabor and Ivan Rosa

**HealthRhythms – Integrated Drum Therapy Program – \$3,717**

Wanaque Borough Education Association (Passaic)

Grantee: Canaan Bump

**Discussing Teen Issues – A Podcast – \$9,000**

Woodstown Pilesgrove Regional Education Association (Salem)

Grantees: Jim Dementri and Kimberly Mak

**In-School World Languages Cultural Field Trip Program – \$5,000**

Jack Bertolino Grant for Social Studies and Civics

Watchung Hills Regional Education Association (Somerset)

Grantee: Tyana Truong

**Project C.A.F.E. (Culture, Agriculture and Food Education) – \$10,000**

Montague Education Association (Sussex)

Grantees: Rachel Van Gorden and Lorie Jeskey

**Winter Thyme – \$10,000**

Winfield Park Teachers Association (Union)

Grantees: Mary Greeley, Loretta Puhak, Rachel Holeman and Kevin Baker

**Family Literacy Night: Bingo for Books II – \$2,900**

Washington Education Association (Warren)

Grantee: Lisa Buhl

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Meet Monmouth  
County and New  
Jersey State Teacher of  
the Year Joe Nappi.



# BREAKING THE 'PROBLEM CHILD' MYTH

MEET 2023-24 NJ STATE TEACHER OF THE YEAR

Joe Nappi

By Kathryn Coulibaly

Joe Nappi knows what it's like to be labeled "a problem child." After his parents divorced when he was four years old, he split time between his mother's home in Tinton Falls and his father's in Bayonne. Things came to a head when he was suspended from public school for the final 10 days of eighth grade and subsequently banned from graduation.

To try to get Joe back on track, his mother got him a scholarship from their local church and moved him to a local Catholic school. He was kicked out by Thanksgiving of his freshman year. So his mother had him enrolled in a juvenile probation program to try to "scare him straight."

His reputation preceded him when he entered Monmouth Regional High School after Thanksgiving.

"They had heard of me as someone who got kicked out of previous schools," Nappi recalls. "No one gave me an orientation, and no one took the time to explain the rotating schedule. They told me it was a 'J' day and thought I would just understand what that meant."

When he tried to follow the schedule as he understood it, he was repeatedly told, "You don't belong here." On his first day of school, he was rounded up in the hallway and received detention, but still no one explained the schedule.

The second day of school, the same pattern repeated. Nappi showed up at classes and was told he was in the wrong place. He got upset and tried to leave. Then he ended up back in front of the vice principal who suspended

him from school. When his mother found out he was violating the terms of his probation she had him arrested.

The next several years were tumultuous for Nappi. After spending time in a group home, he ended up living with his father and, while he was able to graduate from high school, he missed almost an entire year of school due to truancy. By the end of his senior year, after numerous discipline infractions, the district grudgingly made a deal with him: take your diploma and go—no prom, no senior trip and no graduation ceremony.

In a generous understatement, Nappi now says, "I did not love high school. It was not my favorite thing at all."

## Changing course

Nappi attended Ocean County College for computer science where he followed his father's advice to choose a profession where he could make some money.

"I hated it," Nappi says. "Sitting in a cubicle all day reminded me of being back in high school."

Two factors changed the course of his life and made him a teacher.

On Sept. 11, 2001, Nappi was affected by the terrorist attacks on the United States.

"Losing two family friends profoundly changed my life," Nappi says. "I wanted to do something that matters."

The other life-changing event was the influence of his wife, Cristina.

"I've known my wife since middle school," he says. "She always had this dream that she and I would go back to Monmouth Regional and teach together. When she told me I should be a teacher, I laughed her out of the room. I

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*Kathryn Coulibaly is the associate editor of the NJEA Review and provides content and support to [njea.org](http://njea.org). She can be reached at [kcoulibaly@njea.org](mailto:kcoulibaly@njea.org).*





**The fundamental focus of Nappi's career has been reaching those students others may have written off.**



hated school, why would I want to do that? But then she said something I couldn't stop thinking about: 'if you're in charge, it can be whatever you want it to be.' That flipped the script for me and set me on this journey."

Eighteen years and hundreds of students later, Nappi teaches history, psychology and a dual-enrollment class with Kean University called Holocaust, Genocide and Modern Humanity at Monmouth Regional High School. His classroom is right down the hallway from his wife Cristina, who teaches English and mindfulness, and who also draws on her past to engage and support students. Together, they sit on Monmouth Helping its Own, a charitable committee that he co-founded. They were both also advisers to Student Council for many years, creating an annual tradition called Battle of the Classes.

Today, this former problem child has been named district teacher of the year twice and now the 2023-24 Monmouth County and New Jersey State Teacher of the Year, a distinction that continues to astonish him.

Over the course of those years, Nappi has racked up an impressive resume. In the summer of 2022, he worked with PBS to develop lessons for Ken Burns' documentary, "The U.S. and the Holocaust." He is a Museum Teacher Fellow with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. In addition, he is a member of Phi Alpha Theta, the New Jersey Council for History Education, and the Center for Holocaust, Human Rights and Genocide Education (CHHANGE) at Brookdale Community College. Nappi is Monmouth Regional's representative to the Kean University Diversity Council on Global Education and Citizenship.

Nappi is also the district's former academic advisor and an assistant coach to the football team and currently serves as the Key Club adviser, part of the district's Equity Council and the chair of Monmouth Helping its Own, or MHIO.

Among his many honors, Nappi was named the Dr. Frank Kaplowitz Human Rights Educator of the Year from Kean University in 2017 and the Ida and Jeff Margolis Medallion for Excellence in Multicultural Education from Rowan University in 2005.

### **Reaching students who have been written off**

But the fundamental focus of Nappi's career has been reaching those students others may have written off.

"Building relationships with kids is what matters to me," Nappi says, as he remembers what it was like to feel as if no one in his life cared about him.



Nappi instructs Monmouth Regional High School students in world history, U.S. history, and a dual-credit class with Kean University titled Holocaust, Genocide and Modern Humanity. He prioritizes his relationship with his students. His goal is to give voice to his students who aren't normally heard.



One of Nappi's greatest achievements at Monmouth Regional has been the creation of Monmouth Helping its Own, a charity for and by the Monmouth Regional community to help students in need.

"Foundationally, I wanted to do that differently," he says. Nappi recalls the student who inspired him to create Monmouth Helping its Own. He was in his second year of teaching when he encountered a student who was considered a "problem" student, as he was.

"I went out of my way to build a relationship with her," he says. "We were playing a review game on a Friday when the student came in and refused to participate. She was scowling at me. I left her alone but approached her at the end of class to remind her that there would be a test on Monday and asked her to take the review document. She flipped out, tossed her desk, picked up another desk in the hallway and broke a window.

"At the end of the day, I saw her waiting for the bus and I felt like I had to talk to her," Nappi recalls. "I asked her what was going on. That's when she told me that her mother had left for Atlantic City ten days prior and hadn't come back. This student had no food and no one at home for ten days. She was only coming to school for the free breakfast and lunch. So of course, she was infuriated that with everything going on in her life, I was bothering her about a test."

It was Friday afternoon. Nappi gave her the money in his wallet, but he couldn't let the student suffer throughout the weekend. He went to her guidance counselor and asked what they could do. They made calls and got her some support, but Nappi felt like he needed to do more.

That night, he wrote the charter for Monmouth Helping its Own and set out to talk to staff about what could be done to help their students.

### **Monmouth Helping Its Own**

Sixteen years later, Monmouth Helping its Own, a charitable organization which runs completely on staff donations, has provided more than \$75,000 in direct aid and scholarships to students.

"I work with a team that includes a guidance counselor, Cristina, the school nurse, a member of the child study team and our student assistance counselor," Nappi says. "We see who needs resources, and then we do our best to provide them."

Students can receive Thanksgiving food baskets, holiday cards, winter clothes, vocational programs, SAT registration, and even the cost of utilities or groceries.

In addition to caring for—and connecting with—students who are in need, Nappi is constantly looking for ways to make school fun for his students.

### **Acknowledging each student's humanity**

His classroom, despite dealing with often very serious topics, is lively and engaging. With a voice like a game show host, Nappi weaves humor with information in a way that keeps his students' attention. However, he knows he's competing against very compelling distractions:



computers, cell phones, teenage drama and sometimes even heavier issues. Through it all, Nappi's goal is to make sure every student knows he cares about them as a human being.

He also knows that life has a way of derailing the best plans. After earning his associate degree from Ocean County College and a bachelor's degree from Rowan University, he was on track to earn his master's degree when his father had a stroke. Any discussion of graduate school was put on hold, and he went home to work and help his father pay the mortgage.

Navigating the twists and turns and painful parts of life has provided Nappi with a unique perspective on life and undoubtedly given him empathy for his students as well as his two daughters, Gianna and Toni.

Nappi is proud to have been named the Monmouth County Teacher of the Year and now, the New Jersey State Teacher of the Year. Among the perks of being named the Teacher of the Year is a six-month sabbatical where he will work with the New Jersey Department of Education in Trenton. But it's a bittersweet benefit of the position.

"I'm really bummed not to be with my students throughout the year," Nappi says. "This is what I love to do."

In addition to the sabbatical, courtesy of program sponsor ETS, Nappi also will receive \$3,000 worth of technology equipment. NJEA will provide a rental car, equipped with EZ Pass, to help him travel to speaking engagements and meetings across the state. NJEA also will provide complimentary access to all major NJEA workshops and training opportunities, a \$1500 clothing allowance, media training and communications support and funding for a trip to Washington, D.C. to meet with the other state teachers of the year and the president of the United States.

### **Teaching about the Holocaust and taking care of each other**

Nappi hopes to use his year in the spotlight to visit schools and talk about his experiences in founding Monmouth Helping its Own, in the hopes of seeing similar programs pop up around the state. He is equally looking forward to talking about what he has learned throughout his career as a teacher of the Holocaust in order to help teachers not just meet the state mandate, but to do the important work of teaching towards bias and prejudice reduction.

"Teaching about the Holocaust can show students why it's so important to stand up for themselves and others around them," Nappi says. "It allows students to realize that this didn't have to happen and gives them the chance to examine what can happen when we allow bigotry and intolerance to go unchecked. I want to use whatever



**Joe and Cristina Nappi, an English teacher at Monmouth Regional High School, collaborate at home, at work and on student clubs and charities.**

influence I have to make sure these lessons of the past are not forgotten. Intolerance should never be tolerated, and unfortunately, we need to be reminded of this now more than ever."

Nappi also wants to share his story with teachers to help them realize that there are no bad kids, only kids who are going through bad times in their lives.

"If you build relationships and get to know your students and their stories, you will be shocked at what you might find out and just how far showing you care will go with them," Nappi says. "I start every year by telling my kids that I don't ask around to other teachers about them. I could always tell the teachers who had heard of me when I walked into class, their expectations of me were already set, and I was more than happy to play that role for them."

Nappi hopes he can help break this "problem child myth" and help kids who, unlike him, didn't have the positive influences outside of school that helped him find success.

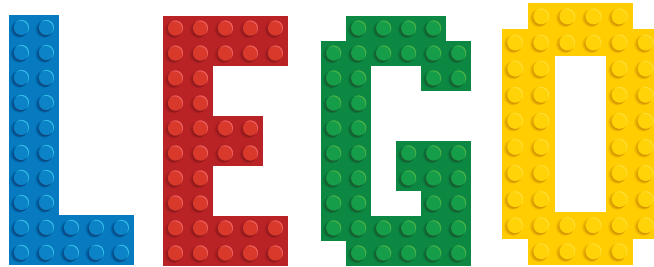
"Many of these kids are on their own," Nappi concludes. "If we can't help them, who will? I've done a lot of things in my career, but none of them has meant more to me than the kids I've helped. That's the most meaningful part of the job for me. It's not always easy, but nothing in life that's worth doing ever is." 🏠





Joe and Cristina Nappi with their daughters Gianna and Toni, at the New Jersey School Boards Association Workshop 2023.

# How my love for



## became a makerspace within my school

*By Domenick C. Renzi*

Every summer when I was a youngster, I could be found outside playing sports with the neighborhood kids from sunrise to sunset. When the weather didn't cooperate, I could be found inside building with Lego bricks. As I aged and realized my dreams of being a professional baseball player weren't going to come to fruition, my love of Lego remained. It has continued to grow during my more than 27 years in education.

Whether it was time spent as a fifth-grade teacher, an elementary supervisor, an elementary principal, or my current role as an elementary math specialist, I love sharing my Lego builds and creations with students.

Lego always found common ground with my math students. After all, Lego does have many math qualities. Bricks and plates are often in the form of arrays and can be used to teach area, perimeter and multiplication. Manipulating Lego bricks also helps to strengthen a student's spatial relations. Who would have thought that we could learn math and have fun at the same time?

### Notices and wonders

A few years ago, I noticed two things in my K-5 school.

First, we seemed to have more students with behavior plans who needed frequent breaks throughout the school day. On occasion, students and paraprofessionals would head to the gym to shoot hoops, if the gym was available.

If it wasn't, a walk around the building would have to suffice until the next break was needed.

Second, my school had a small hallway that was rarely used. The hallway led to the school courtyard but housed old televisions, broken overhead projectors and immovable carts no longer able to be wheeled. It was a true eyesore.

My notices became wonders: "I wonder if this hallway could be put to better use." "I wonder if this could be an area where students could build with Lego." This was when I put my two observations together and went to my principal with the idea of turning that hallway into a Lego makerspace.

### Simple steps to create a makerspace in your school

A makerspace is a creative prototyping workspace where makers gather to share knowledge, experiment, create, tinker and learn. Creating a makerspace involves simple steps.

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*Domenick Renzi is a math specialist at Wedgwood Elementary School in Washington Township. He is the 2018 Gloucester County Teacher of the Year. He can be reached at domrenzi@aol.com.*



Second-grader Nolan Jones holds a Lego build that he designed.

First, secure your space. Find an area in your school or classroom you can redesign to foster creativity. For me, that was our unused hallway now assigned to store old and outdated items.

Second, get creative with materials to build a hub of inspiration and activity for your students. Examples include craft paper, markers and crayons, glue, modeling clay and recycled materials. Our makerspace would contain only Lego bricks and plates.

Finally, invite students to explore, create and tinker as they communicate and collaborate with schoolmates.

### From a dream to a reality

A Lego makerspace empowers all students, at every grade level, to follow their curiosity wherever it leads them, in a safe, inspiring and instantly accessible environment. My dream of creating a Lego makerspace included bright yellow walls for that small hallway. On the walls Lego plates would be secured on which students could design and build. My school's maintenance staff helped that dream come true.

The Lego brick, with its simple and intuitive building system, is the perfect prototyping tool. Students start exploring with a handful of Lego bricks and begin to create, test, build and rebuild. As they work toward their ultimate goals, they continuously modify, retest and rebuild.

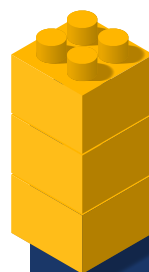
### Necessary for some, beneficial for all

Our Lego makerspace allows for our entire student population to engage in various self-directed activities with a teacher or paraprofessional. The makerspace also serves as an educational opportunity for students with behavioral plans needing to take a break from the structured environment of a classroom. There was no need to take a walk around the building hoping the gym was available. Now, any student could head to the Lego makerspace at any time during the school day. What was necessary for some students quickly became beneficial to all.

The creation of the Lego makerspace was the first of its kind in my school district as support and funding came from our PTO, community donations and grants. In the following years, the Lego makerspace was duplicated in all the other district elementary schools. Gone were the old televisions, broken overhead projectors and immovable carts. They were replaced with smiling kids, working together to manipulate Lego bricks to design and create whatever they could dream up. 🧱



Before and after: A seldom used hallway that had become a catchall storage space was transformed into a Lego makerspace.



## Benefits of a Lego makerspace

By encouraging playful learning and tinkering, a Lego makerspace:

- Supports the social and emotional development, creativity, and academic skills of your students.
- Builds knowledge, critical thinking and collaboration skills.
- Gives students the chance to be risk-takers and helps them accept and learn from their mistakes.
- Enables an environment of student choice and self-directed learning.





# MUSIC DOWN THE HALL

## The positive impact of the arts

*By Dr. Larisa Skinner*

As a music educator, I've often advocated for my own programs with the understanding that music benefits the whole student. I've experienced firsthand how students develop socially, emotionally and academically because of their involvement in my program. Involvement in music helps to develop discipline, self-esteem, community building, communication skills and grit, to name a few.

Most people would probably agree with the benefits of education in the arts. But as we go through the daily grind of the school day, these long-term benefits may be swept under the rug as we are bogged down by curricular deadlines, student management strategies, administrative tasks and achievement scores. Music teachers may find it hard to schedule adequate time to see their music students, and general education teachers may be reluctant to let their students miss class for music.

Even though we know the arts are good, even though we know we want those experiences for our students, sometimes priorities shift. At each developmental stage of a young student, participation in performing arts can have a significant impact.

### Prioritizing the arts

Until I recently accepted a position in Newark, I was fortunate to be part of a school community that has a high appreciation for and support of the fine and performing arts. That school, the Passaic Gifted and Talented Academy (PGTA), is part of the Passaic Public Schools system. According to the state's report card for PGTA, the city of Passaic is 92.5% economically disadvantaged and 30.5% of students are English language learners.

PGTA accepts students through an application process and offers a unique approach to student offerings and opportunities for elementary and middle school students. The school provides intensive study in the areas of performing arts (band, choir, theater and strings), visual arts (2D, 3D, digital and media art), and physical education (sports, coaching and health), in addition to their general studies.

In a conversation with PGTA Principal John Melody, we discussed how the school's approach to prioritizing the arts in scheduling benefits our students.

Upper elementary and middle school students receive six periods a week of their "strand," or major area of study. For example, a student would be scheduled for my string orchestra class three days a week for a double

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*Dr. Larisa Skinner is the new department chair of Visual and Performing Arts at Arts High School in Newark. Prior to the fall of 2023, she had taught instrumental music in Passaic for 12 years. She has also taught in Thailand, China, Hong Kong and Madison, New Jersey. She specializes in urban music education and through teaching music, she hopes to provide amazing, life-changing opportunities for her teachers and their students. She can be reached at [LSpitzer@nps.k12.nj.us](mailto:LSpitzer@nps.k12.nj.us).*

**Editor's note:** The author submitted a similar version of this article for publication in *Tempo*, the journal of the New Jersey Music Educators Association. It was published in October. Learn more about NJMEA at [njmea.org](http://njmea.org).

period. This equals to 240 minutes a week of music study, all happening during the school day.

I asked my principal if this amount of time negatively impacts their other studies. His response was, "No, actually quite the opposite!" Our school is the highest performing elementary and middle school in the district. Melody attributes our rise to the top to the arts, as an integral part of our achievement.

### Benefits of the arts in general education

My curiosity has led me to consider how my general education colleagues experience the benefits of music education in their own classrooms. I asked them two questions: "What role does music education play in our school community?" and "How is music education beneficial for our students?"

The ultimate goal was to better understand from an outside perspective what role music education plays in student development academically, socially and emotionally.

As teachers reflected on these questions, a major theme emerged. All the teachers interviewed expressed that access to music education positively impacts other aspects of a student's learning experience.

As students are introduced to and incorporated into the school music program, their involvement produces an immense inner and outer sense of pride and accomplishment. Successful experiences in music class provide students with the confidence to tackle challenges presented in their other classes. Teachers identified a definite connection between music and students' improvement in their academic and social-emotional skills.

### Great beginnings

At PGTA, second and third graders participate in music classes once or twice a week, equaling 40 to 80 minutes of musical instruction. In their music classes they learn singing techniques and music theory and receive instruction for the ukulele, recorder and violin. The school's vision is to provide rigorous instruction in core academic subjects as well as the arts, thus the second and third graders gain musical exposure that is foundational to their growth as students and musicians.

What do the teachers of our younger students see as the benefits of musical instruction? Prudence Price, a veteran teacher of Passaic Public Schools, is very committed to the arts personally and professionally. Having participated in music during her childhood and in college herself, and now with her daughter pursuing vocal jazz performance, Price understands what kind of impact music education can have on students as they navigate through their educational journey.



Fourth and fifth graders practicing on stage in a dress rehearsal for their upcoming concert.

Price witnesses the benefits of music instruction every day. As she reflected on music's impact on her students, she explained that music "acts as a catalyst for motivation that encourages the students to think abstractly as well as creatively." Her students look forward to violin class every Thursday and Friday.

"Socially, music education provides opportunities for students to meet, work and play alongside peers that have the same interests," Price explains. She also described how music gives her students an opportunity to experience success, especially if they struggle academically.

### Fostering growth

In fourth grade, PGTA students select their strands, choosing from different disciplines within the performing and visual arts. Because of the early exposure my string students have to the violin in second and third grade, many of my fourth grade students already have two years of musical experience under their belt when they join the band, choir or strings class. For the next four years, students will dedicate themselves to focusing on their musicianship and artistry in their specific field of study.



The second grade strings program paves the way for many years of musical advancement.



Amiyah Reynoso as a third grader showing off her skills with the "Twinkle Variations."

## **All the teachers interviewed expressed that access to music education positively impacts other aspects of a student's learning experience.**

Jen McGlynn, another veteran teacher in the Passaic community, fully supports students as they participate in the arts. A language arts educator by day and painter by night, McGlynn emphasizes the importance of artistic and self-expression as she described the impact the arts has had on her students.

"Students are so proud to be part of the band, chorus or strings," McGlynn says.

Pride in one's work is an invaluable gift to a child who may struggle in other academic areas. The confidence children receive from their music class fuels them to tackle other challenges in school and life.

McGlynn, who serves many of the English language learners and students who may be academically behind grade level, described how participation in the arts is a vital part of their life and their success. McGlynn states that possibly because of student participation in performing arts, "I see an improvement in students academically as they progress in the school year in fourth grade."

### **Direction for the middle years**

Sixth through eighth graders at PGTA continue to hone the craft they selected in fourth grade. Middle school is a tumultuous and tremendous time of growth and maturity. Much is expected in the areas of responsibility, academics and independence.

As sixth graders are given the opportunity to demonstrate that they can handle more challenging tasks, performing arts students at PGTA rise to the challenge. They explore their discipline with even greater vigor and are expected to perform with higher musicianship and more performing opportunities outside the school community.

Marina Vogiatzis, a sixth grade math teacher at PGTA, has noticed the impact of the performing arts on her students.

"Every day I see students come to my class with a sense of accomplishment after a successful practice," Vogiatzis says.

Likewise, Daniel Hennessy, sixth grade social studies teacher, describes how "the ability to act, dance, sing and perform music gives students a strong set of skills they can bring into the classroom."





Mit Patel (Cali Pathway Project), Amiyah Reynoso (eighth grader), and Joshvict Escamilla (N.J. Symphony Youth Orchestra) now perform at the advanced level as middle schoolers.

All of the teachers whom I interviewed agreed that participation in the arts is beneficial to student learning, emotional health and academic performance. Liliorara Helgiu, an eighth grade math teacher and avid supporter of the arts, agrees.

"It shows students that hard work is possible and that it pays off," Helgiu says.

Participation in our school's performing arts programs provides numerous opportunities for team building, positive attention and discipline during the crazy middle school years.

### **A challenge to walk down the hall**

Each school is one-of-a-kind—no school community can be replicated. We all serve a unique blend of students who are trying to navigate through a complicated and challenging journey called childhood.

As a member of the PGTA community, I was honored to partner with students as they learned how to play an instrument and to work alongside colleagues who understand just how important music can be in a child's life. I am excited to partner with Arts High School as a leader and continue to foster the artistic and academic

growth of students and teachers as they navigate the critical years before college and beyond.

Kathryn Ahern, sixth grade language arts teacher and newer member of PGTA, saw right away that the performing arts and academics were an integral part of our school.

"The music program here truly helps bring our school, students and staff together," Ahern concludes.

If the arts are not already foundational to your school's community, I challenge you to explore what may happen if you personally volunteer at a concert, intentionally seek out performing opportunities for your students, and encourage (and maybe remind) students to attend their lessons. It may make all the difference in that child's life, and ultimately help them perform better in your class!

Evelyn, an eighth grade cellist, described in an essay the importance of music in her life.

"It opened up a world I never imagined ... [my music teacher] has shown me a musical path I never knew existed," Evelyn said.

A walk down the hall to the music room may make all the difference! 🏡





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1: NJEA President Sean M. Spiller (center), NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty (l), and NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson (r) cut the ribbon to open the 2023 NJEA Convention, joined by national, state and local leaders in the association and public education.

2: Friday afternoon keynote speaker Alisha De Lorenzo.

3: NJEA Preservice member Halanna Oliveira (Kean University) sorts through thousands of books at the Booksmiles giveaway for her future classroom library.

4: With representatives from every county as well as higher education, NJREA and NJEA Preservice, the NJEA Convention Committee oversees convention programming.

5: Filmmaker Spike Lee and NJEA President Sean M. Spiller at Thursday morning's keynote session.

6: From left: Union Township teacher Nicholas Ferroni and actors/writers Karyn Parsons and Emily Hampshire discuss writing for young readers.

7: Friday morning keynote speaker Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg.

8: Goat Yoga returned this year to offer members time to recharge between sessions.

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



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9: The NJEA Higher Education luncheon included a panel with Hudson County Community College (HCCC) President Christopher Reber (l) and HCCC Professional Association member Antonio Acevedo. From left: Reber, Acevedo, NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson, NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty, and HCCC member Raffi Manjikian.

10: NJEA 2023 Burlington County ESP of the Year Sandi Wilcox is a proud member of ESPAN: The ESP Advocacy Network.

11: Thursday afternoon keynote speaker Ani DiFranco.

12: The Trumpet Chics, a part of the Camden Repertory Theater, greet members as they arrive at the convention. The group provides opportunities for students in the arts.

13: The NJEA All-State Chorus and Orchestra performance is an annual highlight of the NJEA Convention. (See more at [flickr.com/njea/albums.](https://www.flickr.com/photos/njea/albums/))

14: In the NJEA Consortium area, NJREA member Carmen Lozada-Cooper discusses resources for teaching the full history of the U.S. with Urban Education Committee Chair Todd Pipkin (left) and Human and Civil Rights Committee member Paul Bryant.

15: Presenter Sheridan Hotung-Pickeral in "Gamifying Reading Instruction for Struggling and Dyslexic Readers."

16: Piscataway EA member LMani Viney asks the State Board of Education about changes to the requirements for alternate route certification.

17: Following his speech, Gov. Phil Murphy visited educational support professionals and others in the convention's exhibit hall.

18: VinChelle reads about Stonewall during a Drag Queen Story Time session on banned books.



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19: Camden EA members Sue Bowen and Cathleen Ackroyd join Victoria Cuneo of Northern Burlington County Regional EA to make a peace ornament in the MudGirls Studio.

20: After a screening of "The Inventor: The Story of Garrett Morgan," NJREA member Dr. Gwendolyn Williams asks writer/director Philip Musey and Producer Cabral Clements a question.

21: From left: NJDOE Education Specialist Trevor Melton, 2022 NJ Teacher of the Year Theresa Maughan, Amistad Commission Executive Director Dr. Patrick Lamy, and Commission member Ane Roseborough-Eberhard present the workshop N.J. Amistad Legislation: Black Joy, Success and Innovation, Grades K-12.



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22: MudGirls, the official 2023 NJEA Convention Charity, receives a \$10,000 donation. From left: NJEA Executive Director Kevin Kelleher, NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty, MudGirls founder Dorrie Papademetriou, NJEA President Sean M. Spiller, NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson and NJEA Deputy Executive Director Denise Graff Policastro.

23: The NJEA George M. Adams Boardwalk Run and Fun Walk had its first in-person run since 2019. Look for results in the January Review and at [njea.org/bwrun2023](http://njea.org/bwrun2023).

24: From left: NJEA Preservice Vice President Kayla Kanarkowski, members Izabelle King and Chelsea Berwick and Secretary Bianca Nicolescu.

25: Thursday evening's highlight was a performance by the New Jersey All-State Jazz Ensemble and New Jersey Honors Jazz Choir in the Claridge Theater. (See more concert photos at [flickr.com/njea/albums](http://flickr.com/njea/albums).)

26: Kai Leigh Lancaster and Ryan Douglas, guests of Orange EA member Carol Douglas, enjoy the sights and frights of the convention's exhibit hall.

27: Pennsauken EA member Kendall Elliott enjoys a moment in Authors' Alley with Willingboro EA member and author Ronnette Smith-Powell.

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



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# What about the buses?

## Their air quality matters too

By Dorothy Wigmore

We want healthy air in schools. But what about school buses, where students and drivers spend so much time? How good is that air?

"The ventilation strategy is 'Open the window and drive faster,'" says Chrissy Kosar, a long-time school bus driver. Now president of Gloucester County Education Association, she counted on the one beside her seat.

Most school buses on the road today—like the large ones Kosar drove—have no ventilation system at all. Smaller newer ones are more likely to have air conditioning, which only cools the air without cleaning it.

Open windows aren't always possible.

"You tend to leave the windows up for the little ones, but it's not a healthy environment for students or drivers," Kosar explains. Open windows let in bugs, leading to screams and then closed windows. They also let in the rain and polluted air, including diesel exhaust.

There are other "bugs" in school bus air—including the virus behind COVID-19.

"If you're just sitting there with no ventilation, no defroster running, with all the windows closed, that's a bad situation," says Mike Van Dyke, an associate professor and industrial hygienist at the Colorado School of Public Health's Center for Health, Work & Environment.

School bus design regulations focus on death and harm in collisions. The pandemic has provided possibilities to talk about bus air quality. While most attention is on students, drivers' health also matters.

"The younger ones in school for the first time get every bug going, and so do the bus drivers," Kosar says. "My first two or three years of driving a school bus, I think I was sick the whole time."

Until the pandemic, no drivers wore masks or respirators. Instead, they counted on limited sick days and "getting used to" the viruses of the day.

Airborne hazards in a school bus also get pulled in through open windows. People around buses that are idling or stopped with the engine running also inhale their diesel fumes. Drivers also inhale fumes during mandatory daily (or more frequent) checks, from their own and other buses nearby at the same time.

State law limits idling to three minutes unless a bus stops for passengers.

Diesel fumes cause cancer and other harm, one reason for electric buses. They also contribute to air pollution. The most common small particles in air pollution (PM 2.5)—even at very low levels—are linked to cancers, diabetes, dementia and harm to multiple body systems.

### What helps?

Like other drivers, Kosar wants a bus with a ventilation system that protects drivers and passengers, one without "bugs" or other harmful particles in the air.

That requires retrofitting or new designs, after research to learn what really works. Long-term recommendations

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





include real ventilation systems with high efficiency particulate absorbing (HEPA) filters that clean the air of viruses and other particles, and respirators (like N95s, not surgical masks) designed to fit children's faces.

Ultraviolet light—which kills viruses—also can be installed in bus ventilation ducts if a system exists. The duct provides a covering to protect people from UV hazards. A 2005 study found a UV and electrostatic filter combination was 99% effective in removing particles and paid for itself in reduced system cleaning in just 18 months.

Those longer-term changes are expensive. But so are the consequences of sick kids and sick staff. Studies link diesel emissions alone to higher absenteeism rates, lower test scores, more asthma attacks, and worse respiratory illnesses among students. Bus drivers have not been studied.

Diesel retrofits are an immediate and relatively inexpensive fix with benefits. A recent study found that if all U.S. school buses had been replaced or had the retrofits, the EPA's 2012–2017 School Bus Rebate Program would lead to more than 1.3 million more student days of attendance each year. Bus drivers would benefit too.

An Australian pilot study with public transit buses suggests another relatively inexpensive solution: several portable air purifiers (without ionization).

Immediate improvements are possible. A 2020 Colorado study found running dashboard fans and opening all school bus windows reduced particle counts by an average of 84% and the time particles remain airborne by 80%. Opening doors also helped improve fresh air.



## What can health and safety committees do?

- Survey bus drivers about bus air issues, how often they get sick, if there are diesel retrofits, etc.
- Organize a meeting with the drivers and local leaders to review the results and decide next steps.
- Push the district to use the EPA's clean school bus program, install diesel retrofits and train bus mechanics accordingly.
- Investigate possible demonstration projects using portable air cleaners.



## References and resources

### National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences

*"The COVID-19 pandemic and biohazard containment," Brian Sherlock*  
[bit.ly/3FYQisi](https://bit.ly/3FYQisi)

### Environmental Protection Agency

*Clean School Bus Program*  
[epa.gov/cleanschoolbus](https://epa.gov/cleanschoolbus)

### Berkeley Center for Occupational and Environmental Health

*"School bus ventilation in the context of COVID-19," Mike Van Dyke*  
[coeh.berkeley.edu/22ihw0308](https://coeh.berkeley.edu/22ihw0308)

Van Dyke was in another group of researchers looking for practical inexpensive solutions in the pandemic. They found hatches are key in larger school buses.

"The biggest increase in ventilation that we saw was really opening the hatches while the bus was moving," Van Dyke says. "It makes sense, you're sucking air out of the bus."

They got a surprising very high 12 air changes an hour combining the defrost fan (fresh setting) on high, middle and back hatches open with the fan on and six windows open 2 inches while the bus was moving.

Their other recommendation was to educate drivers about these measures.

When air pollution is present, Van Dyke suggests opening hatches only, not windows. (Air dilution increases further off the ground.) Like others, he also warns against "particle charging," "hydroxyls" or "ionization" add-ons, which produce harmful by-products (e.g., ozone) and lack evidence about their claims.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency agrees. It is testing various methods to clean air in enclosed spaces like school buses. A researcher there says they see "filtration-based technologies are more effective than those that work to inactivate (or 'kill') virus without a capture mechanism, and electronic air cleaners can create harmful by-products." 🗑️





PAST, PRESENT  
AND FUTURE

## MEDICARE PREMIUMS FOR 2024 ANNOUNCED

### Medicare Part B premiums

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) announced the 2024 premiums for Medicare Part B in November.

Part B premiums will increase to \$174.70 per month, an increase of \$9.80. Medicare Part B deductibles will increase to \$240, and increase of \$14.

Retirees will also pay a different premium amount in 2024 if they fall into a different income-related category. This change happens once individual filers reach an annual income of \$103,001 or a joint-filer reaches \$206,001, for income earned in 2022.

INCOME LEVELS FOR SINGLES	INCOME LEVELS FOR JOINT FILERS	2023 PREMIUMS
\$103,000 or below	\$206,000 or below	\$174.70
\$103,001 to \$129,000	\$206,001 to \$258,000	\$224.60
\$129,001 to \$161,000	\$258,001 to \$322,000	\$349.40
\$161,001 to \$193,000	\$322,001 to \$386,000	\$454.20
\$193,001 to \$500,000	\$386,001 to \$750,000	\$559.00
\$500,000 and above	\$750,000 and above	\$594.00

### Medicare Part D premiums

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

While there is no standard Medicare Part D cost associated with the program, enrollees whose incomes exceed the legislated threshold amounts—\$103,001 in 2022 for a beneficiary filing an individual income tax return or married and filing a separate return, and \$206,001 for a beneficiary filing a joint tax return—will pay a monthly, income-related payment.

INCOME LEVELS FOR SINGLES	INCOME LEVELS FOR JOINT FILERS	2023 PREMIUMS
\$103,000 or below	\$206,000 or below	\$0.00
\$103,001 to \$129,000	\$206,001 to \$258,000	\$12.90
\$129,001 to \$161,000	\$258,001 to \$322,000	\$33.30
\$161,001 to \$193,000	\$322,001 to \$386,000	\$53.80
\$193,001 to \$500,000	\$386,001 to \$750,000	\$74.20
\$500,000 and above	\$750,000 and above	\$81.00

## Information pertaining to both Part B and Part D

The Social Security Administration uses the income reported two years ago to determine a beneficiary's premium. Thus, the income reported on a beneficiary's 2022 tax return is used to determine whether the beneficiary must pay a higher monthly premium in 2024. If a beneficiary's income decreased significantly in the past two years, they may request that information from more recent years be used to calculate the premium.

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

For any income-related monthly adjustment amount (IRMAA) and for Medicare Part D premiums that a member receiving PRMB or their dependent pays is reimbursed at the end of the year in which the adjustment is paid. However, this is only after the proper paperwork is filed with the New Jersey Division of Pensions and Benefits.

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

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

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

## Around the counties

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

### BERGEN COUNTY REA

**Dec. 12:** Winter meeting/luncheon at Seasons Catering in Washington Township. Cost is \$50. To attend, call Randy Allshouse at 973-460-1262 by Dec. 2.

### HUNTERDON COUNTY REA

**Dec. 14:** Holiday meeting/ brunch at Mountain View Chalet in Asbury. Cost is \$35. To attend, call Joyce Kucyn at 908-479-6656 by Dec. 4.

### MIDDLESEX COUNTY REA

**March. 7:** Spring meeting/luncheon at The Grand Marquis on Old Bridge. Cost is \$43. To attend, contact Susan Jaysnovitch at 732-925-1606 or [andyjace@aol.com](mailto:andyjace@aol.com) by Feb. 24.

### MONMOUTH COUNTY REA

**Dec. 13:** Holiday luncheon/meeting at the Molly Pitcher Inn. Cost is \$45. To attend, call Debbie Adamchak, 848-459-2672 by Dec. 1.

### MORRIS COUNTY REA

**Dec. 13:** Winter meeting/luncheon at Birchwood Manor in Whippany. Cost is \$35 for members and \$53 for guests. To attend, call John Beekman at 973-514-1080 by Dec. 1.

**March 13:** Spring meeting/luncheon at Birchwood Manor in Whippany. Cost is \$35 for members and \$53 for guests. To attend, call John Beekman at 973-514-1080 by March 1.

### OCEAN COUNTY REA

**March 14:** Spring meeting/luncheon at Clarion Hotel in Toms River. Cost is \$28. To attend, call Maryann Tomborello by March 1 at 732-323-0346.



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# THOSE WHO CAN, EDUCATE. I'M AN EDUCATOR. WHAT'S YOUR SUPERPOWER?

BY HANNAH PAWLAK

Education is the one profession that creates all other professions.

In a time when some people's misinformed opinions about who educators are and what we do seems to echo so loudly, we remain diligent with our eyes on the goal of shaping well-rounded students who value humanity and thrive as individuals.

We tell ourselves the statements found in this article's headline because, well, they are true. This year, I have my first student teacher. It is an incredibly rewarding experience and a daily reminder that learning does not stop outside the walls of an educational institution or upon receipt of a diploma. We educators revel in knowing that we are lifelong learners, and the volume of perspectives, ideas and strategies I have already collected from this collegiate professional has been more than I originally anticipated. This proves that clinical internships are symbiotic educational experiences for both the student and the cooperating mentor.

On my end, I like to think that one of the first lessons that I taught my student teacher about being an educator was one of the most important lessons that he will take into his full-time career: the importance of joining NJEA Preservice. As an NJEA membership category, NJEA Preservice is one of the largest professional organizations that aspiring educators can join. It supports them in their studies as well as in their full-time careers.

First and foremost, NJEA Preservice offers liability insurance for members in observation, practicum, student teaching and internship that is equivalent to the protection offered to school district-employed members. This security is an invaluable safeguard when working in an environment where members interact daily with students and their families. Additionally, NJEA Preservice opens access to monetary benefits, leadership opportunities, network

**NJEA Preservice gives members the opportunity to be at the forefront of their own professional learning.**

expansion and professional learning.

NJEA Preservice gives members the opportunity to be at the forefront of their own professional learning. The organization provides unique opportunities for preservice educators: they have the chance to plan conferences, career development workshops, and discussions executed at a statewide level for other preservice members. This allows preservice educators the chance to grow their leadership skills and gain experience as organizers. In turn, preservice members come to understand the importance of organizing around the values, advocacy efforts and goals of NJEA. They go on to become leaders in our local, state and national unions as they move through their careers in education.

If you have the honor of hosting a future colleague, I encourage you to give them the gift of NJEA Preservice membership, helping them to understand their union and benefit from its statewide system of support before signing their first contract.

NJEA Preservice membership is an invaluable part of an aspiring educators' experience, and we mentors have an incredible opportunity to open the world of unionism up to our mentees. By opening the doors of unionism through NJEA Preservice and dismantling the barriers to educational resources, we give the gift to our student educators of truly embodying that "yes, those who can, educate." Being an educator is an incredible superpower. As an educator, you do work in the profession that creates all other professions.

To learn more about NJEA Preservice and to find out how your preservice mentee can join, visit [njea.org/preservice](http://njea.org/preservice).

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*Hannah Pawlak is a special education teacher in Highland Park. She is the evaluation chair and webmaster for the Highland Park Education Association. Pawlak is an NJEA organizing consultant focusing, in part, on NJEA Preservice.*

# RAINBOW CONNECTION'S 2023 NJEA CONVENTION GLOW-UP!

*By Kate Okeson with Amy Moran, Ph. D.*



Members at the SOGI Committee and others at the NJEA Convention. From left: Kate Okeson, Max Rodriguez, Kenneth Bassett, Susan Waldron, Chris Cannella (chair), Carol Watchler, NJEA President Sean M. Spiller, Katherine Beggiato, Edwinta Rhue, NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson, Steve Koumoulis and Sofia Capinha.

This is being written in the days shortly after the General Election, where the stakes felt high for education, which was evident in many campaigns as our entire New Jersey Legislature—totaling 120 seats—was up for election. And representation barriers continued to be broken: Luanne Peterpaul is the first out lesbian to be elected to the New Jersey General Assembly.

It's fitting that the NJEA Convention comes on the heels of the election, where we educators are ever mindful of how we're impacted by, and discuss events connected to, election outcomes—especially those tied to our representatives' understanding and promise to support and act on our behalf.

"Rainbow Connection" has been covering the myriad ways that classroom and school experiences can be improved for all students when we are intentionally inclusive and unapologetically committed to the truth about what it takes to authentically support LGBTQIA+ students and educators. Convention attendees, NJEA members recognized for their exemplary service, and our presenters reflected back to us the power of all our stories being represented.

Keynote speakers Spike Lee and Ani DiFranco brought forward the power of storytelling to raise up voices that are less represented around us—or not represented at all. Lee's particularly clear connection of his own trajectory of going to graduate school in order to have access to filmmaking tools is a lesson for us about access to the means to tell stories and its connection to undoing marginalization. This was a call to be mindful of how we invite students into our educational spaces. We may forget that students often need to have access to various spaces in order to utilize the tools there to both hear other stories and tell their own.

DiFranco's talk explored the impact of multitudinous stories being in the world: "Laying eyes and ears on those [stories] means there is possibility." There is power for students in that possibility—our collective and continued



For additional resources, scan this QR code. And share your thoughts and ideas with us at [rainbowconnectionnjea@gmail.com](mailto:rainbowconnectionnjea@gmail.com).

efforts to make and keep our schools as places where we can practice with what DiFranco called “revolutionary love.” Taking care of ourselves first, our community together, and then tending to the pain in those that cause harm. In fact, throughout the convention, we heard repeated calls from members for concerted efforts and commitments to restorative practices to be embedded in school, from individual classrooms to district practices.

NJEA Equality Champion Steve Koumoulis shared a reflection on the workshop he facilitated, LGBTQIA+ Issues and Content in the History Classroom. He noted that while much progress is being made and many are committed to inclusive educational practices, participants reported looking for supports that just aren’t offered in teacher preparation programs or district professional development. This leaves them developing cultural competencies independently and sometimes putting their learning into practice in less welcoming environments.

The convention made this, above all, clear: the actions of educators matter. Whether we are working with new content and courses, or integrating new practices that embrace all of our students’ truths in our schools, we are doing what is necessary to clear a path for student successes. Lee stopped NJEA President Sean Spiller during the keynote with a gentle reproach, “The word ‘try’ is like handcuffs,” he said. “We have to do this work.”



NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty addresses members at the SOGI Brunch at the NJEA Convention.

We all show each other the possibilities of what the work looks like. In workshops, in the many member areas like SOGI (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Committee), in the NJEA Consortium space (whose mission is to redefine curricula with diversity and representation), or MOC (Members of Color), NJEA members demonstrate what secretary treasurer Petal Robertson called “activism and advocacy wrapped in love and joy.”

Keep up the good work, team! 🏡

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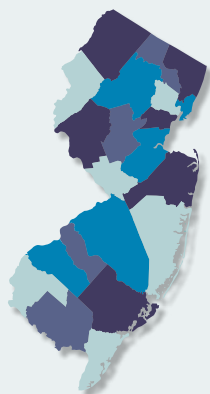
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# SUSSEX TO CAPE MAY

Workshops and conferences

## HIGHLIGHTS

African American history and multilingual learners

### 2024 NJTESOL/NJBE SPRING CONFERENCE

#### Systems of Support for Multilingual Learners

The 2024 conference of the New Jersey Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages/New Jersey Bilingual Educators (NJTESOL/NJBE) will have two components: an in-person conference and a video library conference.

#### In-person conference

The In-Person Conference will take place at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in New Brunswick on May 29-31. You can register for one, two or all three days. The conference will feature three keynote speakers: Dr. Ayanna Cooper, Dr. Fernando Naiditch, and Dr. Denise Furlong.

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

#### Video library conference

The Video Library Conference is a select collection of library presentations you will have access to view starting on June 3 using the conference platform. There is no set schedule, and you will be able to view the workshops for three months. By using your unique login, your hours will be tracked so that you can earn professional development hours. Please note that the select collection of presentations will not include the keynotes or special invited guest speakers.

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

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

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

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

### EIGHT-WEEK SUMMER AMISTAD COURSE

Are you interested in learning more about the New Jersey 2002 Amistad Law that requires public schools to integrate Black history into their K-12 curriculum? Are you interested in learning new and innovative ways to teach African American history, discuss racially sensitive topics and engage your students?

This summer, Rowan University will offer an eight-week, hybrid interdisciplinary course titled Empowering Educators: Strategies for Integrating Black History in the Classroom. It will be co-taught by Dr. Chanelle Rose, associate professor of history and Coordinator of the Africana Studies Program and Dr. Andrea Hawkman, associate professor of social studies education and former high school social studies. The course opens July 1 and concludes Aug. 23, offering 24 continuing education credits. The program is offered online in an asynchronous format with one in-person session at the Amistad Conference (July 29-Aug. 1).

The course will examine African American history through several humanities disciplines, including history, English, sociology, and philosophy. Teachers will explore the rich and diverse culture of African Americans from precolonial West Africa to the present. The themes for each module range from Africa and the Black Diaspora to Power and Resistance, Black Joy, and Deconstructing Critical Race Theory.

Each module will provide a broad but rigorous overview of the U.S. Black experience, with a particular focus on New Jersey's African American communities. Major themes and historical figures will include Trans-Saharan trade and West African empires, U.S. Slavery and Emancipation, The Harlem Renaissance and Great Migration, Civil Rights/Black Power movements, the post-World War II urban crisis, Hip-Hop culture, Black conservatism, and the Black Lives Matter movement.

In-service teachers will examine the political experience of African Americans, and a range of prominent thinkers past and present. They will study a variety of genres, including music, art, fiction, poetry, autobiography, and nonfiction, from the earliest published work by African Americans through to the present day. Finally, they will complete a capstone project that demonstrates their understanding of the comprehensive knowledge acquired during the course.

Funded through the National Endowment for the Humanities, the cost per participant is \$200.

For more information, visit [go.rowan.edu/blackhistoryforeducators](https://go.rowan.edu/blackhistoryforeducators) or email Dr. Chanelle Rose at [rosec@rowan.edu](mailto:rosec@rowan.edu).

# Professional development in Mercer County

*By Dawn Howlen*

When NJEA members walk into a professional development (PD) workshop at the Mercer County Education Association (MCEA), they may be unaware of everyone responsible for making the session possible. MCEA President Dan Siegel says the association begins its PD planning process in the spring when MCEA executive board and committee chairs meet.

The meetings also include staff from the UniServ and Professional Development and Instructional Issues divisions of NJEA. They determine a budget for the upcoming year using the previous year's workshop data. This approach allows them to offer various workshops to their diverse educator community.

Once spring planning is complete, MCEA looks ahead to the summer. During this time, the association compiles a master registration form distributed to members electronically as a part of *Mercergram*, the county association's newsletter. This gives members enough time to plan for future sessions and coordinate their schedules accordingly.

## Workshop catalog online

This past summer, MCEA used this information to create a new platform for its members: a workshop catalog that can be viewed online. This tool allows members to browse the workshops and read the descriptions before registering.

The registration process in Mercer County has a twist. Members are required to send a check to hold their spot for workshops. When members attend the workshops, they get their checks back. This has reduced member cancelations. Siegel also highlighted the importance of working closely with the local leadership within his county. He acknowledges that when local presidents share the county information via their platforms, it helps support the participation at the county office.

MCEA's committee chairs, officers and Executive Assistant Iris Tonti work together to ensure members have a pleasant experience. There is always a variety of food, drinks, snacks, and desserts from local establishments. In addition, using NJEA county association PD grants, they

also have secured the latest technology in Chromebooks and Smart TVs, which benefits members and presenters.

## Local association PD in Mercer County

Mercer County also has two locals that plan yearly professional development opportunities for their members, the Trenton Education Association (TEA), and the East Windsor Education Association (EWEA). These locals use virtual workshops as their primary platform, which has helped maintain higher attendance levels.

One of the tools EWEA uses to address the needs of its members is surveying them about their PD interests and giving them a \$5 Dunkin gift card after each workshop. EWEA President Ellen Ogintz and Professional Development Chair Vanessa Rosa agree that communication is key. They send out multiple friendly reminders that highlight the PD of the month.

TEA uses a variety of strategies to engage its members. Each year, TEA surveys its members to determine their PD wants and needs. This, along with visits to individual buildings, allows TEA to recognize trends in issues across the district.

TEA shares a full schedule of workshops with members so they can make room for them in their schedules. Once members preregister with TEA, they are sent the link to register with NJEA. TEA 1st Vice President Kathy Graf also checks in with a staff member in the NJEA PDII Division to ensure the members have registered on the NJEA Zoom account.

TEA also offers its members the National Education Association Blended Learning Program, which is designed to enhance collaborative professional learning. TEA was one of the first locals in the state to institute this program for its members and the opportunity has proven to be successful in helping the participants learn about relevant topics, such as how to support English language learners. 📖

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





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### Questions?

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# STAFF NEWS

## HIRES AND PROMOTIONS



NJEA welcomed **MELISSA KIRZ** to NJEA staff on Nov. 1 as an administrative assistant to the regional director in the UniServ Northeast office in Livingston. Prior to joining NJEA staff, Kirz had served as office manager for the Wayne Education Association since 2019. She holds a bachelor's degree in art history from Marist College. An avid hiker who has completed the New Jersey, New York and Connecticut sections of the Appalachian Trail, Kirz lives in Wayne with her husband and their two children.



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## Got a great idea?

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**C:Reboot** – Students across the country build robots and compete for national recognition, but for many schools, the cost of constructing robots is not in the budget. Thanks to a Hipp Grant, students at Howell Memorial Middle School can join in the fun. C:REBOOT stands for Construction: Robotics Engineering that Builds Original Opportunities through Technology. The program incorporates engineering standards within STEM based learning. During an afterschool program, sixth through eighth graders build a functional robotic prototype vehicle designed for competition.

NJEA's Frederick L. Hipp grants provide \$500 to \$10,000 grants for educators just like YOU and projects like this one!

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Apply by March 1, 2024, at [njea.org/hipp](https://njea.org/hipp).





# NJEA Delegate Assembly

The NJEA Delegate Assembly met virtually on Jan. 8, 2022, at 9:30 a.m.

The meeting was called to order by President Sean M. Spiller. Sharon Ortiz (Essex County) gave the inspirational message and along with President Spiller, led the flag salute.

The roll call and the seating of delegates was taken by Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson via a poll that was placed on the screen for voting members of the D.A. by selecting present. There were 127 members present and a quorum was met. Alternates were seated as follows: Andrew Policastro for Christine Phillips (Bergen County); Jessica Cavagnaro for Fuquan Brown (Essex County); Daniel Fields for Francine Wilden (Middlesex County); Jo-Ann Montanti for Margaret Watkins (Monmouth County); Kimberlee Shaw for William Junker (Ocean County); Nancy Jubert for Gina Pizzuto (Ocean County); Ted Graham for Patricia Kebrdle (Passaic County); and Linda Calandra for Barbara James (NJREA).

President Spiller asked that everyone review the Report of the Delegate Assembly Rules Committee, a status motion request for committee review, and asked that the agenda be adopted with flexibility and there being no objection, the agenda was adopted with flexibility.

President Spiller moved on to announcements and informational updates.

## President's report

President Spiller discussed ongoing issues around the COVID-19 pandemic, noting the help NJEA provided to build support for extending the governor's COVID briefings. He also discussed the one-year anniversary of the Jan. 6th insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, the gradual increase of New Jersey's minimum wage to \$15/hour by 2024, the State Board of Education's discussion of assessment data, and the current composition of the State Board. He thanked NJEA members and staff for their work on all of these issues.

## Vice president's report

Vice President Steve Beatty reported on the NJEA's ongoing work with NJEA Preservice to eliminate edTPA as a required step toward certification, as well as NJEA's work regarding the impact of adverse childhood experiences on students' mental and physical health, the 200,000 Conversations initiative, meetings with the N.J. Secretary of Higher Education, and activities with NJEA's Affiliated Special Interest Groups. He noted that he, the President Spiller and the Secretary-Treasurer Robertson have resumed visits to members at their schools as COVID restrictions permit.

Vice President Beatty also made announcements concerning the activities of the County Teachers of the Year as well as the previous state Teacher of the Year Angel Santiago and the current state Teacher of the Year Theresa Maughan.

## Secretary-treasurer's report

Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson reported on NJEA's current financial statements, noting that in preparation for the next fiscal year, NJEA has been meeting with members to ensure that the budget reflects members and the overall association's values.

Secretary-Treasurer Robertson congratulated Bayonne Education Association President Gene Woods on being selected to be an NEA trainer of local presidents across the country, discussed NJEA's work on restorative justice, the NJEA REAL movement, and the upcoming NJREA Celebration of its 102nd anniversary.

Secretary-Treasurer Robertson presented a slide show demonstrating the positive impact of NJEA's budget on members, students and their families, as well as NJEA's impact on elections across the state, demonstrating that when we come together as a profession, we all win. In addition, she reported on the HCR office's first annual summit, the REAL Movement, Equity Alliance, SOGI work, and the Members of Color Network, 200K Conversations, and supporting members through the NJEA Food Assistance Program.

Secretary-Treasurer Robertson requested that President Spiller introduce Steve Mazur, a partner with Novak Francella, the CPA firm who then presented the audit report.

## Participation by nondelegate members (11:00 am):

Ewa Dziedzic-Elliott, Lawrence Township EA, who works as a school library media specialist, and president of the New Jersey Association of School Librarians (NJASL) and is an affiliate of NJEA asked that NJEA reaffirm and defend a commitment to students' first amendment right to read and prioritize intellectual freedom and students right to access materials.

Beth Raff, Morris County, Parsippany Troy Hills School District works as a school library media specialist and made the same request as Dziedzic-Elliott, urging NJEA to show support by issuing a statement on students' rights to read and intellectual freedom and for school boards to stop allowing personal attacks on their staff.

## Report of the executive director

Executive Director Steve Swetsky spoke to the audit report presented and all the reports that are presented that describes the work done by NJEA over the past year. He asked that everyone take a moment to recognize the staff and the working management team and all that is accomplished by the NJEA. He spoke about higher education and membership, and the impact of the Janus decision on NJEA and the restructuring of the membership division that will continually put NJEA in the position of being one of the strongest labor unions in the country.

Executive Director Steve Swetsky spoke about COVID and stated that he thought we had turned a corner with the pandemic, but yet we have shifted some things back into a virtual environment such as the Equity Alliance event and Winter Leadership. He said that NJEA follows the science to determine the safest ways to proceed before returning to large-group in-person events. He also reported on the one-month premium holiday for districts that are enrolled in the School Employees' Health Benefits Program (SEHBP).

## Reports of committees without recommendations

The NJEA PAC Operating Committee report was included for the review of the Delegate Assembly.

## Reports of committees with recommendations

### Membership Committee Report

Anita Kober, Hudson County, spoke to the report for the committee. She said the committee was moving forward the recommendation regarding a disability retirement membership tier. The recommendation was "that the proposed language undergo appropriate review and procedures to amend the NJEA Constitution and Bylaws to establish a disability membership tier with the following language:

NJEA Constitution (to be added under Article III – Membership):  
"Disability Retirement Members

Active members, upon applying for disability retirement or Tier 4 or 5 Long Term Disability, may continue to enjoy all rights and services, including the right to vote, but not to be elected to office, by payment of the annual dues as a disability retirement member.

In addition, any active member applying for disability retirement membership must be verified by the Director of NJEA Research and Economic Services at the time of application, as well as before the beginning of any new membership year in which the member applies for continuous membership within this category.

Eligibility for membership within this category will cease when  
(1) the member is granted disability retirement or long-term  
(2) disability (as defined by Tier 4 and 5) by the State of New Jersey, or

(3) the member is denied disability retirement or long-term disability (as defined by Tier 4 and 5) by the State of New Jersey, including appropriate appeals, or the member returns to regular employment"

NJEA Bylaws (to be added under Section 1. Dues)

"Disability Retirement Members

The dues for any active member qualifying for Disability Retirement Membership as outlined in the NJEA Constitution shall be:

- (1) three hundred-fifty (\$350) dollars for Professional members, and
- (2) two hundred (\$200) dollars for ESP members.

This shall be a flat rate for the full membership year and shall not be pro-rated or refundable."

Anthony Rizzo, Burlington County, moved that the recommendation be forwarded to the Constitution and Bylaws Committee for review, and was seconded by John Crane, Atlantic County. The motion carried.

### Constitution Review Committee Report

Scott Elliott, Warren County, spoke to the report for the committee its first recommendation.

**Rule Recommendation 1:** that the NJEA temporarily suspend the application of the dues increase formula for the fiscal year 2022-2023 only by amendment of Bylaw 1. Dues to be amended as follows:

"...that the Bylaws be amended effective September 1, 2022, by adding the following new section to the end of Bylaw I, Dues:

"(i) Temporary Dues Formula Suspension – Notwithstanding any other provision of these Bylaws to the contrary, the dues for active professional, active supportive, and retired members shall

be maintained at 2021-2022 dues level for the 2022-2023 fiscal year only, and the dues amount for the 2023-2024 fiscal year shall be determined by applying the normal percent increase calculated in 2022-2023 to the base dues amount in effect for the 2021-2022 fiscal year, utilizing the formulas specified in Bylaw 1 (a), (b), and (e). This paragraph shall be deleted from the Bylaws on September 1, 2023."

There were questions and discussion from the delegation.

Ann Margaret Shannon, Union County, moved the recommendation, seconded by Christopher Cannella, Essex County. The motion carried.

Scott Elliott, Warren County spoke to the report for the Committee its next recommendation.

**Rule Recommendation 2:** that the NJEA establish a disability membership tier. (Language identical to language in the Report of the Membership Committee above.) Ann Kaspereen, Warren County, moved the recommendation, seconded by Kathleen Paterek, Morris County. The motion carried.

### Exceptional Children Committee report

Tomika Sanderlin, Atlantic County, Chair of the Committee spoke to the report for the Committee regarding its recommendation.

**Recommendation No. 1:** that NJEA believes all child study team assessments and other individualized student assessments should be conducted face-to-face whenever possible. When circumstances require remote assessment of a student, the following principles should be followed:

1. Evaluators should have training on the use of any online assessment platforms being used.
2. Evaluators should not be required to adapt or modify assessments intended and normed for in-person use.
3. When obtaining parental consent for testing, families should be informed about possible limitations of remotely administered assessments.
4. Evaluators should include the testing conditions in the assessment report.
5. Evaluators should consider data obtained prior to the need for a remote learning environment in addition to evidence gathered since the remote instruction began.
6. Where appropriate, assessments should include structured interviews, rating scales and curriculum-based measures with local norms when available.
7. Evaluators must consider the reliability and validity of results carefully as many assessments have not been standardized or normed for remote administration.

Carmen Porter, Salem County, moved the recommendation, and it was seconded by Lori Schorno, Morris County. The motion carried.

### New Business

There was no New Business.

### For the Good of the Order

There were no announcements for the Good of the Order.

**President Spiller adjourned the meeting.**



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# DECEMBER & *beyond*

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

<b>DEC</b> <b>06</b>	<b>WEDNESDAY</b> Executive Committee	<b>JAN</b> <b>12-13</b>	<b>FRI &amp; SAT</b> Equity Alliance Conference	<b>FEB</b> <b>14</b>	<b>WEDNESDAY</b> Executive Committee
<b>JAN</b> <b>05</b>	<b>FRIDAY</b> Executive Committee	<b>JAN</b> <b>26-27</b>	<b>FRI &amp; SAT</b> Winter Leadership Conference South	<b>FEB</b> <b>17</b>	<b>SATURDAY</b> NJEA FAST Showcase
<b>JAN</b> <b>06</b>	<b>SATURDAY</b> Delegate Assembly	<b>FEB</b> <b>02-04</b>	<b>FRI TO SUN</b> ESP Conference/ Health and Safety Conference	<b>FEB</b> <b>23-24</b>	<b>FRI &amp; SAT</b> Winter Leadership Conference-North

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



*"There comes a time when silence is betrayal."*

## SAVE THE DATE

Jan. 12 & 13, 2024

### 50<sup>th</sup> Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Human & Civil Rights Celebration & Equity Alliance Conference

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# SUPPORT LEADERS WHO VALUE PUBLIC EDUCATION

November brought several high points for NJEA members and for public education: the 2023 NJEA Convention was a resounding success and pro-public education majorities were elected in both houses of the Legislature.

A successful convention does not happen by accident. It's the result of thoughtful planning and hard work by NJEA members and NJEA staff to bring the right speakers, the right workshops and the right experiences to Atlantic City year after year.

Electing pro-public education majorities to the Legislature does not happen by accident either. It is due to the efforts of NJEA members like you. In support of candidates endorsed by the NJEA Political Action Committee (PAC), you not only made sure you voted by Nov. 7, but you also knocked on thousands of doors, made countless member-to-member phone calls, and talked to your families, friends and neighbors about the importance of electing leaders who support public education.

Because we support candidates who support public education, we've counted some impressive wins in recent years:

- Our pensions have been fully funded after nearly three decades of neglect.
- We've expanded sick leave rights to ensure that you can care for your family when they need you.
- We've lowered health insurance costs for school employees, while protecting the quality of your coverage.
- We've strengthened job protections for educational support professionals.
- We've removed needless barriers to the profession to help address the educator shortage.

Another important way to support the allies and advocates who passed the legislation that made those wins possible is by donating to NJEA PAC, the association's political action fund. Every decision—from pensions and privatization to salaries and benefits—is a decision made by people who hold public office. The only way to influence these decisions is to elect candidates who support our public schools and the people who work and learn in them.

One of the best ways to make sure we elect the right candidates is to give them the financial support they need to win. Endorsing and electing candidates—both

**If you are not already a donor to NJEA PAC, consider becoming one today. If you already contribute to NJEA PAC, consider increasing your monthly contribution.**

Democrats and Republicans—who support NJEA's goals significantly increases the association's ability to effectively advocate for favorable legislation and stop negative legislation and attacks on public education.

NJEA PAC is entirely funded by association members' voluntary contributions. Along with on-the-ground support leading up to Election Day, NJEA PAC is an important way to help pro-public education candidates win elections.

If you are not already a donor to NJEA PAC, consider becoming one today. If you already contribute to NJEA PAC, consider increasing your monthly contribution. Even \$5 per month makes a huge difference and helps make sure we keep moving our profession forward.

When we can support our allies in the Legislature, we achieve big things. 🏡



## Contribute to NJEA PAC

Scan the QR code here. Once you're logged in, follow the easy step-by-step directions that appear on your screen.

To log in, you'll need your NJEA PIN and password. Your PIN is on your membership card. It's a two-letter, two-number, two-letter combination. Your password is the last four digits of your Social Security number, unless you've changed it.



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| 1. Trenton & You: Perfect Together?                   | 12. What Have You Done for Me Lately?   | 19. Walk-Throughs: Before, During & After                                  |
| 2. What Would You Do?                                 | 13. How to Keep Yourself Safe & Sane In Your Worksite   | 20. Safety in the Science Classroom  |
| 3. Preparing For Negotiations – Collective Bargaining | 14. ESP Compensation: Show Me the Money!  | 21. Worker Protection for Bus Drivers                                      |
| 4. You & Your Pension                                 | 15. Empowering Innovation: Harnessing AI & Google Tools   | 22. Maintenance & Custodial – Keeping Your School Building Safe            |
| 5. PERC Law for ESP                                   | 16. The ESP Balancing Act: Supporting Students While Empowering Yourself                              | 23. School Safety & Security: Recognizing Indicators of Potential Violence |
| 6. Using Your NJEA Buying Power                       | 17. 10 Steps: Involving Members on Health & Safety Issues & the Role of the Health & Safety Committee | 24. Preparing for Your Evaluation  |
| 7. School Law & The Anti-Bullying Law                 | 18. Is It Over? COVID for School Nurses   | 25. Understanding Your Union & its Importance to You                       |
| 8. X's & O's for Local Leaders                        |   |  |
| 9. Special Education for ESPs                         |   |  |
| 10. Meeting Our Students Where They Are               |   |  |
| 11. Bargaining Non-Compensational Issues for ESPs     |   |  |



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