

REVIEW

MARCH
2024
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MAJOR SUCCESS IN SPARTA

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EVERY VOICE

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DISORDERS

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MUST STOP

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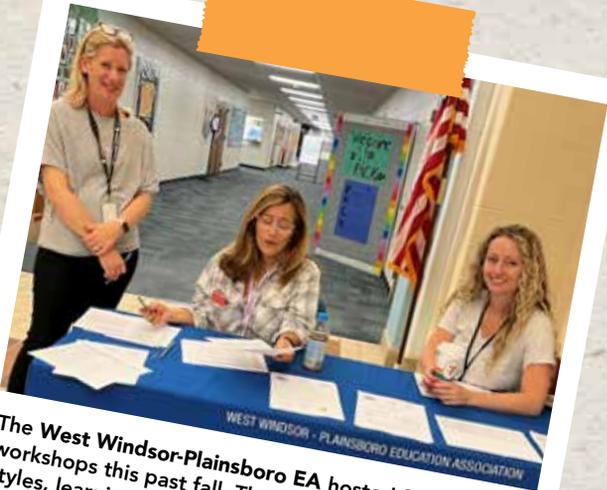


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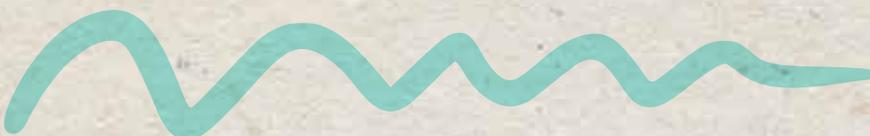
The New Jersey Chinese Teachers Association partnered with The Language Center at Rutgers to host a Lunar New Year Celebration on Feb. 9. Students studying the Chinese language at eight high schools across the state participated. For the full story and more photos, visit njea.org/lunar-2024.



The West Windsor-Plainsboro EA hosted family dinner workshops this past fall. They discussed parenting styles, learning styles, and working together as a family. From left: Fifth grade teacher Vanessa Bruno, elementary school counselor Marisa Efsthios, and Reading Recover teacher Jessica Moore.



The Sayreville EA handed out parent help brochures, healthy snacks, and information on healthy eating at the Middlesex County EA Pride in Public Education Health and Safety Fair. From left: Vice President Marleen Lewandowski, Treasurer Nicole DelPopolo, and member Laurie Aich.



FEATURES



20 | A NEW STRATEGY BRINGS MAJOR SUCCESS IN SPARTA

The November 2022 school board election in Sparta brought unwelcome changes to education in the district. Books were being challenged and staff, including Sparta Education Association President and school librarian Angela DeLuccia, were facing personal attacks. Determined to change the narrative, the Sparta Education Association reached out to the community early in 2023 to amplify the voices of those who cared about education in this Sussex County community.

BY KATHRYN COULIBALY



24 | EVERY CHILD, EVERY VOICE

Unlike his twin brother, Cole Renart was born Deaf. With few resources available to help Cole and his hearing parents, he struggled with language acquisition and communication. Finding Cole in a corner by himself at daycare while the other kids ran around the room laughing, his mother realized just how isolated Cole was. Her determination to open the world up to Cole brought her into contact with allies. Together, they made a difference for Cole and Deaf and hard of hearing children statewide.

BY AMY T. ANDERSEN



28 | AUDITORY PROCESSING DISORDERS

Auditory processing disorder (APD) and central auditory processing disorder (CAPD) are umbrella terms for any kind of hearing disorder where the brain and the central nervous system cannot process sound properly. It is estimated that about 1 in every 20 students has APD. Classroom accommodations can go a long way to help students with APD learn.

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



32 | HAZING NEW EDUCATORS MUST STOP

New educators are expected by school leaders to fill undesirable noninstructional roles and operate without adequate resources, all while honing the tremendously difficult task of learning how to teach. These expectations result in high turnover rates, high burnout rates and a toxic work culture for those who endure.

BY JONATHAN LEE LANCASTER

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The Freedom to Read



THE NUMBER \$80K

The Plainfield Education Association is the first in the state to ratify a contract with an \$80,000/year starting salary. The \$80,214 starting salary takes effect in Year 5 of the contract, 2028-29. An upcoming edition of the *Review* will tell the story of this groundbreaking collective bargaining achievement.

Source: NJEA UniServ-Northeast, Region 15 Office, Union County

GOOD NEWS

New Jersey is among the safest states for high school students

In a recent survey conducted by Scholaroo, New Jersey ranked among the top five safest states for high school students. In order to determine the rankings, Scholaroo compared the 50 states on crime and school safety indicators.

Source: Scholaroo, "Safest States for High School Students," Oct. 8, 2023. (scholaroo.com)



Sparta Education Association President Angela DeLuccia, a Sparta High School librarian, with newly elected Sparta Township Board of Education member Chad Wood, who is a recent SHS graduate.

PHOTO BY
Jennifer Marsh

REVIEW



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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*; 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*

Maintaining our commitment to our students

One thing that every NJEA member takes very seriously is our commitment to advocating for our students. That advocacy can take many forms. Sometimes, it's educators in a meeting with parents, administrators and other staff working to find the best solution for a struggling student. Other times, it involves speaking out at local board of education meetings, calling out attempts to reduce funding, increase class sizes, villainize excellent educators and much more. It also can mean lobbying leaders at the state or national level about education policy and access. No matter what form it takes, there is a universal and clear-cut call to action that our members have thoroughly embraced: we are here for our students.

Long after lesson plans are completed, school buses are parked and the phones stop ringing for the day, our members are thinking about the students we educate, protect and care for. In this edition of the *Review*, we see many examples of how our members are fighting for our students, as individuals and as a whole.

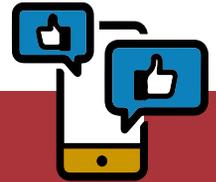
Amy Andersen, 2018 New Jersey Teacher of the year and Ocean City ASL teacher, tells her story about the continued fight to provide equal access to educational resources for Deaf and hard of hearing students, particularly one very special student who is thriving today thanks to Amy's and his parents' efforts.

Another example is Sparta school librarian and local association president Angela De Luccia who has built a massive coalition fighting to protect students' right to read and to combat attacks on public education.

There are stories upon stories that could be told about large and small acts that educators take every day in the best interests of our students. That advocacy has won us powerful enemies—we are too good at fighting for our students in some people's eyes. But our members simply have to be tireless advocates for students—there is no other way. As Frederick Douglass said, "Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. If there is no struggle, there is no progress."

As a labor union, we have an increased power in numbers. Those who are quick to dismiss a single educator or small group, must sit down and listen when we speak as one. We must continue to be fierce advocates for our students and for public education. Together, we will maintain our great public schools, work to make them even better and fight for every student in our schools to receive the respect, care and support they deserve.

In Unity,



SEAN M. SPILLER

Facebook

@SpillerforNJEA: Spending this weekend representing New Jersey while working with other NEA state affiliate presidents was truly an honor. We came together to celebrate Black History and Women's History and to share innovative ideas across state lines. In every corner of our nation, proud union members are making a difference for their students, schools and unions.

On Feb. 12, NJEA President Sean M. Spiller shared images from NEA Super Week in Washington, D.C. NEA Super Week is a national conference for state association leaders from across the country to learn, collaborate, and strategize around issues impacting public education. In one of the images, Spiller held an NJEA T-shirt with the quote "Reading Books is Always Better Than Banning Books – Gov. Phil Murphy" to emphasize the need for educators in every state to stand against censorship.

STEVE BEATTY

Facebook

@SteveBeattyNJEA: Our commitment to ensuring every student has a great public school with the best educators is at the center of what we do. Making that happen takes a sustained and total effort, including ... a legislator breakfast meet and greet at HQ, which saw over 40 members of the Assembly and Senate come to NJEA to talk with the officers, our full-time release presidents, and our staff ... Next, our stalwart retired members gathering to plan for continued engagement on the political front, lobbying on behalf of our kids, members, and profession. And ... an NJEA MOC RA engagement meeting that had over 100 members listening to how they can be more involved and step into their power with an organization providing space for all.

NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty shared images from three different events organized by NJEA on Feb. 12.

PETAL ROBERTSON

Facebook

@PetalforNJEA: Making time to see over 130 MOC members dive into African American history today was definitely a highlight of my weekend.

On Feb. 10, NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson shared images of NJEA members at the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. The day trip was organized by the NJEA Members of Color Network in honor of Black History Month. Since the NJEA officers were in Washington, D.C. for NEA Super Week, they took a break from the activities to surprise and engage with the members.

OFFICERS ONLINE

The ADVOCATE

RESOURCES FOR YOUR LOCAL ASSOCIATION

NJEA elections slated for April

NJEA will hold its annual elections in April for NJEA county (and other unit) representatives. This year, approximately one-third of the Executive Committee and approximately one-half of the Delegate Assembly and Delegate Assembly Alternates will be elected.

Balloting is conducted with the assistance of an outside vendor. A ballot and a postage-paid return envelope are sent to each member. The ballot will come via first class mail to the address currently on file. A paper ballot will be used. Complete instructions for voting will be contained in the ballot mailing. To be counted, voted ballots must be mailed to the address specified in the ballot mailing. Ballots sent to any other address will not be counted.

If there are any unanticipated changes in procedure, this information will be published in the April *NJEA Review*, publishing schedules permitting.

Elections will be held between April 1 and noon of April 15. In order to be counted, ballots must be received at the address indicated in the ballot mailing no later than noon on April 15.

For complete elections rules and procedures, visit njea.org/njeaelections.

Thinking about retirement?

NJEA has many resources to help you navigate the retirement process so that you can make the best decisions for yourself and maximize your future. From webinars to workshops to in-person pension consultations, these perks of membership are exclusive to you as an NJEA member. In addition, you have access to NJEA staff who can help you deal with issues and answer questions.

Once you retire, be sure to join NJREA so that you can continue to have access to news and resources about your pension and health benefits. NJREA does an excellent job communicating with its members about potential changes or important issues that may affect you in retirement. If you ever have an issue with your pension or health benefits, your NJREA membership provides you with expert resources and advocates to help you protect what you have earned.

For more information about planning for your retirement, go to njea.org, log in using your NJEA PIN and password, click "For Members" and choose "Retirement Planning."

RIF resources for NJEA members

Learning that you may be affected by a Reduction in Force (RIF) can be intimidating, but NJEA has the resources and support to assist you navigate the process.

If you receive a RIF notice, your first step is to reach out to your union representative or local association president to let them know. They are trained advocates who can make sure that you are being treated fairly and in accordance with the law.

If you do not know who your union representatives are, go to njea.org. Log in, click on "About" and choose "Regional Offices." Type your local association in the search and you will find information about your local association representatives and the NJEA UniServ office that serves your association.

NJEA has additional resources online at njea.org/rif-resources about health benefits, pensions, and other questions you may have.

NJEA seeks Distinguished Service Award nominations

Do you know an individual or group that has made a significant contribution to public education in New Jersey? Nominations are now being sought for the 2024 NJEA Ruthann Sheer Award for Distinguished Service to Education. The award was first presented in 1934.

The award was renamed in memory of Ruthann Sheer, an educator from Hackensack, who was its 1994 recipient.

The award is designed to call public attention to those who greatly serve New Jersey public schools and children. Such service to education may take any form that in the opinion of the Distinguished Service Award Committee most merits the recognition this award involves.

Any New Jersey resident or organization, including educators, may be nominated. Excluded are NJEA officers during their terms in office. The NJEA Executive Committee selects award recipients based on recommendations from the Distinguished Service Award Committee.

Nominations are accepted at njea.org/serviceaward.

You may also submit nominations by mail to: Ruthann Sheer Distinguished Service Award; NJEA; PO Box 1211; Trenton, NJ 08607-1211. Please include the nominee's name, address, phone number and email address along with a narrative explaining why the nominee should win the award. The deadline is June 14.

Higher Education programs set for April

The NJEA Higher Education Conference will be held on April 12-13, at the Princeton Marriott at Forrestal. The conference begins with registration at 2 p.m. on Friday followed by workshops and dinner. The keynote speaker on Friday after dinner will be invited members from the New Jersey Senate and Assembly Higher Education committees. On Saturday, the conference continues with more workshops and concludes with lunch.

Higher Education Conference – April 12-13, 2024

Workshops will address:

- Contract Enforcement and Grievance Process
- Introduction to Artificial Intelligence
- Leaves of Absence-FMLA, NFLA, FLIA
- Local Associations Use of External Communications
- Member Benefits Overview: Accessing your Member Benefits
- Political Power
- Union Basics for New Leadership

Higher Education Collective Bargaining Summit – April 13-14, 2024

The NJEA Higher Education Collective Bargaining Summit, April 13-14, immediately follows the Higher Education Conference at the same location, the Princeton Marriott at Forrestal. The summit begins with registration at 3 p.m. on Saturday followed by workshops and dinner. The summit will continue Sunday and conclude with lunch. The summit is an interactive program that will address current issues facing negotiations teams. Strategies and techniques for strengthening your local to improve bargaining position will be explored.

Registration details for Conference and Summit

The cost to attend either event is \$200-single occupancy, per person; \$150-double occupancy, per person-must indicate a roommate; or \$120-commuter.

The cost to attend both events is \$300-single occupancy, per person; \$250-double occupancy, per person-must indicate a roommate; \$220-commuter.

To register for either or both events, go to njea.org/highered or contact NJEA UniServ Region 29/Higher Education office at HigherEd@NJEA.org or 609-689-9580 by March 29.

Conference fee includes accommodations, meals, and materials. You will need your PIN and password and a credit card to register.

For additional information, special meal requests, or if you have a disability-related need which may require assistance to facilitate your participation in the conference, contact the office at HigherEd@NJEA.org or 609-689-9580.

Photo identification, such as a college ID or a driver's license, will be required to check in at the conference. NJEA will adhere to the safety protocols established by the New Jersey Department of Health.

Clearing the record: Toolbox authors omitted

The Toolbox column in the February 2024 *Review* titled "Best Apps and Links for Travel" omitted the names of the lead authors, Sabina Ellis and Lori Lalama. Ellis is the chair of the NJEA Technology Committee and a data manager for South-Orange Maplewood Public Schools. She chairs the ESP and Program (public relations, webmaster, photographer) committees for the Essex County Education Association. A middle school technology teacher in Clifton, Lalama represents Passaic County on the NJEA Technology Committee and is and president of the Clifton Education Association.



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COOL STUFF



NJ HALL OF FAME ESSAY CONTEST

The New Jersey Hall of Fame and its lead sponsor, Hackensack Meridian Health, want your students to help decide who belongs in the Hall of Fame. New Jersey public school students are invited to participate. Nominations can include famous people—living or deceased—as well as ordinary citizens who do extraordinary things. Students should research or, if possible, interview, the person they wish to nominate and write an essay no longer than 500 words.

Essays must be typed and double-spaced. The student must include their name, age, grade level as of April 1, 2024, address, phone number, parent/guardian's name, school name, and school district. If the essay is a school project, the student should also include the name of the teacher who assigned the activity. Nominations must be postmarked or timestamped by April 1, 2024, to be eligible.

Entries will be divided into two age categories: Intermediate (grades 4 through 8) and High School (grades 9-12). Winners will be notified by June 1. The winning students' nominations will be forwarded to the New Jersey Hall of Fame Academy for consideration in 2024.

The winning students will receive a \$500 scholarship to pursue a camp, program or educational opportunity of their choice. They will also be invited to participate in the Annual New Jersey Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony scheduled for October 2024, which will be televised on My9NJ.

Send entries to NJ Hall of Fame Contest, Meredith Barnes, c/o NJEA, PO Box 1211, Trenton, NJ 08607-1211, or email mbarnes@njea.org with NJHOF Essay Contest in the subject line. For more information about the New Jersey Hall of Fame, visit www.njhalloffame.org.



SET SAIL WITH THE AJ MEERWALD

The AJ Meerwald, New Jersey's official Tall Ship and a former oyster boat, is now used as a floating classroom. It has educational opportunities for students and their families at its home port in Cumberland County and as they sail to ports across the state. With programs for students in third grade and older, the AJ Meerwald have online and in-person opportunities. To learn more, email education@bayshorecenter.org.



DO YOU TEACH ABOUT THE JURY SYSTEM?

Order and use the New Jersey State Bar Foundation's (NJSBF) Educational Guide for Trial Jurors. It is a 16-page guide (booklet) that has been passed out to potential New Jersey jurors for decades. NJSBF will send you free copies for every student (suitable for grades 7 and up). Order the guide at njsbf.org/publications.

New Jersey Student Climate Challenge

Sustainable Jersey for Schools is organizing a social media campaign to spread awareness about the New Jersey Student Climate Challenge. The challenge is free and open to all New Jersey public schools serving students in grades 6 to 12. It is an innovative way for teachers to motivate their students to learn about climate change through a fun place-based project that aligns with the New Jersey Climate Change Education Student Learning Standards. School winners receive grants to advance their climate education initiatives ranging from \$3,500 to \$500. Visit bit.ly/NJStudentClimateChallenge.



**NOMINATIONS NJSAA
TEACHING AWARD
DUE APRIL 1**

The New Jersey Studies Academic Alliance (NJSAA) teaching award recognizes innovation and creativity in teaching New Jersey studies on the elementary, middle, secondary, and college levels. Submissions for the award must deal with some aspect of New Jersey studies. All disciplines are encouraged to apply. Nominations for the award may come from anyone who has knowledge of the candidate's work, or a candidate may self-nominate. Additional information and a link to criteria, including instructions on where to email nominations can be found at bit.ly/njsaa-teaching-award.



**FREE DIVERSITY
NEWSLETTER ALL
GRADE LEVELS**

The winter 2024 issue of *Respect*, the New Jersey State Bar Foundation's diversity and inclusion newsletter, features articles on caste discrimination and laws across the country that ban gender-affirming care and includes an article on the recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling on affirmative action in higher education, as well as a sidebar on legacy admissions. A PDF of the issue can be downloaded; copies can be ordered for classroom use; individual articles can be downloaded from the Respect Rundown. Educators can subscribe to receive future issues. Visit njsbf.org/publications.



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Grateful for the lessons the students teach

Meet Sandi Wilcox, 2023 Burlington County ESP of the Year



Sandi Wilcox's life was on a very different path when a medical emergency changed everything.

A proud former Marine, Wilcox moved to Burlington County in 2007. She had always worked in the secretarial and administrative field, but her life was upended when her son suffered a brain hemorrhage and needed to undergo emergency surgery. After he recovered, he had special needs and required more care.

"Going into special education allowed me to work the same hours as my son," Wilcox says. "I thought I'd do it for three years and, after he graduated, I'd go back to my previous line of work."

Almost 17 years later, Wilcox is still working at Burlington County Special Services School District, which serves

students from Pre-K to age 21, and her son is happy and working as a landscaper in South Carolina, where he lives with his father.

"I didn't picture myself working in special services, but this is where I landed, and I love it," Wilcox says. "Not only do I feel like I make a difference in students' lives, I feel like they make a difference in my life every day."

Wilcox works as a one-on-one teacher assistant with students with multiple disabilities. She has worked with every age in the district, except for PreK, and is currently working with transition students. In this program, students aged 18-21 are transitioning to what is next in their lives—a group home, living at home or working.

Lessons in humility, strength and compassion

"Every student that I have worked with with—when I was a classroom assistant or a one-on-one aide—has taught me so much about humility, strength, compassion, and about life and how precious it is. I think lots of times we take it for granted when our child is healthy."

Wilcox is a wonderful resource for the students and parents with whom she works. As the parent of a special needs child, she knows the challenges and joys they face and can point to her and her son's experiences to provide encouragement and a vision of what might lay ahead.

Wilcox grew especially close to one student with whom she worked for seven years. In April 2020, he passed away from other medical issues during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the district was remote.

"I'd been with him so long, it was devastating," Wilcox recalls. "I experienced great joys with him, and great sadness. I saw his potential at his finest, and then I saw him decline and it was very sad. His parents trusted me implicitly. I'm thankful he was a part of my life."

Wilcox works with students on life skills and loves seeing the pride on her students' faces when they complete a task.

"The little girl who I work with feels such satisfaction and excitement when she successfully folds a towel. That might seem mundane to you or me, but to her and her family, that means everything."

“They make a difference in my life every day.”

Winning back health benefits

Wilcox was surprised and honored to be named the 2023 Burlington County Educational Support Professional (ESP) of the Year. She really saw the value of her union membership when the district took family health care benefits from ESPs more than eight years ago.

“It was either give up our benefits or be privatized, so we took that,” Wilcox says. “I saw what it cost my fellow ESPs and myself to not have benefits for our families. As ESPs, we are paid very little and to have to pay for medical benefits on top of that was really harmful. I decided to get involved at the local and county levels. When it came time to negotiate again, I joined the team to advocate for ESPs. I felt like I was in a position where I could give up my time to try to help my coworkers.

“We were able to negotiate benefits back for our ESPs, which was just amazing. Since then, I’ve served on the negotiations team each time. I’ve also served as the recording secretary for my association since 2016. In addition, I am on our local ESP Committee and our Health and Safety Committee. I am on the rep council for Burlington, and I’m the ESP chairperson for the county. I am also a member of the NJEA Patriots Alliance, which is a group for military veterans. I enjoy being involved and helping other people. If I can make things easier for other people, that’s what I like to do. That’s just who I am.” 🏠



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NJEA Report

Central Regional educator gives back after Sandy destroyed home

By Kathryn Coulibaly



Haug traveled to Fort Meyers, Florida in the fall of 2022 following Hurricane Ian. Hold On, I'm Coming and its volunteers helped 1,500 residents, serving 1,300 hot dogs, 42 lbs. of chili, 20 lbs. of sauerkraut, 75 gallons of iced tea, 400 cups of coffee, 1,600 bags of chips, and 20 cases of water. They also delivered 20 rolls of toilet paper and four blankets.

Mark Haug knows what it's like to live through disaster. A physical education teacher at Central Regional High School in Bayville, Ocean County, Haug and his family lost their home in Superstorm Sandy in 2012. He remembers standing in his backyard looking at the shell that had been his home when a man walked up with a cup of coffee for him.

"He asked me if I needed anything and I'm like,

'I'm good,' because my wife and I are in a good place financially," Haug recalls. "But it was little acts like that that kept us going. When friends would stop by with a pizza, I kept thinking that someday I would pay that forward."

Haug kept his promise, launching his charity, Hold On, I'm Coming in March 2021. Haug travels to various disaster sites to provide food, comfort, communications, support, information, and donations of toiletries and other essential

supplies using a trailer he has outfitted for the trip.

“The concept is simple,” Haug says. “It’s time-consuming, but once I figured out the logistics of it, it was manageable. For anyone who helps, I have a script. People need to tell their story; you just listen to it and offer empathy. I want our volunteers to be part of the mental healing as well as the physical stuff.”

The name of Haug’s charity comes from a Motown song that was on the radio when he was describing his idea to his son. Haug knew that while there are many wonderful organizations meeting people’s needs when they go through a crisis, he had a unique perspective thanks to his experience.

“People recommended organizations for me to join, but you hear how much of their money goes to overhead,” Haug says. “If someone gives me a dollar, then I’m spending a dollar to help people. No one is telling me where to go, I tell myself. It was really important for people like me to go to these places because we’ve been through it. People are suffering and we can tell them our story. It gives them hope.”

A spot where people gather

Haug keeps his project simple. He provides some seats, a phone charging station, food and water.

“I have found that when I get to places, I become a spot where people start to gather,” Haug says. “It’s a sense of community. People come and tell their stories to each other.”

Haug has visited disaster sites in several states, including New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Florida, Kentucky, Vermont and others.

“I try to be a bridge to other services,” Haug says. “When the first-aid squad and the firefighters leave, and before the Salvation Army and Red Cross get in, I try to be there in the middle. Those are big operations, and they can’t move as quickly as I can. I’ve been there on site and I’m feeding the Red Cross, the National Guard, state troopers, the tree guys, the wire guys and EMTs.”

Haug has become known for providing hot dogs at the sites. He’s found that how people prefer the hot dog—what condiments and other toppings they like—is a great topic of conversation. He provides chips and crockpots with sauerkraut and chili. He’s learned that in Kentucky, people preferred to eat their hot dogs with mayonnaise. In Pennsylvania, they were all about the chili and sauerkraut. Down in Florida, they wanted hot peppers and Tabasco sauce.

Haug travels to various disaster sites to provide food, comfort, communications, support, information, and donations of toiletries and other essential supplies using a trailer he has outfitted for the trip.

Expanding the project

Almost two years after starting his project, Haug has expanded to a second trailer. He has made connections with people from all over who want to support his work.

“While I’m at a location, people will donate things to me, and I just turn around and give that to people while I’m there.”

Haug provides bags full of supplies for people that include everything from toilet paper, rubber gloves, soap, dog treats, blankets, hats and socks.

“People reach into their own pockets to help others,” he says.

Haug feels strongly that when people donate to his charity he has an obligation to do right by them.

“Whatever you give me, I’m going to give it to someone.”

As someone who has been where these people are now, Haug knows how challenging it is to accept donations from people. But as someone who has been there, “We’re all links in the chain,” he says.

“People still have their pride. I don’t accept anything used,” Haug says. “While I appreciate their generosity, these people are going through the worst times in their lives. It means a lot for their pride when they get new stuff. I’ll find the right home for used donations.”

Haug lives a busy life in Ocean Gate with his wife, Christina, a teacher in Toms River, and their family. In addition, he coaches track and volleyball, is a councilman in Ocean Gate and has a travel agency, but Hold On, I’m Coming is his passion.

“This is what I want to pursue in retirement,” he says. “I just want to pay forward what has been given to me and my family.”

Learn more about Hold On, I’m Coming by following them on Facebook and visiting holdonimcoming.com.

Kathryn Coulibaly is the associate editor of the NJEA Review and provides content and support to njea.org. She can be reached at kcoulibaly@njea.org.

How to *write* for the NJEA Review

What can I submit for publication?

Feature article

Review feature articles address areas of interest to NJEA members. This is an opportunity to help your colleagues improve their skills by describing a successful approach or strategy. A feature article should range between 1,400 and 2,000 words. Remember to use subheads to break up sections; consider listing resources or tips as a separate sidebar.

Letter to the editor

Respond to content that has appeared in the *Review* by submitting a letter to the editor that is about 250 words or less. A letter/email must be received by the 10th of the month in order for it to appear in the subsequent issue (e.g., Sept. 10 for the October *Review*).

Speak out

This occasional column lets members opine about a hot topic in education. If you have strong feelings about a current issue that would be of interest to other members, speak out in an essay of 650 words or less.

I Am NJEA

Are you involved in a local, county or state association activity such as a workshop, a rally, a meeting, a protest or other event? Consider snapping a few photos to be considered for this page, which consists primarily of photos and captions of members engaged in association activities. Make sure your local president is informed if you are sending photos from local association events and activities.

Proud moments

Has your local association used Pride funds to promote our great public schools? Send a brief description and your best photo to ProudMoments@njea.org.

Toolbox

If you have a great way to incorporate technology to boost student learning, consider writing about it in the "Toolbox" column. Share your expertise in 1,000 words or less.

How do I submit for publication?

Submitting content

Email submissions to njeareview@njea.org. Be sure to include your name and contact information, the name of your district and what you do there, the name of your local association, as well as the name and contact information of your local association president.

The review process

You will receive an email acknowledging receipt of your submission, but the review process can take several weeks. Please be patient; the editor will get back to you and let you know if we will use your submission. You may be asked to revise the piece but will be given specific suggestions on what needs to be changed.

If your submission is not accepted for publication in the *Review*, don't be discouraged! While your article may not be right for the *Review*, it may be appropriate for another publication. All submissions, even letters to the editor, may be edited for length, style and content.



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NJ Teacher of the Year one of four finalists for national honor

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) announced in late January that New Jersey State Teacher of the Year Joe Nappi has been named one of the four finalists for the 2024 National Teacher of the Year.

CCSSO runs the National Teacher of the Year Program. From a cohort of 55 State Teachers of the Year, the National Teacher of the Year Selection Committee, comprising 16 individuals and education organizations, selected finalists based on written applications. This year's finalists are below.

Joe Nappi

The 2024 New Jersey Teacher of the Year, Nappi is a high school history teacher who encourages a critical examination of history while emphasizing each individual's power to impact others. His blog, *Ten Concrete Tips for Teaching About the Holocaust*, reflects his efforts to foster a classroom environment where students feel comfortable discussing difficult curriculum topics, and his desire to bring about positive change led him to co-found a charity that raised more than \$75,000 in staff donations to help students overcome financial difficulties affecting their classroom success.

Catherine Walker

The 2024 Alaska Teacher of the Year, Walker is a high school science and career and technical education teacher who develops problem-based, career-oriented lessons with a focus on sustainability and stewardship of natural resources while encouraging students to build empathy and collaboration to solve problems in their community. She supports students who are traditionally

underrepresented in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) careers by opening her classroom to business partners who allow the students to envision themselves in future career pathways.

Christy Todd

The 2024 Georgia Teacher of the Year, Todd is a middle school music technology teacher who believes in every child's creativity and in the power of unlocking it to deepen learning across subject areas. To address student well-being during the pandemic, she led the development of a schoolwide *Make Kindness Normal* podcast, engaging more than 500 students across subject areas and learning formats—in-person, virtual and hybrid—widening the possibilities for student response and reflection.

Missy Testerman

The 2024 Tennessee Teacher of the Year, Testerman is an English as a second language specialist and program director who works to ensure students are prepared to advocate for their families who have limited English proficiency. In her rural Appalachian community, Testerman builds bridges between cultures—families who have been in the area for centuries and newer immigrants—through a curriculum focused on a study of Americans from diverse backgrounds, allowing students to better understand that people are inherently the same and that they all belong.

Nappi was featured in the December *NJEA Review*. His story can also be found at njea.org. More information about the 2024 State Teachers of the Year and CCSSO's National Teacher of the Year Program is available at ntoy.ccsso.org.

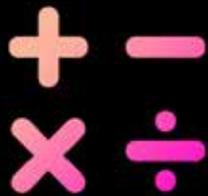
PENSION UPDATE

TOTAL PENSION FUND:
\$95.14 BILLION

The totals below reflect market values as of Dec. 31, 2023, and for comparison, May 31, 2023. The figures, which are rounded, may not reflect the current market values of some alternative investments through the period noted, because of lags in reporting under industry standards.

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

	Dec. 31, 2023		May 31, 2023	
	Market Value (\$ billions)	Asset Allocation	Market Value (\$ billions)	Asset Allocation
Global Growth	\$52.89	55.59%	\$50.97	56.34%
Income	\$16.45	17.29%	\$15.99	17.67%
Real Return	\$7.53	7.92%	\$7.38	8.15%
Defensive	\$16.36	17.20%	\$14.32	15.83%
Other	\$1.91	2.00%	\$1.82	2.02%
Total	\$95.14	100%	\$90.47	100%



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Implementing High-Impact Tutoring Grants

Issues for bargaining

By Katrina Homel, Esq.



This school year, the New Jersey Department of Education (DOE) rolled out the New Jersey Learning Acceleration Program: High-Impact Tutoring Grant, with approximately \$52 million in available funding. The DOE's goal in creating this grant was "to prioritize high-impact tutoring interventions for students that have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic."

In districts receiving funding, NJEA locals should pay attention to how these services will be implemented and the timeline for doing so, as there may be issues that are mandatory subjects of bargaining to address with the board.

The grants were made possible via federal funding under the American Rescue Plan, passed by Congress and signed by President Joe Biden during the pandemic. To receive high-impact tutoring grants, districts were required to apply to the DOE by late September 2023.

The period for program implementation began on Oct. 11, 2023, and will expire on Aug. 31, 2024. However, these programs may only be in their initial phases in some districts. In apportioning grants, the DOE prioritized districts with elementary schools and students in grades 3 and 4, though recipient districts are permitted to serve other students as needed.

Grants were awarded according to a tiered system based on student New Jersey Student Learning Assessment proficiency levels and district enrollment in grades 3 and 4. Depending on their tier, districts were eligible to receive up to \$768,000 in funding.

In implementing tutoring services under the grants, districts may contract with an approved vendor from a DOE-approved list or compensate district staff for tutoring services pursuant to a collective bargaining agreement.

Priority was given to districts able to provide at least three 30- to 60-minute tutoring sessions per week in

groups of no more than three students per tutor. Eligible costs include the costs for tutoring by an approved vendor and/or compensation of district staff members as well as costs of related professional development opportunities, needed instructional materials, and evaluation strategies to assess program impact.

More information from the DOE about the grants can be found at bit.ly/NJLAP-HIT. (Note: Bitly links are case-sensitive.)

Unit work and negotiations

The format of tutoring programs will vary from district to district. Some programs may be implemented in the classroom for specific students while general classroom instruction is going on, or tutoring can occur after school.

As these programs roll out, NJEA locals will want to consider whether tutoring is within the scope of unit work such that negotiations may be required. For example, if members are currently providing tutoring services for the district, locals may wish to assess how these members will be impacted by the district's program. Additionally, locals may also want to evaluate whether these opportunities are made available in compliance with any applicable contract terms and if implementation requires that additional association members are given the opportunity to serve as tutors and be compensated for that work.

Where members will be directly delivering tutoring instruction, locals may also want to consider how member workloads will be impacted. There could also be an impact on member workload if the tutoring services are provided by a third-party vendor. Factors to evaluate may include, but are not limited to, whether there are additional classroom management responsibilities and whether more time is required to grade student work, provide instruction or plan lessons.

Finally, where the implementation of tutoring programs requires additions or changes to transportation schedules, negotiations over added time and its impact may be required.

If you have questions or concerns about a high-impact tutoring program, or about implementation of other remote instruction in your district, you can reach out to your NJEA UniServ representative for more information. 🇺🇸

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.

A new strategy brings major success in Sparta

By Kathryn Coulibaly

The 2022 school board election in Sparta brought unwelcome changes to education in the district. After endorsing pro-public education candidates who were ultimately unsuccessful in their bid for office, the Sparta Education Association faced months of confronting a political agenda that included policy changes and book bans.

“Things that were happening across the state, but that hadn’t ever happened here before, began to happen in Sparta,” Angela DeLuccia, the president of the Sparta Education Association (SEA), recalls.

A school librarian, DeLuccia was on the front lines of the attacks. Books were being challenged and staff, including DeLuccia, were being personally attacked.

DeLuccia and her colleagues confronted every challenge, but it was wearing them down.

“We were spinning our wheels and I thought, ‘How can we try to slow down what is going on?’” DeLuccia says. “It was exhausting, and it was daily.”

A focus on community relationships

DeLuccia tapped into the resources of the community. A resident of Sparta, she had connections and relationships and knew the community was ultimately supportive.

“I reached out to people beyond the association,” she says. “We started a group to talk about how we wanted to deal with the book bans and the resource policy issues.”

The group began meeting in February 2023. Soon, other like-minded residents joined and helped to speak out, write letters to the editor, circulate petitions and continue to bring awareness to the community.

“We worked to find community members who were willing to use their voice at the table,” DeLuccia says. “That was a big thing given the high profile of the board of education in the past year. We tried to expand our reach



Campaign lawn sign—a simple slogan that led to a big victory.

beyond the people who always stood up and spoke out at meetings. We knew we needed fresh voices. By June, we had 50 people sitting in a room talking about what we wanted to do.”

The group deliberated over what to do about upcoming board elections.

“At that point, we had three open board seats and only one person who had filed the paperwork to run.”

Reluctant to engage in endorsements, as they had in the past, the SEA believed it was more important to focus on these community conversations and relationships and let people know what the real impact of the board’s actions were on students and staff.

“We had a long conversation, and I gave the group the perspective of an educator and a member of the association,” DeLuccia says. “I told them where we were, how we felt, as a group of educators and as individuals. We had a lot of strife, uncertainty and unrest in our working lives, and we needed that to stop so we could provide the best instruction, the best resources and the best support to our students. How can we do that if we’re on the defensive against attacks?”

Kathryn Coulibaly is the associate editor of the NJEA Review and provides content and support to njea.org. She can be reached at kcoulibaly@njea.org.



Some attendees and community supporters from the Stop Raising Taxes Campaign Rally held on Oct. 29, 2023.

One of the members of the group was Chad Wood, a recent graduate of Sparta High School and one of DeLuccia’s former students. Wood had served as the student council president and the student liaison to the board.

“Chad had felt his voice was stifled by the board as a student representative,” DeLuccia says. “By the end of the meeting, he had his petition to run for the school board signed and was ready to go.”

The group knew they needed a broad message to really reach voters. While the book banning issue was important—and bad policy—the bottom line is that treating educators poorly costs money. Everyone cares about money.

“We had a 5.8% tax increase, and we still lost staff in this district,” DeLuccia says. “We needed change.”

The NJEA Center for Honesty

DeLuccia reached out to her state affiliate for support and found strong partners in NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty and Government Relations staff member Michael Giglio, who leads NJEA’s Center for Honesty in Education. Center for Honesty leaders worked quickly to connect DeLuccia with myriad resources to help identify and mobilize supporters in her community through effective messaging and innovative organizing tactics.



Candidates Jennifer Lonsky (NJEA member), Kaitlin Gagnon, and Chad Wood sharing remarks about the positivity and possibility of the campaign.

“We had a lot going for us,” DeLuccia says. “More than 70% of the SEA membership lives in Sparta. We went through our membership lists and made sure everyone knew what was at stake. In addition, the youth vote really helped. Chad used social media, including Instagram, TikTok, and word of mouth—which he likes better—to talk to high school seniors and recent graduates. He made sure they were registered to vote and did. It all really worked together.”

On Election Day, all three pro-public education candidates were elected.

“We didn’t give them any money, but we gave them countless hours of support and voter outreach,” DeLuccia says.

Preparing for the next election

With the previous election only three months past, the group began meeting again in February 2024 to prepare for the next election.

“We don’t want to be stringent about political parties because that’s not our message,” DeLuccia says. “We are about working with people who care about our schools and our students, and who will stand with us when we face attacks. I keep in touch with all of the people who were



Candidate Jennifer Lonsky and DeLuccia taking a moment to be proud of their work.



DeLuccia in her school library office. On the bulletin board is a commendation from the Sussex County Education Association for DeLuccia’s 25 years of service to public education.

a part of this. We’re relative strangers, but I know that if I need their backing, they’ll be there.”

DeLuccia knows how lucky she is to have this support—from NJEA, her community and the New Jersey Association of School Librarians. She’s sharing what she has learned to help others facing challenging times.

“I’ve seen other librarians sunk by these crises,” DeLuccia says. “These attacks are so devastating.”

DeLuccia and others are working to pass a “Freedom to Read” bill in the NJ Legislature. S-2421, known as the “Freedom to Read Act,” establishes requirements for library material in public school libraries and public libraries, and protects school library media specialists and librarians from harassment. The bill is sponsored by Sens. Andrew Zwicker and Teresa Ruiz.

In addition, DeLuccia urges other associations to begin building their support network now, before a crisis hits.

“I recommend creating a book club in your community. Find ways to connect outside of politics but where you can build connections.” 📖



NJEA joins librarians to oppose censorship and book banning

NJEA, the New Jersey Library Association (NJLA), the New Jersey Association of School Librarians (NJASL), issued the joint statement below on Jan. 22.

The New Jersey Library Association (NJLA), the New Jersey Association of School Librarians (NJASL), and the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) have watched, with concern, the growing number of coordinated attempts of censorship and suppression in schools and libraries in New Jersey and across the country. Many of these attacks are targeting materials and programs that address race, racism, sexuality, and gender identity and expression. New Jersey school, public, and academic library workers are being defamed, harassed and threatened in public school board meetings, public library board of trustees meetings, on social media and on public media. Their professionalism, honor, work ethics and performance are being questioned, judged and vilified.

The signers of this statement condemn these attacks. We strongly affirm the Library Bill of Rights and the Freedom to Read Statement, first published by the American Library Association in 1953. We respect and recognize New Jersey's Law Against Discrimination and refuse to participate in efforts to discriminate against protected groups by weaponizing information. Libraries provide access to books and other library resources and services for the interest, information, education, and enlightenment of all people within the communities we serve. They do not exclude materials because of their origin, background, or the views of those contributing to their creation. Libraries do not discriminate against any group, recognizing that a healthy democracy holds many voices and free access to credible information is a cornerstone that keeps all of us safe, healthy, and informed about the world around us.

Library workers are trained to curate collections that are designed to be inclusive. NJASL's job description states that school librarians are obligated to:

- Select, purchase and process new materials to assure a current and balanced collection representing diverse points of view in accordance with the district materials selection policy.

- Continuously evaluate library resources with respect to curricular needs, accuracy, diversity, and community interest, removing those that do not meet established criteria, ensuring that the collection stays current, relevant, and in good condition.

Information service providers are guided by the tenets of intellectual freedom and their ethical responsibilities to uphold the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America. Through careful consideration and rigorous training, librarians and library workers are equipped to make selection decisions that represent a balance of the spectrum of knowledge.

We appreciate the right and responsibility of parents and guardians to guide the reading choices of their children. Such rights should not inhibit the rights of others to read or view materials of their choosing. As parents, educators, administrators, and school board members, we stand united against prejudices, and politically motivated culture wars that target the right to read and access to education and information.

We reaffirm our commitment to our communities, the right to be who they are and to see themselves represented in books, regardless of their gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, or religion.

The New Jersey Library Association, the New Jersey Association of School Librarians and the New Jersey Education Association stand together to support the freedom to read. In addition, these organizations stand in steadfast support of New Jersey's library workers, community members, and students, who demonstrate daily courage as champions of the right to read for everyone.

Signed by:

New Jersey Education Association

New Jersey Library Association

New Jersey Association of School Librarians

Every child, every voice, every battle for equity



By Amy T. Andersen

As a teacher of the Deaf and teacher of American Sign Language (ASL), advocating for every child's right to their culture and identity has always been as important to me as teaching. In 2018, as the New Jersey State Teacher of the Year, my ability to successfully advocate for Deaf children in my state was magnified, and for that, I will always be most proud and grateful.

This story begins nine years ago when I met the Renart family: two grieving parents, a 6-year-old big brother, and beautiful baby twin boys, one Deaf and one hearing. This family would guide my trajectory to ignite change in a system statewide. This story is about knocking down barriers to guarantee a little boy the educational opportunities he deserves.

This is a story about the day I saw a Deaf baby's eyes genuinely smile for the first time as he connected to the world around him through ASL. It is about the right that every child has to their voice, spoken or signed, and the human right we all have to communicate.

When I met Cole's mother, Stephanie Renart, she told me about the day she learned her baby was Deaf. She was sitting in the doctor's office thinking, "How am I ever going to tell my husband our baby will never hear?"

Barriers to language acquisition

With one Deaf and one hearing twin, as the babies grew up, Renart and her husband couldn't miss the differences. Ryan was repeating sounds, babbling and responding to simple directions.

Amy Andersen is a doctoral student with research interests in early intervention programming for Deaf and hard-of-hearing babies. As the 2018 New Jersey State Teacher of the Year, she secured funding for an innovative early intervention program for Deaf babies in New Jersey called Leveling the Playing Field. She can be reached at njstoy2018@gmail.com.



Cole Renart with Amy Andersen.

Cole became the first Deaf baby in New Jersey and the country to have a Deaf paraprofessional in the daycare setting for 25 hours a week.

Cole was not. He couldn't hear those sounds or simple directions. He was babbling but with his hands.

Renart's instincts drew her to sign even though the doctors had advised against it. Using visual language made sense, and she was committed to giving her baby a voice. Through early intervention, Cole's family met with a teacher of the Deaf one day a week for an hour, learning sign language and how to incorporate it into daily routines—one hour per week for eight months, but Cole seemed stuck.

Early intervention systems are family-centric. The service provider goes into the home, works with the parents, and provides activities the parents can work into daily routines within the home. This approach assumes that one of the parents is home with the baby.

There are two obstacles this approach can present for Deaf babies.

First, more than 90% of parents with Deaf children are hearing and do not know sign language, let alone have a fluency level in ASL to provide the regular interactive language a child needs to begin acquiring language.

Second, most families with children have two working parents. In single-parent families, that one parent works. As a result, children may spend most of their waking hours in a daycare setting, not in the home with a stay-at-home parent who can implement what they learn during early intervention sessions.

In a typical daycare environment, the childcare workers interact naturally with the children throughout the day, talking about what a child is playing with, reading stories, and talking about people and things in the environment. Time spent listening to, and interacting with, language is a crucial component of language development.

For Deaf children, daycare is a place without an accessible language. This presents a significant barrier for Deaf babies to acquire a language foundation. Research worldwide shows a systemic increase in the number of Deaf children entering kindergarten at a severe disadvantage due to language deprivation.



Amy Andersen, Cole, and his mother, Stephanie Renart.

The search for community

Cole spent 47 hours a week in a daycare with caring teachers interacting with him but in a language he could not hear. For only one hour a week, Cole had language access when his teacher of the Deaf was working with him. For the other 46 hours, Cole was isolated from his teachers and peers.

Renart knew she needed more, and Cole required more. There needed to be more than one hour a week. She found an ASL class at a local community college and enrolled, desperate for a way to reach her Deaf baby. Renart learned more signs every week and continued to meet with Cole's early intervention teacher for the Deaf, but Cole still wasn't making progress. Then, Renart was told that Cole's teacher for the Deaf was going on maternity leave, and no other teachers in the area were available to work with Cole.

The next day, she went to pick up Cole and Ryan at daycare, and when she walked into the room, Cole was in a corner by himself while the other kids ran around the room laughing. For the first time, she realized just how isolated Cole was. She felt a sense of hopelessness, unsure of how to open up his world in a place where no one could sign, and Cole couldn't hear the language being used.

That night, Renart went to her ASL class and sat next to her friend Denise, the mother of one of my ASL students. Denise told Renart about our monthly ASL chats with the Deaf community. The next night, at our December ASL Chat, I met Cole and his family for the first time. I immediately introduced them to our local Deaf community, and Renart was able to ask about them growing up Deaf



A monthly ASL Chat with the Deaf community for ASL students and Deaf/hard of hearing children. The picture includes both current Ocean City High School ASL students and former OCHS students who are now professional interpreters in the South Jersey community.

Back from left: Jack Brogan (OCHS '24), Jennifer Vitagliano (OCHS '14), and Emily Krause (OCHS '10)
 Middle from left: Kaitlin Calloway (OCHS '24), Amy Andersen, Alivia Adams (OCHS '25), and Ella Mashura (OCHS '24)
 Front: Cole Renart

in a hearing world. Later that night, I offered to be Cole's teacher of the Deaf for his early intervention services. Renart cried that night but not out of despair. She finally felt HOPE.

Advocating for Cole

As I started working with Cole, I knew he needed to be in a language-rich environment, exposed to an accessible visual language with a native user of ASL. For months, I called the early intervention agency I worked for and sent research articles, hoping we could find a way to add visual language to Cole's daycare environment. I shared everything I knew with Renart, who, as his parent, also began to advocate.

We asked for Cole to have a Deaf, native user of ASL with him in daycare, signing throughout the day, just like the hearing babies had teachers talking to them throughout the day. The agency told us this had never been done before and suggested we teach Cole's daycare teachers sign language. At that time, Cole was 18 months old and

**It's a story about
 parents who refused
 to take "no" for
 an answer and
 about the love
 and determination
 of a teacher and
 community fighting to
 empower a little boy
 to succeed.**

didn't have time to wait for his teachers to learn some signs. Renart made calls every day and refused to give up.

Finally, we sat down for an emergency meeting in January 2017. Cole's mother and I provided resources showing the importance of language acquisition for Deaf children, and most importantly, we spoke from our hearts. We advocated for a Deaf American Sign Language user to be placed in Cole's daycare classroom. Representatives from the early intervention agency expressed concern that we would never find someone like that, even if they approved the request.

Fortunately, we had already found a trusted member of the local Deaf community who was anxious to jump in and be the first to pioneer this approach. With persistence and determination, we finally convinced the New Jersey Early Intervention System to do something they had never done before. Cole became the first Deaf baby in New Jersey and the country to have a Deaf paraprofessional in the daycare setting for 25 hours a week. He finally had access to a visual language he could naturally acquire, and his language exploded!

The world opens up for Cole

When Cole turned 3, he knew his colors, numbers, and animals and could fingerspell M-A-X, the name of his favorite toy dog. Cole could tell his mother he wasn't feeling well or was scared to ride the Ferris wheel at the boardwalk. He could tell his mother he was excited that his daddy gave him candy, which sometimes got Daddy in trouble.

Cole loved school because he knew that his Deaf language role model would communicate with him and that he could share with his teachers and friends, who were all starting to learn to sign. Soon, many of Cole's friends signed with him and knew how to get his attention by waving to him or tapping him on the shoulder. Expressing his wants, needs, likes and dislikes opened this toddler's world and allowed him to forge relationships with his parents, brothers and friends.

Now, as a thriving, bilingual eight-year-old, Cole's confidence is clear to anyone who meets him. He is a leader and academically on par with his peers. He is on his local basketball team and loves playing Roblox, swimming and FaceTiming with friends. Sometimes, I even get a Marco Polo video from Cole telling me he's dyeing his hair green for St. Patrick's Day or showing me a new magic trick he's learned! Cole wants to be a veterinarian when he grows up.

A program to "Level the Playing Field"

This happy ending did not stop with Cole and the Renart family. In collaboration with Deaf colleagues Michelle Cline and Christopher Sullivan, I submitted a proposal to

the New Jersey Legislature called "Leveling the Playing Field: A Language Acquisition Program for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children."

The proposal was based on the service model we pioneered with Cole and sought to expand it statewide for all Deaf, hard of hearing, and Deafblind babies and their families. Sure enough, on a surprising day in July, I received a phone call letting me know the proposal was accepted, and the program would receive \$550,000 annually to provide this service, free of charge, to families throughout New Jersey. All of those babies and all of those voices now receive access to language in their daycare environments!

The possibilities for Cole became limitless because he was given the gifts of love, language, and voice. Cole's story shows how one child's experience can affect many and how education and language access are liberating. It's a story about parents who refused to take "no" for an answer and about the love and determination of a teacher and community fighting to empower a little boy to succeed, not as a version of everyone else, but as himself.

Cole taught us all that with dedication and hope, we can break down barriers to ensure every child receives the equitable education they deserve!

Editor's note: To read more about Cole's story, read "The Leveling the Playing Field Language Acquisition Program for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children" by Amy T. Andersen, Michelle Cline, Stephanie Renart, and Tiffany Narciso, published in the *Teacher Education Journal of South Carolina*. Visit njea.org/TEJSC-Andersen to download the article. 



Teaching students diagnosed with **auditory** **processing disorders**

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



Auditory processing disorder in students is a disorder involving the central processing portion of the brain. It is commonly mistaken for a hearing problem, behavior disorder or attention deficit disorder. – American Speech-Language Hearing Association

Auditory processing disorder (APD) and central auditory processing disorder (CAPD) are umbrella terms for any kind of hearing disorder where the brain and the central nervous system cannot process sound properly. Most cases start in childhood. It is estimated that about 1 in every 20 students has APD.

Students with APD are unable to process verbal information the same way as other students because their ears and brain are not working together properly. A delay in the brain's processing of the information coming from what is heard can last 10 seconds or longer. By the time the brain begins to process the first word that was spoken, the person speaking has already said the entire sentence. This means that a student with APD may have heard only the first word, or the first few words, spoken.

Students with auditory processing disorder can have difficulty doing schoolwork, especially if instruction is long or has multiple steps. Processing words and their meanings may be difficult for these students. These students also commonly have speech and language difficulty, as they cannot decipher the difference between similar sounding letters. For example, consonant blends at the beginning of words, such as "pr" and "dr," may sound the same to these students.

Students with auditory processing disorder also have auditory memory problems and based upon learning styles, rely on visual processing skills. Visual aids in the classroom can help the student learn or know what steps to do next in class.

Misunderstanding students with APD

Unfortunately, students with auditory processing disorder are often thought to be easily distracted, not focused, not paying attention, not caring about what is happening, lazy, disrespectful or in need of medication.

Students who have auditory processing disorder may

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also suffer from auditory attention problems, especially if there is an abundance of background noise in the home or classroom. It may appear that the student has a hearing disorder, is simply not listening, or that they have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder—a common misdiagnosis—as their brain tries to keep up with processing verbal information.

Possible causes of APD

Researchers are still working to identify the exact cause of auditory processing disorder. Some researchers report that exposure to lead, trauma to the head, heredity, prenatal drug/alcohol exposure or chronic ear infections may be contributing factors.

Proper screening can be conducted by a learning disabilities teacher-consultant (LDT-C), school psychologist, and/or a speech-language pathologist knowledgeable in APD or from an audiologist who specializes in the diagnosis of central auditory processing disorders (CAPD).

Proper diagnosis can help the student succeed in school and at home, as parents, teachers and other aides can work together to provide the right support and services in the home and school.

According to researchers Kathleen Corriveau, Usha Goswami and Jennifer Thompson, there is general agreement that auditory perceptual abilities and language development are interrelated, as are auditory processing skills and preliteracy skills. Researcher Gail Richard found that it can be difficult to separate the influence of auditory and language skills when considering academic demands. Researcher Larry Medwetsky noted that the act of processing speech is complex and involves the engagement of auditory, cognitive and language mechanisms, often simultaneously.



Understanding auditory processing disorder

Auditory processing difficulties can manifest in various ways—no two students face the same auditory processing challenges. Students may experience difficulties with listening, understanding what is being said and engaging in conversation. They may struggle with social skills. They may have difficulty maintaining a working memory. Executive functioning and poor organizational skills are common with auditory processing disorder in students.

Auditory localization

The student cannot locate the source of sound and may lack a skill called auditory localization. The student has trouble identifying precisely where a sound is coming from. Auditory localization is essential in most daily activities. Imagine trying to walk through a busy hall between class or crowded cafeteria without being able to identify where sounds are coming from.

Auditory sequencing

The student cannot understand the order of sounds. Students with auditory processing disorder may lack a skill called auditory sequencing and may be confused about the order of sounds. Their brain cannot store and recall auditory stimuli, such as the exact order in which sounds arrive. Not being able to store and recall makes it difficult for students to learn anything by repetition, recite a poem or remember music. The student would have difficulty following verbal instructions or understanding the consequences.

Auditory word discrimination and sound discrimination

Students with auditory processing disorder cannot differentiate between similar sounding words like crash and cash or eighteen and eighty. This is due to a limited ability for auditory word discrimination and sound discrimination.

Auditory discrimination

The student with auditory processing delays does not always understand speech. They are lacking in the skill of auditory discrimination, having difficulty understanding speech when more than one person is talking, there's noise in the background or the quality of sound is bad.

This is because the student cannot differentiate between sounds of different frequency, duration, and intensity and cannot distinguish speech from background noise. The student may not understand when someone speaks fast. The rate at which we process sound is known as temporal processing. For a student with APD, temporal processing is slow. As a result of slow temporal processing, there is a bigger time gap between hearing a sound and processing it.

Auditory memory

APD affects auditory memory or the ability to store sound information and recall them, as necessary. When the speed of processing sound is low, students take more time to understand spoken instruction, directions or commands. The student may ask that information be repeated, or they form a habit of guessing.

Auditory figure-ground

The student with APD gets distracted easily by noises, self-distractions and/or environmental distractions. They find it difficult to listen in a noisy place, classroom, hallway, school bus, etc. The student may not be able to identify the primary sound from background noise, a necessary auditory skill known as auditory figure-ground. Students with auditory processing disorder may also have a short auditory attention span.

Auditory fatigue

Students with APD become tired easily and may be observed with their head down on their arm, pretending to be involved in the lesson, eyes closed or staring. A noisy place can be tiring due to the increased need to put in more effort to listen above the noise or not be distracted. In fact, the daily effort of listening may become so strenuous that the student may just stop trying to adjust. This is known as auditory fatigue.

Auditory closure

Students with auditory processing disorder may not perform well at school. Sometimes, when a part of a sentence is missing or garbled, we make sense of the context and fill the gap using common sense. For example, in the sentence, "The ___ rises in the east," we can easily fill in the missing word, sun, from what we know. This is known as auditory closure. We all use auditory closure to understand what is being said. Students with APD might

constantly have to rely on auditory memory and auditory closure. Since the student with APD needs to allocate extra mental resources (energy) just to understand what is being said, they are often left with a reduced capacity for other schoolwork, homework or socialization.

APD impact on spelling, reading, recall and singing skills

Students with APD have poor spelling, reading, recall and singing skills. While instructing a student with APD to spell or read, make sure to speak in a clear, distinct way with pauses and repetitions. Students with APD mispronounce words and leave out syllables. While singing, they might change both the lyrics and the tune. Learning to read, spell or sing depends on auditory skills as identifying and joining syllables, attaching meaning to sounds, and remembering the sequence of sounds and words. Students with APD lack these basic skills, they perform poorly in any area that is dependent on hearing and display limited vocabulary.

APD impact on holding conversations

Students with APD struggle with holding conversations and may speak in ways inappropriate to the moment or their age. They may say too much or too little, use inappropriate language, fail to follow a conversation, or have difficulty organizing their thoughts or staying on topic.

Accommodations for students with APD

Students with auditory processing delays will need help from a speech-language pathologist to stay at the same speech and language level as their peers. These students may need help from a friend or help from an aide in the classroom when organizing schoolwork in the classroom or to bring home in their backpacks.

Classroom seating, materials, and routines

- Provide a quiet area for independent work.
- Let the student sit near the teacher and away from auditory distractions, like doors and windows.
- Check in frequently to make sure the student understands the work.
- Give extra time for testing.

Giving instructions and assignments

- Give step-by-step instructions, and have the student repeat them.
- Use attention-getting phrases like "This is important to know because..."
- Decide with the student on a nonverbal signal to show that a key point is being made.
- Say directions, assignments and schedules aloud, and rephrase as needed.
- Repeat key information throughout the lesson and rephrase as needed.
- Use visual tools, images and gestures to enhance and support spoken lessons.
- Break down test or classwork instructions into short, written steps.
- Highlight key words and ideas on worksheets.
- Adjust quantity of homework. Give written homework instructions.

Introducing new concepts/lessons

- Speak clearly and slowly when presenting information.
- Give material on a new concept to the student before it is taught to the whole class (so the student can become familiar with the material ahead of time).
- Give a list of or highlight key vocabulary and concepts for upcoming lessons.
- Give a brief review or connection to a previous lesson before teaching something new.
- Give the student an outline of the lesson.
- Grade based on the student's completion of the lesson goal. (For instance, do not grade spelling errors if that is not what the student was supposed to learn.)
- Consult with the learning disabilities teacher-consultant and/or speech pathologist for additional support and strategies.

Hazing new educators must **STOP**

Expectations for new educators are setting them up for failure



By Jonathan Lee Lancaster

There exists a terrible reality in many schools: new educators are expected to do it all. In addition to honing teaching techniques, becoming familiar with their curricula, developing classroom management abilities and creating their pedagogical ideology, new educators are also subject to expectations from school leaders to advise extracurricular clubs, volunteer for noninstructional duties and take on roles in committees.

In the aptly named 2004 article, “Why Do New Teachers Cry?” educators and researchers Thomas McCann and Larry Johannessen tracked new teachers and presented their difficulties, most of which included a “demoralizing workload” and reports that their position was “especially fatiguing.” While the article is 20 years old, it doesn’t appear that much has changed.

Other research from educators Mary Elizabeth Lloyd and Alexandra Sullivan in 2012 highlights new teachers’ “sense of under appreciation, lack of support and some colleagues’ unwillingness to help.”

Moreover, as Mary Patterson notes in an *Educational Leadership* article titled “Hazed,” school leaders often

assign new educators the most difficult classes that contain students with the most needs, refuse to assign new educators their own classroom and require them to move rooms throughout the day, and burden new educators with the expectation to come early and leave late. All of these conditions set our new educators up for failure.

Passing it off

New educators are often pressured into fulfilling vacant noninstructional positions. After years of enduring the sometimes undesirable roles of class advisers, club supervisors, chaperones, morning and after-school duty holders, committee members and project leaders, more senior educators are eager to pass these roles to new educators. While more senior staff sometimes hold the sentiment that new educators must undergo the same hardships that they did in order to earn their place in the wider school community, it is often the case that more senior educators pass on these roles out of exhaustion.

Educators with more experience don’t desire to see newer teachers fail, rather they pass these roles off because they now have the leverage and seniority to resist the pressure from school administration and decline school leaders’ requests. In this way, more senior educators act out against the toxic work environment that they had endured as a new educator. However, the result perpetuates the cycle of toxicity for newer educators who become saddled with additional roles and responsibilities.

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Preying upon the most vulnerable

The result of passing all undesirable roles to new educators is that these tasks are placed upon those in the worst position to perform them. Because new educators need to balance the numerous responsibilities that come with learning to teach, pressuring them to take on additional work is irresponsible and exploitative. Preying upon those without the seniority or tenure to decline extra responsibilities creates an unsustainable environment in which new educators either quit or endure long enough to obtain seniority so they can also pass on these roles.

This cycle produces terrible working environments and outcomes. New educators will never be able to perform these duties well because of the enormous commitment that being a new educator entails. The staff who are most in a position to succeed with these additional roles are those who have seniority and have already developed experience in their roles. Typically, staff with more seniority have developed their base curriculum and teaching techniques enough that they have much more time to devote to these additional roles than new educators who are still trying to find the printer.

Despite this reality, school leaders fail to develop the culture or relationships with senior staff that is needed to break the cycle. As opposed to working with more senior staff—who can flex their contractual muscles to refuse unwanted or unreasonable demands for additional work—school leaders pawn it off on new folks who cannot refuse as freely.

School leaders need to push for more fair compensation for these noninstructional roles to incentivize teachers to agree to take them on. They should also use their influence as leaders shift the school culture toward an environment more conducive to sharing the burden of these roles. That can begin by developing an ongoing dialogue around these issues with more senior staff.

The big picture

As result of the unrealistic expectations placed on new educators, 50% of them leave the profession before their fifth year according to several studies, including those by Carol Bartell in 2005, Bonni Gourneau in 2014, and Leiflyn Gamborg, Angela Webb, Amber Smith and Jennifer Baumgartner in 2018. And further research has demonstrated why.

For instance, Mei-Lin Chang in 2009 and Mike DiCicco, Robert Jordan and Laura Sabella in 2019, found that new educators report alarming levels of anxiety, emotional distress and a lack of self-care. In “The Plight of the Novice Teacher,” Sarah Clark found that new educators typically feel isolated and unsupported. Lloyd and Sullivan found that new educators state that they regularly feel “disrespected or not valued ... beat up, exhausted and a

failure.” Additionally, researchers Carl Hancock and Lisa Scherff found that new educators developed “cynical attitudes toward students, parents and the workplace” after their first year. Is it any wonder new teacher leave the profession or develop these attitudes?

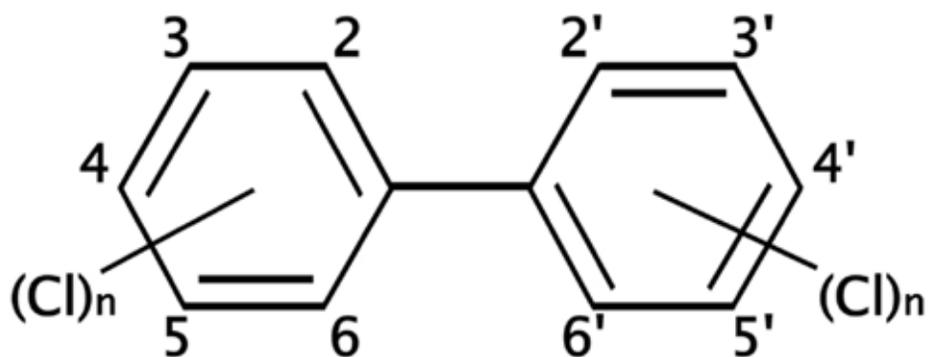
At a time where nationwide teacher shortages are at an all-time high, schools need to treat new educators better. According to researchers Elizabeth Steiner and Ashley Woo in a 2021 Rand Corporation study, the top reason that teachers state for quitting is not pay, benefits or resources—it is stress. The role of being a new educator is stressful enough. School leaders need to realize that it serves the profession, their culture and students better to work with more senior staff to shift culture than to take the easy route of expecting new teachers to take on all undesirable roles.

Solutions

School leaders must protect and develop new educators by giving them the time, resources and means to succeed. As Patterson contends in “Hazed,” this means hiring teachers with appropriate lead-time, providing one classroom and a reasonable number of preps, and being clear that the expectations for these new educators are no more than what they have agreed to in the contract.

Those in power—school leaders, policymakers and board members—must work to develop strong relationships with more senior staff to help share the burden, push for higher compensation and seek fairer working conditions. Simply put, the current expectations placed on new educators cannot continue. 🚫





PCBs in NJ Schools

What we need to know

By Zarin Hussain, MPH (c) and Derek G. Shendell, D. Env., MPH

Grasping the use of PCBs

PCBs or polychlorinated biphenyls have been a public health threat for decades. PCBs were commonly used as insulators in materials from the 1920s to 1970s and, consequently, in the construction of many schools. This may now lead to higher exposure of PCBs among students and staff members.

Most schools were constructed in the 1950s-1980's. Studies show that children have higher exposure, in part, because they spend most of their time in school. Researchers have estimated no less than 12,960 schools up to as many as 25,920 schools in the U.S. were built using caulk and sealants containing PCBs. About 46% of U.S. schools were constructed using PCBs and can be found in materials such as tiles and walls.

Other materials used in building schools such as ballasts of fluorescent lights may contain PCBs. For example, the electrical components of fluorescent lights contain PCBs in their capacitors and potting material of the ballast for insulation.

People are often exposed through inhalation or physical contact with PCB oil or materials contaminated with PCBs after ballasts age and leak. According to lab and field

studies, internal/external caulking increases indoor air concentration of PCBs. Notably, PCBs build up in dust settling on surfaces such as heating systems and ceiling panels. The materials used to build schools were correlated to increased inhalation exposure to PCBs in schools due to materials utilized in the construction of schools, surface treatments, and paints.

Notably, the oldest parts of school facilities usually have the highest concentrations since they were built in the period PCBs were popular. Moreover, materials such as sealants, paint, adhesives, and PCB volatilization from these materials increase excess PCB levels in indoor air exceeding acceptable EPA levels.

Exposure effects and prevention

Frequent cleaning of surfaces is crucial to prevent PCB exposure through the buildup of particles such as dust in buildings. Notably, for exposure among younger school-aged children, toxins and toxicants including lead often accumulate in such dust. Ventilation systems must be regularly cleaned as well to mitigate high PCB levels on dust in the air.

Teachers are also considered high-risk groups for exposure. For instance, inhalation exposure occurs through migration of PCBs from contaminated buildings or outdoor areas, often resulting in higher concentrations of PCB substances. The most common way for exposure to PCBs among staff and students is through inhaling dust contaminated by caulk and electrical components in lights.

Dr. Derek Shendell is a professor at the Rutgers School of Public Health where Zarin Hussain is working toward her master's degree in public health, majoring in environmental health sciences. They worked in coordination with the New Jersey Work Environment Council to produce this article.

PCBs remain in older school buildings due to historical use in window caulking and older lighting fixtures, and proper removal when replaced remains imperative.

Susceptible, vulnerable subgroups include younger children because they spend most of their time in school, including on the floor for group activities or nap time and during physical education classes. Thus, custodians should effectively clean surface dust. For instance, in a window frame that contains deteriorated caulk that reached the floor, it is crucial to use a HEPA vacuum to clean the areas.

The brains of children are growing rapidly, they ingest higher amounts of food per pound, breathe at higher rates, and have higher rates of metabolism. Furthermore, children spend approximately 35 to 50 hours in facilities for schools per week. For instance, children are more likely to ingest dust by engaging in behaviors such as crawling and playing on the ground before eating. Furthermore, children of women who were exposed to PCBs often are born prematurely and have higher incidents of low birth weight.

Notably, among adults, PCBs have been correlated to endocrine disruption and cancer. In addition, exposure to high concentrations of PCBs potentially induces lowered function of the liver, rashes, headaches, nausea and vomiting.

The long-term impact of PCBs includes nervous system damage, inhibited immunity, issues with the respiratory tract, interference of hormone levels and damage to the



Resources and references recommended

Environmental Science and Pollution Research International

"PCB Remediation in Schools: A Review"
bit.ly/pcb-schools-brown

Reviews on Environmental Health

"Exposure to and health effects of volatile PCBs"
bit.ly/pcb-reh-carpenter

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs)
epa.gov/pcbs

Environmental Health

"Mitigation of Building-Related Polychlorinated Biphenyls in Indoor Air of a School"
bit.ly/pcb-mitigate-macintosh

reproductive systems Short-term impacts of exposure to PCBs include eye irritation and skin irritation, such as chloracne. Pregnant women or women who are nursing and exposed to PCBs potentially pass them to infants, who potentially experience impairments in short-term and recognition memory (visual), and movement.

Summing it up

Primary sources of PCBs often lead to higher levels of exposure, especially if they are indoors due to substances such as caulk, paint, waterproofing sealants, adhesives and other coatings found in places such as around window frames, on walls, in expansion joints, and base and floor tiles. PCBs are also found in fluorescent light ballasts, in which the risk of exposure occurs if the seal is opened and PCBs leak into air or on dust.

Secondary sources of PCBs migrate from primary sources to materials used for construction nearby. For instance, there have been 99,000 ppm in brick, concrete, foam board, mortar and other building materials near primary sources.

Finally, PCBs also transport from both primary and secondary sources to media indoors such as dust, soil, air, and other media. 🏠



What can local associations do

Employees should report any identified hazard immediately to prevent future work-related illnesses to their employers and your union representative. If the reported unsafe working condition is ignored, work with your union representative and union health and safety committee. Locals should also request the use of HEPA filter-containing vacuums, especially when cleaning dust potentially containing PCBs.

The local association should create, expand, and/or enhance their health and safety committee to oversee issues including removal of identified old sources of PCBs.



PAST, PRESENT
AND FUTURE

REGISTER FOR BENEFITSOLVER

Your retiree health benefits information at your fingertips

The New Jersey Division of Pensions and Benefits has set up Benefitsolver, which gives you access to your School Employees' Health Benefits Program (SEHBP) account and allow for online designation of beneficiaries, change of health and dental plans, and submission of documentation.

If your district was in the SEHBP, there should be a button for Benefitsolver after you log in to MBOS. If your district was not a member of the School Employees Health Benefits Program, you will need to register for Benefitsolver.

Registering for Benefitsolver

1. Go to mynjbenefitshub.nj.gov or on the Division of Pensions and Benefits homepage, click on "Access Benefitsolver."
2. Click on "Register."
4. Complete all the information requested on the Benefitsolver "Health Benefits Registration" page. Make sure the Company Key has SHBP/SEHBP
5. Click "Continue."
6. Complete "Contact Information."
7. Answer "Yes" to having a MyNewJersey Account.
8. Put in your MBOS Login ID and password you created when registering for MBOS.
9. Click "Submit."
10. Your Benefitsolver account is now linked to your MBOS Account.

When you log in to MBOS there should be a button for MBOS and a button for Benefitsolver.

The Division of Pensions and Benefits has a video library to assist members with many topics. You can access the video for the Retired Benefitsolver Guide at youtu.be/-K_9xCnaD4M.

NJREA SPRING LUNCHEON IS APRIL 18

The NJREA Spring Luncheon—held in honor of Dr. Frederick L. Hipp—will be held on April 18. Dr. Hipp was instrumental in the formation of NJREA and was a leading advocate for public education throughout the state. In 1976, the *New York Times* named Dr. Hipp one of the eight most powerful men in New Jersey.

At this popular members-only event, retirees will learn more about what they can do to act on important issues,

as well as how we can work together to continue to restore respect for public education and preserve the pensions and benefits public school employees have earned.

The business agenda begins with the Delegate Council meeting at 10 a.m., followed by the Member Information Session at 11 a.m., where attendees can receive updates and ask questions.

As per NJREA policy, only NJREA members may attend the business meeting and luncheon. There is no reserved seating.

The luncheon, held at the Masonic Fellowship Center in Burlington, will be an in-person event. Doors open at 9:15 a.m.

Can't stay for the whole event?

For just \$8, attendees have the option to join their fellow retirees for breakfast and sit in on the day's Delegate Council meeting and/or Member Information Session, but not stay for lunch.

Registration

To register, send the coupon along with your check (payable to NJREA) to NJREA Second Vice President Ron Burd, PO Box 253, Lebanon, NJ 08833 by Friday, March 29. The coupon can be found in the December *NJREA Newsletter* or at njea.org/NJREA. Be sure to include your meal choice of Salad with Shrimp Cocktail, Pasta Primavera or Chicken Marsala. Salad, fresh vegetable, potato, bread and rolls will accompany the entrée, followed by coffee service and dessert.

The cost is \$35. Breakfast will be provided. There will be danish, muffins, bagels, fruit salad, coffee and juice. Lunch will be served after the Delegate Council meeting.

JOIN US AT A NEW LOCATION

The Masonic Fellowship Center is located at 1114 Oxmead Road, Burlington. For directions, visit the njea.org/njrea.

SPRING LUNCHEON AGENDA

9:30 a.m. – Breakfast

10 a.m. – Delegate Council meeting

11 a.m. – Member Information Session

Noon – Lunch

2 p.m. – Delegate Council reconvenes (if necessary)

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

May 14: Spring meeting/luncheon at Seasons Catering in Washington Township. Cost is \$50. To attend, call Randy Allshouse at 973-460-1262 by May 5.

BURLINGTON COUNTY REA

May 16: Spring meeting/luncheon at Marco's at Indian Springs Country Club in Marlton. Cost is \$25. To attend, call Donna O'Malley at 609-268-0838 by May 2.

CUMBERLAND COUNTY REA

May 1: Spring meeting/luncheon at NJ Motorsports Park in Millville. Cost is \$33. To attend, call Pamela Garwood at 856-392-6909 by April 24.

ESSEX COUNTY REA

May 15: Spring meeting/luncheon at Hanover Manor in Hanover. Cost is \$40. To attend, call Kathie Osborne at 973-715-6591 by May 8.

GLOUCESTER COUNTY REA

March 26: Laura Maltman Health and Wellness workshop and luncheon at the GCREA office in Woodbury. Cost is \$10 members, \$15 guests. To attend, call Margery Walsh at 856-381-1123 by March 20.

May 14: Spring meeting/luncheon at Riverwinds Restaurant in West Deptford. Cost is \$30. To attend, call Margery Walsh at 856-381-1123 by May 4.

HUNTERDON COUNTY REA

April 25: Spring meeting/brunch at Mt. View Chalet in Asbury. Cost is \$35. To attend, call Joyce Kucyn at 908-479-6656 by April 18.

MERCER COUNTY REA

May 8: Spring meeting/luncheon at Mercer Oaks Golf Club in Princeton Junction. Cost is \$33. To attend, email Iris Tonti at iristonti@msn.com by April 28.

MONMOUTH COUNTY REA

April 9: Spring luncheon/meeting at Falco's in Ocean Twp. Cost is \$45. To attend, call Debbie Adamchak, 848-459-2672 by March 29.

MORRIS COUNTY REA

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.

April 20: Scholarship fundraiser meeting at Morris County Vo-Tech. Program is Tricky Tray and \$20 admission purchases entrance and one sheet of white tickets. For additional information and to attend, call Cheryl Doltz at 973-818-1353.

May 8: General 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 April 24.

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.

May 9: Spring meeting/luncheon at the Captain's Inn in Forked River. Cost is \$28. To attend, call Maryann Tomborello by April 23 at 732-323-0346.

PASSAIC COUNTY REA

March 27: Spring meeting/luncheon at the Brownstone House in Paterson. To attend, call Kitty Sausa at 201-445-7577.

SOMERSET COUNTY REA

May 1: Spring meeting/luncheon at the Somerville Elks Lodge in Bridgewater. Cost is \$28. To attend, call Kathy Kapp at 908-722-7715 by April 25.

SUSSEX COUNTY REA

April 8: Spring luncheon/meeting at Farmstead Country Club. Cost is \$34. To attend, call Elaine Freda at 973-219-3029 by April 1.

WARREN COUNTY REA

April 3: Meeting/luncheon at Hawk Pointe Golf Club in Washington. Registration required by March 27. Luncheon is \$30. To register, go to warrencountyrea.org/meetings.

Prioritizing the needs of special education students

Respecting the staff who serve them

By Jamaya Newton

Special education plays a vital role in catering to the unique needs of students, ensuring they receive tailored support for their educational journey. Despite its importance, the field encounters challenges, including high turnover rates, persistent understaffing and a need for increased awareness.

Working in this field, I've witnessed the challenges and successes of these programs. In this article we will explore the experiences of two professionals in our public schools, gaining insights into their work. Their narratives highlight the importance of prioritizing and actively safeguarding their mental health and well-being in the demanding field of special education.



A passion for the work

Meet Sara Fernando, a special education teacher at Bayberry Elementary School in the Watchung School District. With 11 years of experience, Fernando currently teaches in a self-contained classroom, specializing in autism spectrum disorder.

"Kindness is such a big part of teaching students on the autism spectrum," Fernando says. "People have to be kind enough to teach them."

Many mental health and behavioral health professionals enjoy their work; however, this job isn't easy. Fernando recounts her experiences with difficult behaviors in the classroom, such as physical and verbal aggression, elopement (leaving or escaping areas), property destruction and tantrums. How does she continue to show up for her kids every day?

"Leave school at school," Fernando advises. "Completely forget that day existed. Lean on your team. My husband is my biggest teammate."

Setting boundaries

Fernando urges new teachers to set boundaries and constraints to offset burnout.

"My first two years of teaching I was at school until 9 p.m.," Fernando remembers. "Do not do that. If it does not have a deadline it can wait until tomorrow."

Fernando encourages taking a break, when necessary. "I had to take the summer off [from this kind of work]," Fernando says. "I had to work in a job that had nothing to do with children. Take a break. Make little adjustments to make the next year easier."

Inclusion

Fernando is an advocate for inclusion.

"I am very big on inclusivity," Fernando says. "Every child needs positive peer models, whether they have a disability or not. We expose them to their peers and work on those skills."

This may include participation in specials such as physical education, art, music and so forth. Unfortunately, districts look at inclusivity differently, and this crucial exposure is lacking in some public schools. In others, special area teachers are not given the support they need to be successful with students who have special needs.

Fernando explains that for her students, even having lunch and recess with their general education peers is necessary exposure for learning how to function with others when eating, socializing, playing and other day-to-day interactions.

"They should not be separated all the time," Fernando says. "In real life they are not separated. They go to the same grocery stores, libraries and banks with the general public. So, it all starts in school."

Jamaya Newton is a secretary in the Professional Development and Instructional Issues Division. Prior to joining NJEA staff, Newton was a registered behavior technician specializing in autism. She can be reached at jnewton@njea.org.

No such thing as a typical day

There is no such thing as a “typical day” in a special education classroom. The responsibilities of a special education teacher go beyond the norm. Daily schedules focus on routine and occupational skills (toileting, teeth brushing, dressing, etc.), as well as modified academic learning sessions.

Fernando often teaches multiple grade levels in one classroom—typically at least three—with different education levels and behavior plans.

“No day looks the same by any means,” Fernando says.

She reflects on becoming like a second parent to the children she works with; a responsibility that she is honored to partake in. But she knows that such a responsibility is not an easy one.

“Support is the largest reason why many teachers end up leaving the field,” Fernando says. “It is not universal for teachers to get adequate prep times, access to behaviorists and other needed supports.”

Fernando also believes that educating all school staff about what special education looks like “would make the world of difference.”



Advocating for students and adults

Meet Angela Terruso, a specialized instructional assistant in Washington Township, Gloucester County, with 15 years of experience in special education. Terruso currently serves as the president of the Washington Township Schools Support Services

Personnel Association, actively advocating for improved working conditions and increased budget allocation in support of special education staff and programs.

“I’ve spent so much time helping these kids,” Terruso says. “It’s time to help the adults now.”

As WTSSSPA President, Terruso extends her commitment to the teachers and educational support professionals who play a vital role in the success of students with special needs.

Terruso explains misconceptions related to her field, including pay. She emphasizes that special education classrooms have different needs than other classrooms, including the hiring of behavioral support staff. She recalls when her district brought several special education programs back into the district with salaries below \$21,000.

Hiring practices, Terruso notes, are a major contributor to the high turnover of support staff.

“We can’t keep people, and we know why,” Terruso says.

To address understaffing, many districts now rely on outsourcing staff work to private, for-profit companies. This leads to a revolving door. Subcontracted staff sometimes receive what appears on the surface to be better pay for equal or less experience. They receive little to no training from the school district.

“We felt as though our jobs were being threatened,” she says.

Terruso is saddened that some amazing staff members felt they had no choice.

“Special needs children need consistency,” Terruso continues. Consistency allows them to thrive and stay on track with their goals. Change is not easy for her students. She fears that these hiring practices negatively impact special needs children, and retaining qualified staff is a key solution.

Remembering self-care

Regarding mental health, Terruso shares a helpful tip: “Somebody once told me that self-care is not selfish. It took me a while to figure that out. You need to take care of you.”

Terruso takes pride in her job and understands that showing up is half of the battle. She advises others to communicate with their colleagues about the trials and tribulations of working with special needs students.

“Talk to your co-workers because they are going through the same thing,” Terruso advises. “It’s not complaining; it’s venting.”

Terruso insists that respect, training and better salaries are three key ingredients to improving special education. In Washington Township, subcontracted employees are referred to as “clinicians,” unlike district support staff.

“We are not even called paraprofessionals in this district, we are called assistants,” she explains.

Terruso views this as a respect issue and she calls for better relationships between administration and staff. She believes that improved training should be provided for all staff to better serve this community, and she seeks to improve the working conditions of her colleagues.

“Sometimes administrators have been out of the classroom for so many years, they don’t understand,” Terruso says. “If we can change the way we treat paraprofessionals, they will want to do their best for these kids.”

In special education, dedicated individuals emerge as unsung heroes. These heroes prioritize the well-being of children, striving for inclusivity and visibility for those with special needs. Recognizing the indispensability of these programs, it becomes imperative to extend our respect and unwavering support to the professionals who selflessly serve our community. 🏡

2024 EQUALITY CHAMPION

DANIELLE EARLE!

By Amy Moran, Ph.D. and Kate Okeson

Danielle Earle has been an educator for 13 years, currently working at Orange High School as a digital media and filmmaking teacher and after-school club advisor with board affiliations with several LGBTQIA+ organizations.

“Being a leader and an advocate for all of our students, especially the LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC community,” she says, “is what makes our job so special. Having the ability to change lives for the better and to guide our students to discover their true passion as well as reach their full potential is why I love it.”

Earle takes pride in supporting her students, helping them focus on their interests while developing their talents. She engages with the powerful nature of LGBTQIA+ representation through pedagogical practices. In her digital media and filmmaking program, featured films, film projects, and instruction promote diversity and inclusion, especially for LGBTQ+ History Month, Pride Month, Trans Day of Remembrance, and World AIDS Day.

During the pandemic, Earle and her students produced an LGBTQ+ Black History documentary series that was accepted into the Garden State Film Festival and received a lot of praise from their school district. The series will also be showcased at the NJEA Convention in November. Last year, they had a LGBTQ+ themed short film submitted to the SKILLS USA competition.

Queer visibility in film

Queer visibility in film and media has increased significantly on familiar streaming platforms, offering the much-needed representation queer youth need to survive and thrive, and Earle capitalizes on that access in her classes. During Black History Month, Earle highlighted LGBTQIA+ filmmakers, musicians, and fashion icons, such as Dee Rees, Cherly Dunye, and Lena Waithe. She uses film and media studies to lift up student voices in her

Amy Moran, Ph.D. and Kate Okeson (both she/her) are out queer educators, leaders and activists working to make education affirming and inclusive for all of their students and colleagues. Moran has taught middle school for 29 years and was a high school GSA adviser for 16 years. Okeson is a 26-year art educator, GSA adviser for 14 years, local association president, and co-founder/program director of Make it Better for Youth.



Danielle Earle, a digital media and filmmaking teacher at Orange High School, is NJEA's 2024 Equality Champion.

school by showcasing films and popular series, such as “Heartstopper.”

“The wonderful thing about teens today,” Earle says, “is how welcoming they are of LGBTQIA+ content. Yes, you might get some students that might be opposed to it initially, but eventually their perspective towards queer content changes because they realize there is nothing different between straight/cisgender storylines in cinema and those found in queer-inclusive movies. That’s the beauty of American Cinema: we can have different opinions about a movie, but at the end of the day our love for filmmaking is a bond that unites us.”

And when it comes to equality, it’s about being respectful and honoring each other’s authentic life experiences.

National trends and educator opportunities

Earle notices national trends in educating queer youth and their straight/cisgender peers—such as how respecting students’ and colleagues’ personal gender pronouns is becoming commonplace—but we have a lot further to go as a profession to authentically and consistently support LGBTQIA+ youth.



Danielle Earle with one of her filmmaking students, Katrina Davis, on Graduation Day in 2019.

Earle acknowledges the national crisis we're in as it relates to equality for trans youth in the public schools and how hate crimes and anti-queer legislation directed at reducing human rights are on the rise against LGBTQIA+ communities. Based on how education is power for both students and educators, Earle encourages all districts to host professional development workshops that share best practices with teachers of all content areas for supporting LGBTQIA+ students.

Earle emphasizes that one of the best things we can do as educators is to help ensure that the schools we work in have GSAs and to deepen our involvement with our union. It can start by joining a committee or attending workshops within your district, through your county, or through NJEA. Changes in the right direction can happen if we get more deeply involved within our unions.

"As long as you have a seat at the table," she says, "you can be able to use your voice to advocate for positive change." 🗣️



Share your thoughts and ideas with us at rainbowconnectionjea@gmail.com.

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REPRESENTING NJEA PRESERVICE AT THE STATE OF THE STATE

BY JASON WILLIAMS

In January, I attended Gov. Phil Murphy's State of the State address as the NJEA Preservice representative. What an amazing honor!

When I received the call asking if I would like to attend, I was unsure of my role as well as the magnitude of what I was about to attend. Ultimately, it was the opportunity of a lifetime.

When I first arrived at NJEA headquarters, I met the leaders of our union, including President Sean M. Spiller, Vice President Steve Beatty, and Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson. My conversation with the NJEA officers made me feel at home as they listened to my concerns regarding aspects of teacher prep programs. They offered their support. I am thankful for my time with them, and I look forward to working alongside them to support the NJEA and the educators and preservice members of NJEA.

My mother, Janel Powell, drove me to the event. She is a special education teacher at Highland Park High School with 32 years of experience. When Deborah Cornavaca, the director of NJEA Government Relations – Politics and Policy, learned of my mother's dedication to the profession, she invited her to also to watch the address. My mother witnessed the kindness and acknowledgment from the governor's office.

Even during a state of emergency, and a very rainy day, walking into the New Jersey State House was an experience in itself as everyone was incredibly eager to engage in the State of the State Address. I could not help but notice how beautifully historical the State House is.

Deborah Cornavaca also introduced me to many people who work for our state. She was a gracious host and made sure we had an opportunity to connect. Soon, I was whisked away to the governor's office to meet the governor in person prior to his address.

Meeting him was like meeting a president, and what a joy it was! Gov. Murphy was very approachable and kind—and yes, he allowed me to take a selfie with him.

When it was time to walk into the Assembly chamber, I was surprised by the crowd and the grand feel of the room. It was packed! Everyone looked so regal and professional. I sat in the balcony with other amazing honorees and felt an incredible sense of gratitude for the moment. I felt



Gov. Phil Murphy stopped to take a selfie with NJEA Preservice member Jason Williams before the State of the State address.

immense pride to be sitting among such accomplished fellow New Jerseyans.

During his speech, Gov. Murphy reminded everyone of how important it is for young people striving to become educators to have both a plan and means to do so. He talked about his initiatives to support upcoming educators that make it attainable to become certified as a teacher, a dream NJEA Preservice members possess, including myself.

My heart was filled with hope by the claps and cheers given as the governor told the stories of people who are making positive contributions to our state. Their narratives of triumph were inspiring. I felt more energized and motivated to reach my goals.

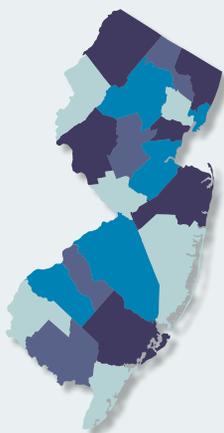
After the address, there was a lovely reception. Our beloved Kean University President, Lamont Repollet, was in attendance and informed me that he came just for me! This makes me feel honored to be a Kean University student.

With guidance and support NJEA Preservice and from my mentor, Hannah Pawlak, I feel invigorated to be an effective teacher in the New Jersey public school system. Making a difference in someone's life by showing up, being a leader, and acting as a role model is my goal as an aspiring educator.

Getting recognized by the governor only pushed me to work harder to get into the classroom and make a difference in any way I can. It was the best motivation I could have ever received.

Thank you, Gov. Murphy and NJEA. 🙏

Jason Williams is a student at Kean University. He is preparing to be a special education history teacher.



SUSSEX TO CAPE MAY

Workshops and conferences

HIGHLIGHTS

Science, history and the environment

27TH ANNUAL BARNEGAT BAY ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATORS ROUNDTABLE

The Ocean County Soil Conservation District invites you to its 27th Annual Barnegat Bay Environmental Educators Roundtable at the Lighthouse Center for Natural Resource Education. The roundtable takes place on Wednesday, April 17 after school hours. Classroom teachers, environmental educators and nature enthusiasts are invited to participate in this in-person, indoor/outdoor, professional development event that takes place during afterschool/evening hours. Engage in lessons and field experiences that inspire and educate.

Attendees can register for field trips or interactive workshops designed to spur a new appreciation of our soil, native woodlands, natural resources, plants, wildlife and local history of the Barnegat Bay watershed.

The Barnegat Bay Environmental Educators Roundtable offers educators opportunities to learn, network and bring valuable resources back to their classrooms, students and community. Each year the Roundtable Steering Committee puts together a variety of programs that offer something for everyone. The Committee strives to help our local educators and community members to “think globally and act locally.”

Roundtable highlights include a light dinner, field trips, workshops, free educational resources, door prizes and a special keynote program.

Location: Lighthouse Center for Natural Resource Education

Fee: See registration website as listed below

Date/Time: April 17; after school/evening hours

Registration/information: Visit OCSCD's Environmental Educators Roundtable at soildistrict.org/environmental-educators-roundtable for a complete description of programs and registration information.

Call 609-991-1534 or email education@soildistrict.org for further details.

JOIN THE NGSS SUMMER INSTITUTE FOR GRADES K-12

Monday, July 22 – Friday, July 26

The Raritan Valley Community College Science Education Institute is offering its NGSS Summer Institute in-person starting Monday, July 22. The weeklong Summer Institute provides K-12 teachers and administrators with practical ideas and tools to implement the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). Every year, the organizers update the Summer Institute to incorporate what they are learning about classroom implementation through their work with thousands of teachers in New Jersey and across the nation.

During the Institute participants will learn how to:

- Identify, select, and fine-tune phenomena and connect them to NGSS core ideas.
- Turn NGSS practices into 3D performance tasks to guide student learning.
- Make NGSS crosscutting concepts explicit in questions and performance tasks.
- Use explanation and argument to assess student learning.
- Support students in defining engineering problems and designing solutions for them.
- Support students as they investigate physical, life and earth science phenomena.
- Plan their own NGSS-aligned investigations.
- Access and use a database of over 750 NGSS-aligned investigations.

The Institute will be led by Dr. Wil van der Veen, author and a nationally recognized expert on the NGSS and science education. Participants will work in small groups that are facilitated by experienced classroom teachers from the NGSS Teacher Leader Program.

The weeklong Institute will be held July 22-26 at Raritan Valley Community College in Branchburg, N.J. Each day begins at 9 a.m. and ends at 3 p.m.

Light breakfast and lunch will be provided.

The fee is \$400.

To register, go to tinyurl.com/RVCC-REGSI24. For more information contact Donna Frasca-Brady at donna.frasca-brady@raritanval.edu or 908-526-1200, ext. 8942.

This Summer Institute is supported by a grant from the New Jersey Space Grant Consortium.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR CIVICS AND HISTORY

The New Jersey Center for Civic Education at Rutgers University is offering one-day workshops on a variety of civics and history topics. The workshops are supported by state funds and free to all New Jersey teachers. All of the workshops will be held at Rutgers University in Piscataway. They all start at 8:30 a.m., include lunch, and conclude by 3 p.m. Teachers can register by going to civiced.rutgers.edu/events/range.listevents.

March 19: Infusing Civics, Economics and New Jersey history into High School U.S. History

The inclusion of civics, economics and New Jersey history in the high school curriculum is required by statute. This workshop will provide free, online resources and ideas to help high school teachers enhance their U.S. history courses, engage their students, and meet these statutory requirements.

April 3: Teaching Controversial issues and Media Literacy (K-12)

Join us for strategies and lessons to help navigate the current highly partisan political climate while providing students with the media literacy skills they need to address controversial issues as citizens.

April 16: Civics for grades K-5

A foundation for civic literacy needs to start in elementary grades. Research also shows that teaching social studies content can help students with literacy skills. This workshop will provide age-appropriate teaching strategies and lessons for elementary students.

May 9: Engaging Students in Middle School Civics

This workshop provides teachers with sample content, strategies, and programs that will engage students and meet the 2022 middle school civics mandate.



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The NJEA Teacher Leader Academy (TLA) admits candidates of any race, color, creed, national origin, ethnic origin, disability, marital status, domestic partnership status, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity to all the rights, privileges, programs and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the NJEA TLA. It doesn't discriminate on the basis of race, color, creed, national origin, ethnic origin, disability, marital status, domestic partnership status, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity in administration of its educational policies, admission policies, or scholarship programs.

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STAFF NEWS

HIRES AND PROMOTIONS



NJEA welcomed **JAMAYA NEWTON** to NJEA staff on Dec. 1 as a secretary in the Professional Development and Instructional Issues Division. Prior to joining NJEA staff, Newton was a registered behavior technician specializing in autism. She

taught functional communication and occupational skills in various centers and school districts to children with special needs. Newton also assisted teachers and staff with behavior management in special education settings. She holds a bachelor's degree in communications from Rutgers University with a minor in entrepreneurship and dance. Newton lives in Piscataway with her significant other.



NJEA welcomed **EUNICE NATAL-D'OLEO** to NJEA staff on Jan. 16 in the position of chief/business services-accounting in the Business Division. Natal-D'Oleo comes to NJEA with over 20 years of experience in accounting. Most recently, she worked

as an accounting specialist for Seminole Wire and Cable/Copperweld in Pennsauken. She received her associate degrees in culinary arts/catering and accounting from Mercer County Community College. Natal-D'Oleo lives in Browns Mills with her husband, Angel. They have five sons and three grandsons. She enjoys reading, journaling, crocheting and cooking.



NJEA welcomed **EDA FERRANTE** to NJEA staff on Jan. 2 as a temporary field representative in the Office of Membership in the Business Division. Prior to joining NJEA staff, Ferrante had been a history and speech and theater teacher in Wayne since

1999. Since 2016, she served as president of the Wayne Education Association. In addition, Ferrante had been an NJEA UniServ consultant in the Region 15 office in Cranford since 2011. Very active in association leadership, Ferrante has served on the NJEA Delegate Assembly, the County Presidents' Council and various statewide NJEA committees. Most recently, she chaired the NJEA Elections Committee. Ferrante holds a bachelor's degree in communications from William Paterson University and a master's degree in teaching from Montclair State University. She lives in Cedar Grove with her daughter, Liliana.



NJEA welcomed **JESENIA VASQUEZ** to NJEA staff on Jan. 2 as a temporary secretary in the UniServ Division. Vasquez will split her time between the Region 19 office in West New York and the Region 20 office in Jersey City. Vasquez comes to NJEA

with many years of experience in customer service and marketing. Most recently, she worked as a temporary receptionist for a software company. She received her associate degree in business administration from Bergen Community College. Vasquez is currently in a digital marketing accelerated bachelor's program at William Paterson University with an anticipated 2024 graduation. She lives in Ridgefield Park with her son and husband.



NJEA welcomed **ESSENCE GORDON** to NJEA staff on Jan. 2 as a temporary secretary in the Region 21 UniServ office in Livingston. Gordon has many years of experience in customer service and data entry. Most recently, she worked as a warehouse

operations administrator for a retail chain. Gordon lives in New Brunswick. She loves listening to music and trying new restaurants.



Employment Opportunities at NJEA

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Questions? Email Beth Buonsante at bbuonsante@njea.org.



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MARCH & beyond

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

MAR
08

FRIDAY

Executive Committee

MAR
22-23

FRI & SAT

Winter Leadership Conference-Central

APR
20

SATURDAY

PDII Transform Conference

MAR
09

SATURDAY

Delegate Assembly

APR
12-14

FRI TO SUN

Higher Education Conference
Higher Education Collective Bargaining Summit

MAY
10-11

FRI & SAT

Carol Watchler LGBTQIA+ Advocacy Conference

MAR
10

SUNDAY

Celebration of Women

APR
13

SATURDAY

Preservice Conference

MAY
17

FRIDAY

Executive Committee

For more information go to NJEA.org



SAVE THE DATE **APRIL 12-14**

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- **Conference** – April 12-13
- **Collective Bargaining Summit** – April 13-14

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THE FREEDOM TO READ

The Final Exam in last month's *Review* recalled an editorial published in the April 1941 *Review*. Like today, a nationally organized campaign to remove books deemed objectional from public schools—bypassing the expert judgement of school librarians and other educators—made headlines in the late 1930s and early 1940s.

A 2008 study of that controversy concluded that those seeking to ban progressive textbooks were largely unsuccessful due to the "...moderate approach most Americans took towards the public school curriculum..."

Recent school board election results, such as those in Sparta covered in this issue of the *Review*, give hope that the "moderate approach of most Americans" will once again hold sway.

But that hope is tempered because there are still far too many school districts here in New Jersey where school librarians are harassed and threatened for doing their jobs. There are still far too many school districts where the loudest voices try to determine what children can read. And there are still far too many school board members who welcome such book-banning campaigns. Of course, even one school district and staff under such attacks is one too many.

A recent legislative proposal could become an important tool in lowering the temperature around school library collections, protecting school librarians and library staff, and fostering the moderate approach of most Americans—and most New Jerseyans—toward public schools and public libraries.

In late January, Sens. Andrew Zwicker (D-Somerset) and Teresa Ruiz (D-Essex) introduced the Freedom to Read Act. The bill, S-2421, seeks to codify practices for library material in both public school libraries and public libraries and to protect librarians from harassment.

The bill also directs school boards and the governing bodies for public libraries to set expectations for the curation of library materials and the procedures to be followed when a request is made to remove material from a library.

The bill spells out the essential role that libraries and librarians play in schools and communities.

"The Legislature finds and declares that ... school libraries and public libraries, as centers for voluntary inquiry, play a unique role promoting intellectual freedom, providing equitable access to learning resources, and promoting democracy by providing service to all ...," S-2421 reads.

The bill recognizes that librarians have been vilified for the expertise and professionalism they bring to their work.

"School library media specialists and librarians receive extensive professional training that prepares them to develop and curate collections designed to meet the broad and varied interests and needs of their communities and students, which is based on a variety of factors, including pedagogical value, student interest, and the age-appropriateness of the material," S-2421 continues. "Despite this, school library media specialists and librarians have been targeted and harassed for providing young people access to library material."

The bill also requires that school districts and governing bodies for public libraries ensure in their policies that diverse points of view are represented in library collections and require student access to grade-appropriate diverse and inclusive material.

S-2421 still foresees book challenges and outlines basic procedures that school districts and communities can build upon to make clear-eyed and fair decisions about the ultimate status of any challenged book. Such procedures allow calmer heads to prevail rather than making decisions based upon which interest group can bring the largest and loudest crowd to a school board meeting.

As of this writing on Feb. 20 the bill was not yet finalized, and new language may be in the final version of the bill. In its current form, S-2421 is a reasonable approach to protect, as the sponsors of the bill state in the bill's summarizing statement, "the freedom of New Jersey's residents to read."

In protecting our freedom to read, the bill protects students, the public and library staff against those who would place limits on what we can access in school and public libraries. 📖





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Elena is the founder and CEO of Bright Morning Consulting, an organization committed to helping individuals and organizations create the conditions for transformation. She has taught tens of thousands of folks how to have conversations that build a more just and equitable world. Elena can be heard demonstrating these conversations on the Bright Morning Podcast.



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