The value of engagement through play
Because Reading Changes Everything.
BUILDING THE FOUNDATION FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS IN EVERY SUBJECT AREA

Transform the future of your students who struggle to read through FDU’s many certificate and degree-track options in Structured Literacy/Orton-Gillingham studies. FDU is New Jersey’s only university program accredited by both the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) and IMSLEC, the International Multisensory Structured Language Education Council.

AREAS OF SCHOOL OF EDUCATION GRADUATE STUDY
• BILINGUAL EDUCATION
• EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP
• DYSLEXIA STUDIES – ORTON-GILLINGHAM
• ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE
• HIGHER EDUCATION (EdD) – ALL ONLINE
• LEARNING DISABILITIES
• LITERACY/READING
• PRESCHOOL, ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION

FEATURED PROGRAM
50 Full-Tuition Graduate Scholarships in Structured Literacy Training – a $10,200 Value
Educators interested in becoming an Orton-Gillingham Teacher can take advantage of this special FDU partnership with the Children’s Dyslexia Centers. Funded by the Scottish Rite Masons of New Jersey, all classes and practica are offered onsite at statewide locations in Burlington, Hasbrouck Heights, Northfield, Scotch Plains and Tenafly, NJ. Applications are due April 15. To learn more, call Grace Hottinger at 201-692-2816 or visit fdu.edu/dyslexia.

APPLY NOW FOR FALL 2024 • NO APPLICATION FEE
For Details Contact Graduate Admissions
EMAIL: grad@fdu.edu • CALL: 201-692-2554

FDU
fdu.edu/soe
The Milltown Education Association partnered with the Milltown Education Foundation for their annual Sweetheart Breakfast! Each family received an MEA kitchen apron and plenty of teachers and support staff were on hand serving up pancakes and eggs.

From left: Union Township EA’s Grievance Chair Krisanne Scott, Treasurer Carlos Esquivel, and Secretary Sharon Ciaglia were among the hundreds NJEA members and school administrators who attended Growing Your Collaborative Practice on March 8. The program was hosted by the Labor Management Collaborative.

On a chilly Feb. 27, the Atlantic County Council of Education Associations teamed up with the NJEA Members Education Associations to host a conversation and presentation of Color Network to host a conversation and presentation titled “Hot Chocolate and Hot Conversations.” The high that day was 36 degrees, but the conversation was fire.
18 | CREATIVE PLAY

Play is important for the development of children, especially those with disabilities. It can help develop their communicative and social-emotional skills, which provides them with more opportunities for social integration. Play can also be utilized as a distinct learning method available to all students regardless of their abilities.

BY DR. CLAUDETTE PETERKIN

26 | AI IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

When you spend your days elbows deep in multiplication, introducing children to their newest favorite chapter book series, and fostering so many incredible “firsts” each day, the scary world of AI technology has seemingly floated right by us. But in between big jumps off the monkey bars, nine-year-olds at Taylor Trost’s school were discussing how they were writing silly stories with AI over the weekend. To her, this was what made it clear: She must get involved, but how?

BY TAYLOR TROST

20 | INSPIRE YOUR STUDENTS AT INSPIRATION CAFÉ

Educators are often frustrated when students don’t seem willing to invest in their own successes. Students sometimes stop trying when a problem becomes challenging. Is there a way to give our students the chance to learn about the power of grit, determination and resilience from those inspired by these traits? The Inspiration Café at Black River Middle School in Chester, Morris County, may hold some answers.

BY JOSEPH S. PIZZO AND DR. KENNETH PIASCIK

28 | THE IMPACT OF CENSORSHIP

During School Library Month, we acknowledge the importance of libraries and are prompted to take action. This month is a call to action to champion intellectual freedom and renew our commitment to maintaining libraries as safe havens for learning and exploration for all students. In this article you’ll find action steps that educators can take to help support intellectual freedom.

BY ELISSA MALESPINA

32 | SUMMER LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

The 2024 NJEA Jack Bertolino Summer Leadership Conference offers a broad menu of seminars that equip members to become stronger association advocates. This year, 32 in-depth workshops are offered as well as numerous electives.
New Jersey is among best states in the country for funding quality prekindergarten education.

An August 2023 report from WalletHub ranked New Jersey among the top four states overall for superior preschool programs when measuring access, quality, and resources and economic support. New Jersey ranked first in resources and economic support.

Source: WalletHub, wallethub.com
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 offices 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, 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 offices 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 856-234-0322
- 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): 732-287-6700
- 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. Subscription: $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

Building our union through leadership training

Every summer, nearly 1,700 NJEA members and staff gather for a week of leadership and advocacy training. The NJEA Jack Bertolino Summer Leadership Conference (SLC) has been going strong for more than 50 years, providing comprehensive training for our members.

From learning about grievances, education law, building association websites, collective bargaining and so much more, there are 32 workshops that cover the depth and breadth of public education unionism. There is specific training for presidents, treasurers, grievance and negotiation committee members, and association representatives. Every facet of NJEA is represented, and staff from throughout the organization will be leading the trainings.

But this conference is not just for leaders and union representatives, there’s something for every member who wants to get more involved in their association. Every year, almost 40% of the participants are first-time attendees. Members get to choose one workshop and two mini-courses in each session. At SLC, members receive more than seven hours of training on a specific topic, much more than is offered at any other NJEA conference.

For many members, one of the most powerful parts of the conference is the ability to connect and network with educators like themselves from across the state. In addition, there are many opportunities to learn more about the multitude of NJEA Member Benefits.

For the first time since 2018, the conference is back at Harrah’s Hotel and Casino in Atlantic City. This year, it will be held a week earlier than usual, from July 27-31.

NJEA is the strongest public school employee labor union in the state, and arguably the nation, because of our members. Their commitment to learning more so they can be the best inside and outside the classroom is what drives our schools’ and our union’s continued successes.

I hope to see as many of you as possible at this year’s conference. It’s a unique opportunity to further your union knowledge so that you can advocate for yourselves, your students and the profession. The deadline to apply is June 1, and you can find more information at njea.org/slc.

See you in Atlantic City in July!

In Unity,

Sean M. Spiller

OFFICERS ONLINE

SEAN M. SPILLER
Facebook
@SpillerforNJEA: I was honored to stand with Governor Phil Murphy in Plainfield today as he announced his historic full funding of our public schools. This budget will impact New Jersey’s future for years to come. When our schools are fully funded, our children, educators and communities win!

On March 1, NJEA President Sean M. Spiller shared images capturing the moments following Gov. Phil Murphy’s announcement of a historic proposed budget at Charles and Anna Booker Elementary School. The budget includes the most significant investment in public education in the state’s history. He was joined in photos by fellow NJEA members and elected officials to celebrate the win.

STEVE BEATTY
Facebook
@SteveBeattyNJEA: Fun night at the Rock celebrating our county and state teacher and ESPs of the year! And a big Devils win! Hundreds of members came out to lift up our colleagues and have a great night together!

On March 8, NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty shared images from the NJ Devil’s Educator Appreciation Night game at the Prudential Center. At the game, the Devils honored all of New Jersey’s 2023-24 County Teachers of the Year as well as New Jersey State Teacher of the Year Joe Nappi and the NJEA ESP of the Year Maureen Kelly.

PETAL ROBERTSON
Facebook
@PetalforNJEA: It warmed my ELA teacher heart to be able to take a moment to read to the students at Olson Middle School in Burlington County. Every student went home with a new book to read. Thank you to all of the faculty, staff, and all the volunteer readers for making today special.

On March 7, NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson shared images from the Burlington County Education Association Read Across America event. While there, she visited a sixth-grade class to read an excerpt from the book Wishtree by Katherine Applegate. Other volunteer readers included parents, elected officials and community members who were escorted to classrooms by members of the student council.
DA elects three NEA Directors

At its March 9 meeting, the NJEA Delegate Assembly elected three members to represent New Jersey on the NEA Board of Directors. Barbara Rheault of Atlantic County and Laurie Gibson-Parker of Camden County were reelected, and Kayla Khaled of Union County was elected to her first term. They will each serve a three-year term beginning Sept. 1.

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

Based on its membership, NJEA is entitled to nine NEA State Directors. The current directors are Brenda Brathwaite of Atlantic County, Theresa Fuller of Somerset County, Laurie Gibson-Parker of Camden County, Robert La Morte and Susan McBride of Bergen County, Peter Moran of Hunterdon County, Mark Richards of Essex County, Barbara Rheault of Atlantic County, and Stacy Yanko of Sussex County.

In addition, the NEA Board of Directors has at-large positions to ensure representation from educational support professionals (ESPs). These members are elected to three-year terms at the NEA RA. Two of these 19 nationally elected NEA Directors are NJEA members Temika Langston-Myers of Cumberland County and Tarsha Lawson of Essex County.

Celebrate retiring members

As NJEA members retire, they deserve recognition for their dedication New Jersey’s students and communities.

One such recognition is the NJEA Years of Service Certificate. These free certificates can be used to celebrate retiring members, as well as members who have achieved other career milestones.

If your local association would like to order these certificates to present to your members, download and complete the request form found at njea.org/celebrating-retiring-members. Return it to Nora Lenahan at the email address on the form and below.

It will take approximately two weeks to produce the certificates and send them to you. For any questions, email Nora Lenahan at nlenahan@njea.org.

NJEA Hardship Relief Fund assists members

NJEA has created the Hardship Relief Fund to help active, retired and student members through the temporary or permanent loss of their primary residence, food insecurity, or the loss of classroom supplies or materials due to an unforeseen event. It is funded through voluntary contributions from NJEA members and local and county associations.

Learn more about the fund at hardshiprelief.njea.org.
MEMBERSHIP CHAIR SPOTLIGHT
Persistence and engagement spell success for North Hanover Township EA
By Ani McHugh, NJEA Communications Consultant

Situated on and near Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst in Burlington County, North Hanover Township’s three Pre-K to sixth-grade schools host a unique population: approximately 50% of the district’s students are children of active duty military personnel, and many staff members are either military spouses or retired military members themselves.

While the transient nature of military life results in more staff turnover at North Hanover than in many other districts, NHTEA’s membership numbers are strong and steady—largely because of the hard work and persistence of membership chair Jodie Carson.

Persistence and follow-up
Carson is a Pre-K educational assistant who has served as the association’s membership chair for nine years. NHTEA’s co-presidents, Wynter Scammell and Tammy Jensen, credit Carson with the local’s success at attracting and retaining new members.

“Jodie is very persistent,” says Scammell, “and she’s really good at following up with potential members to answer their questions and encourage them to become a part of the association.”

In the past three years, the local has welcomed more than 130 new members. Carson, who goes to every board meeting to know when new staff are hired, makes a point to prepare for and attend new teacher orientation each year so she can personally meet and begin a relationship with potential members. This year, she was joined by Burlington County Education Association President Anthony Rizzo, and together, the two spoke about the benefits of membership.

“I’m very honest with potential members about the instances when staff might need union support,” says Carson, who notes that the district has an especially high percentage of students with significant needs. As an experienced member herself, Carson tells potential members to consider membership as an insurance policy—and reminds them how important it is to have reliable, knowledgeable and experienced representation should they ever need it.

It’s also important, Carson notes, to remind potential and existing members of all the things the association has fought for over the years—like working conditions, preparation time and the salary guide.

Organization and delegation
From a logistical standpoint, Carson’s organizational skills help her get new members signed up quickly and efficiently. She prepares membership paperwork in advance, and she keeps meticulous track of who has returned their forms and with whom she needs to follow up.

Given that it is difficult to be present in buildings other than her own, Carson enlists other members—many of whom are also ESPs—to serve as helpers for her and points of contact for existing and potential members across the district. Some of these helpers are newer members themselves, and Carson notes that these new roles have fostered a renewed enthusiasm in and understanding of the workings of the association.

Keeping members engaged
Once new members are on board, NHTEA leadership makes sure they feel connected to and part of the association. They make concerted efforts to communicate with members regularly, both through email and in-person meetings, and they ask for feedback from members regarding the workings of the association.

The association also onboarded two new social chairs who have sought unique ways to engage and connect members. They formed an after-school walking club at a nearby park, they organize fall and spring happy hours, and they continue to find ways to promote unity among staff.

From left: NHEA Co-Presidents Tammy Jensen and Wynter Scammell, NHEA Membership Chair Jodie Carson, and dedicated ESP member Deandra Adams.
Members interested in exhibiting in Author’s Alley must be willing to offer members advice on how to go about publishing their authored works. Member authors will be responsible to exhibit on both days of the convention – during all show hours – displaying and selling their published works and conversing with members.

Submissions must meet NJEA criteria. Please send copies of your published materials with the application. Any media that correlates with your book such as CDs, bookmarks, workbooks or giveaways must be included with your application and approved. In addition, it is not necessary to resubmit previously approved books; however, the title(s) must be listed on the application.

Space is limited. For more information call Felicia Davis at 609-310-4260. To be considered, complete and submit the registration form below, and copies of your published materials by April 30, 2024.

*All authors who submit complete registration materials will be entered into a lottery to determine who will be featured in Author’s Alley. Incomplete submissions or those not meeting the criteria will not be eligible for entry into the lottery.

I AM INTERESTED in being a vendor at the 2024 NJEA Convention at the Atlantic City Convention Center, Nov. 7-8. I understand that I must be an active NJEA member, NJEA Preservice, or NJREA member to participate in Author’s Alley, and I agree to participate for the entire convention.

Name
Address
City
State
Zip
Phone Number
Email
School District
County
Published materials

RETURN TO: Felicia Davis, NJEA-PDII, PO Box 1211, Trenton, NJ 08607-1211
RECYCLE INK, BUY INK, FUNDRAISE FOR HIPP!

NJEA Frederick L. Hipp Foundation for Excellence in Education has partnered with Planet Green Recycle to recycle ink cartridges, reducing waste in landfills and raising funds for a worthy cause.

Did you know that more than 375 million empty ink and toner cartridges are thrown out every year, with most ending up in landfills? It can take up to 1,000 years for these cartridges to decompose. By recycling your ink cartridges through Planet Green Recycle, you’ll help reduce this colossal amount of waste.

By using the Hipp Foundation’s unique program code, 31808, you’ll help to support our efforts to fund innovative educational projects. The only foundation of its kind in New Jersey, the Hipp Foundation has disbursed more than $2.3 million in grants for projects that represent a bold, fresh approach by public school employees. Help us raise funds so we can support even more projects, and at the same time, help protect the environment!

It’s simple to do!
1. Gather four or more ink cartridges.
2. Go to planetgreenrecycle.com to print out free USPS labels.
3. Use the Hipp Foundation’s Program ID Code 31808 to ensure the foundation receives the credit for your donations.
4. Use any box to mail the ink cartridges to Planet Green Recycle for free.
5. Ask friends, family, and businesses to participate, as well.

By purchasing ink through Planet Green Recycle, the Hipp Foundation can earn 10% of every purchase. Simply include the Hipp Foundation’s program code, 31808, next to your name at checkout.

Learn more about the Planet Green Recycle program at planetgreenrecycle.com and the Hipp Foundation at njea.org/hipp.

CLEAN OCEAN ACTION’S 36TH ANNUAL SPRING STUDENT SUMMIT

Apply Now for May 15 or May 16

The Clean Ocean Action Spring Student Summit provides school students (grades 5-8) from eligible central and northern New Jersey schools a free opportunity to experience hands-on, marine environmental education at Sandy Hook on May 15 and 16. Designed to meet the New Jersey Student Learning Standards and reinforce STEM concepts, the Student Summit is an opportunity for students to receive a unique, educational program that combines peer-to-peer learning with outdoor connections to the sea and environmental stewardship.

If your school is interested in participating complete each section of the 2024 Spring Student Summit Application and return the completed form with a $100 refundable deposit check to Clean Ocean Action by April 22. The application and additional information can be found at cleanoceanaction.org. Click on “Education Programs,” then select “Student Summit.”

Questions? Email Kristen Grazioso at Education@CleanOceanAction.org.

BLUECLAWS RECOGNIZE MOST IMPROVED STUDENTS

Join the Jersey Shore BlueClaws as the team recognizes the public school students who have improved the most. Game nights are April 19, May 3, 9, and 30, and June 1. To purchase tickets, visit blueclaws-njea-24. For more information, visit milb.com/jersey-shore.

PATRIOTS RECOGNIZE EDUCATORS AND MOST IMPROVED STUDENTS

Swing it out of the park with the Somerset Patriots as they celebrate Most Improved Students on April 17. Then on May 16, come back for Educator Appreciation Night. For more information and to purchase tickets, visit milb.com/somerset.
NJEA and NEA endorse three more for reelection to Congress

On NJEA’s recommendation, the National Education Association (NEA) Fund for Children and Public Education has endorsed three additional New Jersey incumbents for reelection to Congress this year: Frank Pallone (CD-6), Robert Menendez Jr. (CD-8) and Donald Payne Jr. (CD-10).

Pallone has been a steadfast supporter of public education and for over 30 years in Congress. Menendez Jr. received an “A” rating from NEA in the most recent session for his unwavering support on top-priority issues for educators and parents. Payne Jr. is also an “A” rated Congressman who has shown leadership on issues of equity and justice that matter to educators in our very diverse state.

The full list of NJEA/NEA endorsed candidates is:
- NJ-1: Rep. Donald Norcross
- NJ-6: Rep. Frank Pallone
- NJ-11: Rep. Mikie Sherrill

Early endorsement is available to previously endorsed incumbents with exceptional records on issues of greatest importance to NJEA and NEA members. These endorsements were made by the NEA Fund for Children and Public Education, which makes endorsements in federal elections.

Phillipsburg High School hosts annual Comic Con

Phillipsburg High School will host their annual Comic Con on May 11 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Organized by the Phillipsburg High School Comic and Anime and Manga clubs, as well as Club Unify, Comic Con has been held since 2015.

As in previous years, there will be panels, activities for kids such as painting superhero masks, comic giveaways and a comic con exclusive print that guests can get with a canned good or monetary donation to the local food bank.

In the past, panels have included basic writing tips, industry stories, sequential storytelling, virtual Q & As and in-person discussions about writing and publishing.

The Phillipsburg High School cafeteria is transformed into a comic lover’s dream with creators displaying their work, engaging with Comic Con attendees and giving students an inside look at how they can continue to pursue their passion for art and writing.

Faith Roncoroni, the 2021-22 Warren County Teacher of the Year, and an English teacher at Phillipsburg High School, helped to create the Comic Con to expose her students to opportunities they might not have known about before.

Roncoroni teaches comic books and graphic novels in her English classes as a way to expand the canon and make reading more accessible for students. She is amazed at the hard work and dedication students have displayed over nearly a decade of holding the Comic Con.

“The students do so much of the work to bring the Comic Con to the community,” Roncoroni says. “They contact creators, send out monthly cards and work with local comic book shops and restaurants. This project really brings out their leadership skills and perseverance—as anyone who’s ever had to organize an event will tell you, it takes persistence!”

For more information about the Phillipsburg High School Comic Con, go to phillipsburgcomiccon.com.
NJ School of Conservation a resource for educators

The New Jersey School of Conservation holds an important place in the history of education in New Jersey. Founded on the site of a former New Deal-Era Civilian Conservation Corps camp, the school is North America’s oldest year-round residential environmental center. For 75 years, thousands of children from across New Jersey have visited the School of Conservation through school visits and summer camp opportunities.

While there, students have a rare opportunity to unplug from their devices, turn off their cell phones and interact with nature. Many students have been so inspired by their experiences at the School of Conservation that they have decided to pursue careers in environmental science, research, education, engineering and law.

Yet decades of underinvestment, coupled with the strain of the COVID-19 pandemic, almost forced the school to close for good.

Thankfully, a dedicated group of alumni, organized as the Friends of the New Jersey School of Conservation, worked to reopen the campus and restart programming during the height of the pandemic. The Friends group advocated for legislation, ultimately signed by Gov. Phil Murphy, that gave them long-term management of the state-owned school. Working with Murphy and champions in the Legislature, they have secured millions of dollars of state investment to bring the school’s more than 50 buildings up to code so that students could safely return.

“The future of the New Jersey School of Conservation is bright because people from across our state came together to advocate for an educational treasure that has served thousands of students for 75 years,” said Kerry Kirk Pflugh “We’re excited to have emerged from this crisis in a position to deepen our commitment to being an educational leader that will serve our state’s changing needs.”

For Pflugh, the fight to save and strengthen the school is a deeply personal one—she grew up on campus as the daughter of late director John Kirk.

A new chapter

Organized under a new and expanded board of trustees that includes representatives from the business community, environmental advocates and education—including NJEA President Sean M. Spiller—the school wants to build on its incredible history to meet the changing educational needs of the 21st century.

As part of that mission, the School of Conservation is pioneering new curricula that help teachers meet the state’s new climate change standards. And they are also working on new programs to teach students about social and emotional learning to give them tools to respond to the growing mental health crisis plaguing classrooms across the nation.

At the same time, the School of Conservation has begun welcoming schools back to campus for two- and three-day overnight trips and is also relaunching robust summer programming.

“We believe one of the best ways to amplify our educational work is to give teachers tools to take what we do at the School of Conservation and apply it in their own classrooms,” said Tanya Sulikowski, the school’s director of education and a former researcher and classroom teacher. “We have worked with master educators to develop world-class curricula that put us at the forefront of environmental education, and we want to serve as a resource for teachers from across our state.”

Programs for educators

The school is hosting two workshops in the coming months that touch on different aspects of environmental science. The first, on May 18, is an Educators’ Open House that will help demonstrate the school’s approach to hands-on learning. The second opportunity is a week-long residential program beginning August 19 for middle- and high-school teachers.

Additional details and registration information for these programs can be found on Page 49.
NJEA ESP Conference honors excellence

After a one-year hiatus, the NJEA Educational Support Professionals (ESPs) Conference has returned. The NJEA ESPs of the Year from 2023 and 2024 were honored as well as 2023 and 2024 County ESPs of the Year. In addition, the 2023 and 2024 Friend of ESP were recognized, and the 2024 ESP Career Achievement Award was conferred.

The three-day conference also featured 25 advocacy and career development workshops.

Trina Jenkins, the 2023 NJEA ESP of the Year, is a paraprofessional in Pleasantville and a strong advocate for her colleagues in the Pleasantville Education Association where she has served in many roles, including vice president.

Maureen Kelly, the 2024 NJEA ESP of the Year, is a paraprofessional at Watchung Hills Regional High School. She is the chair of her local’s Pride in Public Education Committee and is the high school’s varsity field hockey coach.

Christine Cito, the 2023 NJEA Friend of ESP, is a world languages teacher at Phillipsburg High School. Over the course of her 30-year career, she was noted for working in equal partnership with educational support professionals and supporting their fight for better salaries and working conditions.

Victoria Hughes, the 2024 NJEA Friend of ESP, is a health teacher at Phillipsburg Elementary School. Hughes is highly esteemed by her administrators, students, and peers, including ESPs.

Pamela Clark received the 2024 ESP Career Achievement Award. Clark serves as an attendance officer in the City of Camden School District and has been a member of the Camden Education Association for 33 years. Since 2002, when she became active in CEA, Clark has worn many leadership hats. She is currently CEA’s treasurer. Clark has also served on the local’s Pride and FAST committees. She is the ESP representative to the Camden County Council of Education Associations and Camden County’s representative to the NJEA ESP Committee.
1. The NJEA ESP Committee, joined by NJEA’s officers and staff.

2. NJEA County ESPs of the Year from 2023 and 2024.

3. From left: NJEA President Sean M. Spiller, 2024 Career Achievement award winner Pamela Clark, NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson and NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty.

4. From left: NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty, NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson, 2024 Friend of ESP Victoria Hughes, 2023 Friend of ESP Christine Cito, NJEA President Sean M. Spiller and NJEA ESP Committee member Scott Elliott.

5. Camden EA member Constance Adams proudly displays her ESPAN T-shirt. ESPAN is the Educational Support Professional Advocacy Network. Learn more at njea.org/ESPAN.

6. From left: North Plainfield EA members Sheila Martinez and Concettina Campo discuss special education issues with Township of Franklin EA Secretary Lisa Bakota.

7. Mount Olive EA members Olena Iwankiw (at left) and Sandra Kapitula arriving at the ESP Conference.

8. Linda Davis, a school bus driver in Plainfield, finds a shirt to her liking.

9. The 2022 and 2017 NJEA ESPs of the Year, Old Bridge EA Vice President Nancy Cogland (l) and Middlesex County EA President Lois Yukna.

10. Back row, from left: NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson, NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty, and NJEA President Sean M. Spiller. Front row: Jasmine Smith (Trina Jenkins’ daughter), 2023 ESP of the Year Trina Jenkins.
Willa Cofield
Still undaunted, still active, still inspiring students
and young educators
By David Sheridan and Sabrina Holcomb

This story was originally published by the National Education Association, on its website, nea.org, on June 11, 2018. Some updates have been made to account for the last six years.

As a young teacher in an all-Black segregated school in Enfield, North Carolina, Willa Johnson taught her students how to register to vote, and those students went home and taught their parents.

Then, Willa Johnson was summoned to the principal’s office and summarily fired.

She petitioned and picketed to end segregation in her town, and the Klan burned a 17-foot-cross in her yard. To this day, she remembers standing on her porch, with her five-year-old daughter in arms, watching that flaming symbol of hatred and intimidation.

With NEA’s help, Willa Johnson won a groundbreaking unfair teacher dismissal case. But no school district would hire her because she was “too controversial,” which at that time—the 1960s—and in that place—eastern North Carolina’s “Black Belt”—meant she had the courage to stand up for what is right.

Willa Johnson eventually became Willa Johnson Cofield, moved to New Jersey, and earned a Ph.D. in urban planning from Rutgers University. She also became a documentary filmmaker while continuing to be a social justice activist. Until very recently, she marched in Newark’s annual Dr. Martin Luther King Day March for Racial Equality, Economic Justice and Peace, sponsored by the People’s Organization for Progress.

Now 93, Willa Johnson Cofield loves to talk with students and young educators.

“Yes, we’ve made progress but the fight for racial equality is far from over,” Cofield says. “We must get involved in the political process and make sure minority people register and vote. In addition, we must engage in direct action to protest police brutality and the terrible conditions in which too many Black people still live. Black lives matter.”

Among the many young educators inspired by Cofield’s story and message is Jaalil Hart. He is a young kindergarten teacher back in her home state of North Carolina, which has passed one of the most restrictive voter suppression laws in the nation, making it more difficult for minorities, the elderly and students to vote.

“Teachers like Willa Johnson Cofield paved the way for young teachers like me who are passionate about the same issues,” says Jaalil Hart. When he was president of the NEA Student Chapter at North Carolina A&T State University, Hart was actively engaged in the fight for student voting rights. And today, when not in his Wake County classroom, Hart helps people register to vote.

“After talking with grandparents and great grans about what they had to do,” says Hart, “I find it personally important to do what my great grans couldn’t do. And like Willa Johnson Cofield, we need to do everything we can to make sure everyone has the opportunity to vote.”

Editor’s note: The editor of the NJEA Review contacted Cofield for an update. Her response is below.

“For the past 10 years, I have focused on documenting the civil rights movement in my hometown of Enfield, N.C. I co-produced an award-winning documentary and, with two of my former students, wrote a book that will be released next fall. Both are titled The Nine O’Clock Whistle.

“Tomorrow I will travel to Enfield where the film will be screened, and a panel of young people will ask me questions. I understand that there will be a simulation of the march that students staged 61 years ago and two historical markers are to be installed. I have been invited to speak at the First Baptist Church on Sunday.”
Using tech to support and connect
Meet Kevin Megill, 2023 Mercer County ESP of the Year

Kevin Megill is a computer technician at East Windsor Regional School District and the president of the East Windsor Regional Supportive Staff Association, so he knows a lot about multitasking, time management and stress.

"Being a computer tech and president of my association brings me a lot of satisfaction and joy, and it's something I want to keep doing," Megill says.

A lifelong love of technology brought Megill to East Windsor’s schools. Beginning when he was 10 years old, Megill knew he wanted to be a computer technician. After graduating from William Paterson, Megill continued to learn on his own, taking keyboarding and other classes. He worked at a law firm until he joined the staff in East Windsor in 2008.

"People think you’re just sitting in your office staring at a monitor, but I’m always on the move,” Megill says. “At any time, I’m working in the six buildings in the district, meeting and talking to everyone.”

Megill says he fell in love with the people in the district and loves to interact with his colleagues and the students. “I like knowing who the comedians are, who’s super focused on their jobs, who the parents are,” he says. “Some people don’t use ‘How are you?’ as a rhetorical question. They really want to know what’s going on with you.”

Every day is different for Megill and his team. The secretary for the tech center is the first person people talk to when they’re having a problem, and she is trained to help get them beyond, “My computer isn’t working.”

After she gets more information, she is either able to help them herself, or create a ticket for one of the technicians.

“When I was hired, a lot of the support was only in the classroom,” Megill recalls. “Each classroom had a desktop machine and a monitor. There were limited laptops and we had desktop computer labs. As years went on, additional technology was being used in the education space—interactive whiteboards and more laptops. Then, more and more mobile devices were purchased. We had additional computer labs built. I was the first full-time computer technician. We now have six techs, plus the tech secretary, keeping track of equipment, purchasing and maintaining technology and fixing problems.”

Keeping it fresh
There are different roles within the technology department, and everyone cycles through them.

“This helps keep it fresh for us,” Megill says. “We’re also constantly learning and developing new fixes for issues. We talk about what we’re working on all the time and share information so that we can learn from each other.”

As a local association president, Megill draws on his familiarity with so many staff thanks to the nature of his work. That helps him address issues and communicate what’s going on, but it’s still a monumental job.

“I really had to learn stress management and time management when I became the president,” Megill says. “Dividing my time up with my job, my household and the association was challenging in the beginning. I still spend about two hours every day, including over the weekends, on my work as president.”

Megill gets so many emails related to his work and his association role, he missed the email informing him that he was the 2023 Mercer County ESP of the Year for several days.

“When I finally read it and it sunk in, I just reflected on all my work building up my association, setting up a social committee, a full grievance committee, engaging with members at general membership meetings and working with the Mercer County Education Association. Doing all of that really made me grow. It was nice to be recognized. It made me happy, to say the least. It’s a great feeling.”
Creative Play

The value of engagement for students with disabilities through play

By Dr. Claudette Peterkin

Playing is an important aspect of children’s development in many spheres. Many research studies have shown that playful activities are essential in developing social skills for students with disabilities. Play constitutes the basis for language, literacy and mathematic development. Children with special needs acquire and improve their communicative, social and cognitive skills, including analytical thinking and problem solving, while they play.

When educators implement play during their lessons, students learn to interact with their peers, their environment and various objects. While students with disabilities often need additional guidance, sometimes from paraprofessionals or other educators, they should not be excluded from playing, because it provides them with valuable developmental and educational opportunities.

One of the primary issues for children with special educational needs is difficulty with interaction within a group. Thus, social play that fosters collaboration with peers may be especially useful for them, as it develops children’s social-emotional skills. Such experiences can help children better adjust to social norms and communication rules and facilitate their social integration.

When teachers substitute creative play for pencil and paper instruction it can also be utilized as a distinct teaching method. As educational researchers Meaghan Elizabeth Taylor and Wanda Boyer found in a 2019 study, apart from social-emotional skills, play can also develop academic skills, such as learning new words or composing a story. It is noteworthy that, unlike other teaching methods, play-based learning is equally available to all learners regardless of their abilities and backgrounds.

Moreover, play can be applied to different domains of knowledge and development. In other words, play is a universal teaching method that can facilitate the learning process for students with special needs.

As an educator who has worked with students from preschool through sixth grade, I have come to realize that play is a valuable tool that helps us understand children. According to researchers Amanda Passmore and Marie Tejero Hughes, playing reflects children’s preferences and developmental needs.

It is imperative that we pay close attention to the playing behaviors of students. This helps us make the playing and learning process more efficient and beneficial for children with disabilities. This way educators can better understand the students’ strong and weak points in their development. By observing creative play activities, teachers can adjust their teaching style to accommodate the learning format to meet the students’ learning needs.

Some students with disabilities may require extra interventions to acquire and develop necessary playing skills. I believe that creative playing activities should not be too simple and monotonous, otherwise, they would not prompt any cognitive, social-emotional or academic development.

Claudette Peterkin, Ph.D., is a special education teacher at Dr. John Grieco Elementary School in Englewood. She earned her doctorate at Fairleigh Dickinson University and earned her teacher leader endorsement through the NJEA Teacher Leader Academy. She can be reached at cpeterkin@epsd.org.
Play centers

Teachers should provide a specific learning environment for children with developmental disabilities. Researchers Megan Pullum, Seth King and Krystal Kennedy note that a structured learning model might be beneficial for such learners, as it implies clear physical and visual boundaries and minimal distractions.

A well-structured and organized playing session helps a child focus and perceive the educator’s instructions and guidance. Therefore, educators should consider the learning environment and guidance format to facilitate concentration and task comprehension for children with disabilities while playing.

Play stations offer every student an opportunity for enjoyment and enrichment. For children with special needs, no matter their ability, play stations can be the most important, or even the only way of reaching them or helping them learn. Play activities will show you how play can help teach self-expression, communication and relaxation. Play also releases tension and improves peer interaction.

Choosing learning stations that meet the child’s needs, and not the disability label, is crucial. In most schools, educators are increasingly pressured to address the academic needs of various students: those identified with a disability, those not diagnosed with a disability but considered at risk, those who achieve at average rates and high achievers. Playful activities can enhance the self-esteem of students with disabilities and help them develop social relationships. Students with disabilities learn how to interact, communicate, socialize and engage in age-appropriate behaviors by mimicking their non-disabled peers.

By engaging in different play stations students with special needs can solidify and enhance their learning and may gain increased skills in several areas, including organization, responsibility, problem solving, decision making and accountability.

Pulling it all together

Peer-to-peer activities provide critical opportunities to bring together students with various needs. Play stations can lead to academic, social and behavioral benefits for young children with disabilities. With peer support, play stations enable students to learn new skills, engage in social opportunities, and have interactions that, over time, can contribute to meaningful changes in the school climate.

Play is important for child development, especially for children with disabilities. It can help develop their communicative and social-emotional skills, which would provide them with more opportunities for social integration.

More to read about play

*Early Childhood Education Journal*  
“Exploration of Play Behaviors in an Inclusive Preschool Setting”  
Amanda Passmore and Marie Tejero Hughes  
bit.ly/passmore-play

*Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*  
“Structured Teaching and the Play of Preschoolers with Developmental Disabilities: An Evaluation”  
Megan Pullum, Seth King and Krystal Kennedy  
bit.ly/pullum-play

*Early Childhood Education Journal*  
“Play-Based Learning: Evidence-Based Research to Improve Children’s Learning Experiences in the Kindergarten Classroom”  
Meaghan Elizabeth Taylor and Wanda Boyer  
bit.ly/taylor-play
Inspire your students at

Inspiration Café

By Joseph S. Pizzo and Dr. Kenneth Piascik

As classroom teachers, we get frustrated when our students don’t seem to be willing to invest in their own successes. Often, they stop trying when a problem becomes challenging. Our students don’t always value determination. Sadly, many of them have given up when facing a difficult problem, not using the strategies we adults use. Is there a way for us to give our students the chance to learn about the power of grit, determination and resilience from those inspired by these traits?

We wanted to give our students the best opportunities to be inspired by their hopes and dreams, but our goals didn’t seem to match theirs. Is there a way to inspire our students to formulate their personal visions, retain their own resilience, and move forward with a determined passion so they know they are not the only people who struggle?

An idea is born

While traveling to the June 2017 National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform (Schools to Watch) Conference in Arlington, Virginia, we began chatting about our vision for our students and our struggle of having an “inspirational” event that would not pull our Black River Middle School (BRMS) students out of their classes. At the conference, we attended a workshop that would serve to be our professional inspiration.

In its session, College Park Middle School in Ladson, South Carolina demonstrated how its career day program is conducted during lunch times. Immediately, we had a vision. We already have a successful career day program. Many schools do. Instead, we would design a program where our students could bring their lunches and listen

Joseph S. Pizzo teaches at Black River Middle School and Centenary University, having also taught at Union County College and College of Saint Elizabeth. An author, professional development presenter and podcaster, Pizzo has been named Educator of the Year nationally for the Association for Middle Level Education and closer to home by the New Jersey Association for Middle Level Education, the New Jersey Council of Teachers of English, and NJ S.H.I.N.E. (Serves, Helps, Inspires, Nurtures, Excels). He has also been inducted into Channel 9’s A+ for Teachers Hall of Fame. Pizzo can be reached at joseph.pizzo@chester-nj.org.

Dr. Kenneth Piascik is the instrumental music teacher at Black River Middle School and has been dedicated to providing the best education at the university, public school and private level for over 35 years. Dr. Piascik was also a semi-finalist for a Grammy, a WDHA Teacher who Rocks, and the SBO NJ Band Director of 2019 to name just a few recent honors. He is endorsed by Vic Firth, Marimba One and Sabian. Dr. Piascik can be reached at kenneth.piascik@chester-nj.org. For more information visit his school website, brmsmusic.weebly.com, or his personal website, kennethpiascik.com.
to speakers talk about challenges and adversity while pursuing their careers.

Inspiration Café, a yearlong program, could help us inspire our students and light the fires within them. Our excitement bubbled over as we discussed our plans to create Inspiration Café.

The planning process

There was an important step to take before we could begin creating Inspiration Café. We needed to secure administrative approval and funding. We are fortunate that as a School to Watch, we are encouraged to innovate. Without hesitation, our principal gave his enthusiastic approval, and our idea was ready for development.

Funding is a challenge for any school, including ours. One day we were discussing our idea with a supporter who became so excited that they gave us a start-up grant. Materials including two banners, tablecloths, frames, certificate paper, labels, envelopes and the first year of commemorative plaques were acquired with these funds.

We created a list of speakers for our café, placing these in a contact list along with any potential speakers for the future. We hoped to have a diverse group of presenters so students with varied interests would be inspired by someone working in a field that appeals to them. To organize our procedures for each event, we developed a flowchart to facilitate the process.

To have speakers with local and global perspectives, we needed to offer two types of presentation options. A featured speaker within commuting distance of our school would be invited to inspire our students in person. However, if the speaker lives far away, they would share their story in a Zoom conference. Please note: a high-quality webcam is needed so the speaker’s image is clear, and the sound is run through a public address system with wireless microphones. This helps balance the sound and eliminate feedback.

Our café must be held in a quiet room without foot traffic during the program. We use the media center since we can close the center to students for a few periods on Fridays. Most importantly, the library remains open during the morning and late afternoon to serve our students. The librarians support our efforts, and we make sure the students thank them upon entering and exiting.

All attendees sign up online through a popular ticket app that is free as long as no event fee is charged. We accommodate up to 30 students and 10 VIPs, and tickets are on a first-come, first-served basis. The students are seventh graders because we all have lunch at the same time, so class coverage is not needed. The VIPs have included our board of education members, PTO members, interested parents, NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty, SCEA Vice President Henry Goodhue, and our building faculty and administrators.
The event must be professional on every level from communication to appearance. Every table has a tablecloth, cookies, bottled water, and a set of expected behaviors and protocols to follow. Students may either bring their lunches to the café, or they may buy lunch in the cafeteria. Those buying lunch receive priority status by showing their e-ticket confirmation to the cafeteria staff. We also provide water for all attendees and an appetizer plate for our VIPs.

Finally, we have created an Inspiration Café website, allowing us to maintain a historical record of past programs while allowing future events to be posted. We also use the website to gather information about each speaker. The website can be found at brmsinspiration.weebly.com.

**Our history, so far**

To contact potential speakers, we send a letter of inquiry that provides an overview of Inspiration Café, as well as our rationale for inspiring our students. We encourage the speakers to share their struggles as they have worked their way toward their career goals.

Challenges, barriers, and disappointments are part of every journey to success. By sharing these stories, our speakers encourage our students to expect roadblocks along the way as they someday will negotiate their journeys to their own successes. Failures are seen as learning opportunities rather than reasons to quit pursuing their dreams. Every speaker inevitably stresses the importance of grit and resilience.

We run between four and five programs a year with speakers covering a wide range of talents and professions. Since the 2018-19 school year, the debut of our café, our guests have underscored the importance of both inspiration and determination.

Our guests represent a wide range, including Steve Piascik who is tax advisor to professional athletes and extreme high net-worth clients, radio personality Jim Monaghan and three-time Caldecott Award winner David Wiesner. We also featured Dr. Jocelyn Chadwick, a former NCTE President, Harvard Graduate School of Education Professor, and Mark Twain expert. We continued in 2019-20
with choreographer and former Rockette Jaclyn Ford and Rutgers University head women’s soccer coach James McElderry.

Our plans were unceremoniously put on hold when schools were closed because of COVID-19. The logistics of continuing to run Inspiration Café during the pandemic were too much to overcome. As the world changed its priorities and put many activities on hold, we were forced to do the same. Interestingly enough, negotiating our way through COVID-19 became a true test for all who gave their best efforts to survive and flourish.

With great excitement, we channeled our energy and reopened Inspiration Café for the 2022-23 school year. Taylor Mali was our perfect first guest. His natural energy and poetic flair were felt by everyone in attendance. Christina Seckar is an international human resources professional who appeals to students interested in the world of business involving travel. Emiko Oye inspires by sharing her “can do” attitude when combining her artistic vision with making a living. We concluded with Sean Conaty, a professional filmmaker who has shared the rewards of producing films while also worrying about finding opportunities for his projects.

This year, we have continued the momentum that has been built in the past. We began with former U.S. Olympic bobsledder Jean Prahm, who continues to be a role model. She gave our students insight into the importance of training daily and accepting hardship and even failure as opportunities to become stronger while working to improve their performance.

Those also visiting Inspiration Café during this 2023-24 academic year include businessman and broadcaster Professor Richard Allen, along with educator, author, and thought guru Rick Wormeli, who was excited to tell the tale of his family’s pursuit and eventual success to gain film footage of the elusive giant squid in the ocean’s depths. We are scheduled to end the season with a famous movie and television actor.

As you can see, our list of guests at Inspiration Café includes authors, business leaders, artists and sports figures. We are always looking for outstanding professionals from a variety of fields to inspire our students. Please forward to us any potential speakers you may be aware of. Most importantly, our “New Jersey” goal is to have Bruce Springsteen (“The Boss”) visit Inspiration Café. If you know of a sure-fire way to contact him, then please let us know.

Feedback

Inspiration Café has been very popular in our school. From our board of education, parents/guardians, students and the community, everyone is excited when they attend. They go on to express their anticipation for the next event.

As a parent stated on Facebook, “A huge thanks to Dr. Piascik and Mr. Pizzo for their fabulous Inspiration Café series. Some BRMS students were lucky enough to attend today’s presentation to hear Caldecott Medal-winning author David Wiesner give a truly inspiring talk about his work. We are so lucky to have educators who put these types of programs together.”

“Inspiration Cafe is one of a kind,” says Chester Board of Education President Sarah Shultz. “This is an
extraordinary program that brings experts in their fields to the Chester School District. This program is truly a gift that opens our students’ eyes to the endless possibilities ahead.”

“The program plants a seed at a pivotal age for middle school students,” observes BRMS Principal Andrew White. “The goal is to aid them as they navigate their own journey with the hope that they will someday pay it forward and impart their own individual wisdom to the next generation. I have witnessed the pure joy, excitement, and validation that their dreams can come true even if the students have to struggle first.”

Even with all the positive feedback from adults and school leadership, the best reward is witnessing the students’ piqued interest and desire to move forward with their dreams. “It was really nice to know that I’m not the only one that had no idea on what they wanted to do at my age, because I don’t, and it was nice to have some reassurance,” shares one student. “And that’s why I really love this café!”

“Inspiration Café, as it states in its name, is really inspirational because as we talked to the speakers, we could see that they are just ordinary people,” shares another student. “It was really cool to see how they were able to turn their passion into something as great as they did and into a great achievement. And that inspired me!”

At the end of every Inspiration Café, our students sign a certificate and write a short note to the presenter. Their comments and reactions exemplify the impact of Inspiration Café. That is truly inspirational!

**Please visit us**

If you wish to visit one of our Inspiration Café presentations, please reach out to us. We have been able to accommodate up to 10 VIP guests for each presentation. As a member of the national Schools to Watch program, we are also able to have a team from a middle school visit us to learn about our exemplary middle school curricula.

We are hoping to set aside a day early in the 2024-25 school year to run a special Inspiration Café program. This will be followed by a more detailed presentation of how Inspiration Café began and how you can start one at your school. There will be plenty of time for questions. Please email us if you are interested in attending our special program, and we will send you an invitation when the date is finalized. Furthermore, should you wish to have us share more details with your school, please reach out to us.
Joe Pizzo’s
50 years in the classroom

A life of possibilities

The September 2023 edition of the NJEA Review featured NJEA members who have navigated long careers in education. Those members have worked in public schools between 47 and 61 years and are still going strong. With half a century in public education, Joe Pizzo is another such educator.

Displaying an unparalleled blend of energy, excitement and knowledge, Pizzo inspires his students every day to use what they know so they can find what they need to know. He designs lessons that cross curricular lines rather than one-size-fits-all formulas because he believes strongly that school should prepare students for a life of possibilities.

When Pizzo designs his lessons, he imagines that he is one of his students sitting at a desk in his classroom. He looks at his plans through the eyes of his students. They appreciate the difference this makes. If the lesson doesn’t make sense from a student’s point of view, then he adjusts the lessons so the assignments are meaningful, exploratory and filled with potential.

As often as it is practical, Pizzo gives his students “voice and choice:” the opportunity to have input into the lesson and to choose the activity that will teach the targeted skills through their preferred learning styles.

Pizzo’s classroom and beyond-the-classroom activities are project-based. His students complete several activities designed to teach and enhance the curricular and the power skills: emotional intelligence, collaboration, communication, creativity and more.

Students have authored their own children’s books, which were read to second graders in the Chester School District and later donated to the second-grade classroom libraries. They have created Valentine’s Day cards for the residents of The Home for Disabled Soldiers, local senior citizens homes, and local nursing homes. They have designed original hero awards for their personal heroes, established the criteria, selected the recipients, and then gave the speeches at a simulated heroes award celebration where the awards were “presented.”

Author’s showcases featuring the students’ original poetry collected in their poetry anthologies were featured as special evening programs and sometimes aired on local cable TV. Moreover, public service announcements have featured selected students on a local commercial radio station.

“Teaching is a calling” says Pizzo, “and I have the opportunity every day to make a difference in the lives of my students.”
AI IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Resist or join in?

By Taylor Trost

“Terrified doesn’t even begin to describe it,” shared a fellow elementary school co-worker when asked about AI, or artificial intelligence, in classrooms. “It’s going to take over, we can’t control the usage, and how in the world are we supposed to monitor it?”

When it comes to the educational discussion around systems like ChatGPT, both sides can easily create a laundry list of why the programming is either going to save modern education or ruin it.

From what I have observed, the conversation became a more mainstream discussion point a few years ago, as high school students became aware of the newest technology. The implications of their usage weighed heavily on upper grade level teachers as they asked, “How can we ensure our students are actually doing the work assigned and able to show us their understanding of the content we have taught?”

With time, some corners of the high school and middle school educational landscape began acknowledging, and even integrating, AI’s capabilities into the classroom. Teaching older students how to use these programs as a tool, not a crutch, when writing or developing ideas has been a common theme within the conversation, acknowledging that this technology isn’t going anywhere. If anything, weaving AI into lesson planning and curricular design, when done well, can support the idea of truly developing 21st century learners.

However, shielded from these heated debates have been the elementary school teachers. When you spend your days elbows deep in multiplication, introducing children to their newest favorite chapter book series, and fostering so many incredible “firsts” each day, the scary world of AI technology has seemingly floated right by us. As high school educators have been exploring how to embed these programs into their practice to lighten the daunting teacher workload, we in the lower grades (for the most part) haven’t truly been faced with the AI “takeover” on a daily basis.

AI felt comfortably foreign to me as a fourth grade teacher until I was listening in on children’s chatter during recess duty. In between big jumps off the monkey bars, nine-year-olds were discussing how they were writing silly stories with AI over the weekend.

Shocked, I brought the question to my sweet fourth grade class: “How many of you have heard of AI before?” When surveyed, nearly 80% of my fourth graders already had an understanding of what AI is. Many could rattle off the names of popular AI generator websites, and shared stories of how they have already used them. To me, this was what made it clear: I must get involved, but how?

Technology in the digital age has a common theme: If the children are familiar with it before the adults, we’re already too late. With so many different apps, websites, and digital resources available to students, we have a responsibility as their educators to be generally aware of what is in their hands.

Since it was made abundantly clear I was already behind the ball, it became my new mission to explore. I wasn’t quite ready to jump headfirst into bringing the world of AI into my classroom, but I felt the nagging importance to develop my understanding of it. If we know what we are “working” with, we can guide our students through the system, instead of frantically backtracking to protect them years down the line. Playing around with the technology for ourselves helps us as teachers be better equipped to predict the roadblocks, screen the nature of the content for our students, and expose them to AI in a way that is intentional and supported by adult supervision.

Yet, it still gave me pause. When it comes to sharing AI with our younger students, there is a rightful hesitation. There is a level of unpredictability when it comes to the maturity level of content, themes or ideas that are generated through this technology. I tend to err on the side of over-caution, so putting AI directly in the hands of nine- and ten-year-olds didn’t, and still doesn’t, sit comfortably in my mind. Yet, we as elementary school teachers can’t isolate ourselves from the usefulness of these programs.

Taylor Trost is a fourth grade teacher at Grace Norton Elementary School in Hightstown and recently received the Milken Educator Award. She is a member of the East Windsor Education Association. Trost can be reached at taylortrost11@gmail.com.
“If I am not entirely comfortable with the students using AI directly,” I thought, “how can I incorporate these programs behind the scenes to make my tasks less daunting, or my lessons more engaging?”

If you are feeling my hesitation, below are ways I have tried to implement different artificial intelligence systems into my own practice. When presenting anything AI related with your younger students, I find it easier to do the generating “behind the scenes.” Meaning, I will use the program on my computer while disconnected from my projector, or prior to the lesson, and carefully review that it is appropriate for the age level and purpose. Once it has been marked “all-clear” by my standards, I will then display it for students. If you want to get your feet wet, I hope one of these three ideas can serve as your starting point.

**AI picture prompts**

When working on narrative writing, I had students tell me information as a class that would generate a picture prompt for us to center our writing on. Students gave me descriptions of a character (either an animal or a person), a setting description or color, objects to be included and emotions to consider. Because it was for my fourth graders, I included the word “cartoon” to keep the style of the image light and young.

This became our focus for both planning and writing stories. The engagement was top-notch, and the pictures were easy to develop in real time “off-screen” before sharing with the class. For this, any “AI Image Generator” will do! I personally gave OpenArtAI a try.

**Creating texts**

Have you ever been looking for the perfect mentor text, but you just can’t find exactly what you’re looking for? Using AI to generate stories to use in the classroom has been such a time saver for me.

We have used AI-created stories to annotate aspects of different writing genres and have utilized AI pieces as exemplars to be referenced during our writing process. I have even asked AI to include specific grammatical mistakes in some stories that match our current and previous grammar/conventions units as editing practice. MagicSchool AI and ChatGPT have both been helpful programs for this purpose.

To get the best results, I suggest including a Lexile level, story length and grade level for the technology to properly tailor the writing to your audience. You can even take it a step further, as many AI tools will generate both open-ended and multiple-choice questions for you!

**Lesson planning**

Thorough and effective lesson planning can be an overwhelming task. If you’re anything like me, you like to mix it up year to year to keep the activities fresh. When you enter a standard, objective and brief description of the lesson plan, AI can suggest different hands-on or group work activities to try with your students. Just be sure to indicate some guidance for the type of activities you’re looking for. I have also entered the standard I am working on with a description of my lesson steps, and AI has generated student objectives for me in “Students will be able to…” format.

**Don’t be intimidated: start small**

Teachers are, to their core, extraordinarily hard-working professionals. But sometimes, hard work just isn’t enough to stay afloat during the busier weeks. As the lesson creating, shoe-tying, conflict deescalating, multitasking grown-up in the room, something has got to give when it comes to your to-do list. When the workload takes over, the magic of our jobs is hard to see through the running list in our minds of what needs to get done and when. When incorporating AI into your lesson planning and daily routines, there is an opportunity to relieve some of that task pressure, while also exposing yourself to relevant technology.

If I have learned anything as I have started my AI journey, it’s to not be intimidated by the programming and find a small idea to start with. By doing so, I feel better equipped to introduce AI carefully and meaningfully to my students in age-appropriate ways, as this technology will no doubt grow alongside them as 21st century learners.

As you explore, I hope it adds to your practice, while also giving you more time to enjoy teaching and laughing with those young learners in front of you. 😄
The impact of censorship in New Jersey school libraries

By Elissa Malespina

As we observe School Library Month in April, let us take a moment to appreciate the vital role played by school libraries and librarians in nurturing educational development while acknowledging the significant challenges they face in light of our nation’s cultural divisions. The assumption that book banning and censorship are issues exclusive to some conservative regions of the country is debunked when we look at New Jersey. The state, presumed by many to be a stronghold against such conflicts, has experienced its share of these contentious issues.

From January to August 2023 alone, New Jersey’s educational and public libraries faced 10 attempts to restrict book access and encountered 23 challenges against specific titles. This trend of censorship attempts, spread across 14 of New Jersey’s 21 counties since 2021, reveals the breadth and depth of the issue, showing that no area is immune to these disputes.

My story

In May 2022, I embarked on a journey into the heart of cultural wars that abruptly changed my career path. My work as a librarian at Verona High School had been marked by positive evaluations and no disciplinary issues for three years, but I found myself without a job. My dismissal was due to an alleged overemphasis on race and LGBTQ+ themes in the library’s collection. The administration suggested that those topics made some students uncomfortable, ignoring the library’s primary goal of creating an inclusive environment that fosters mutual understanding through a broad spectrum of literature.

It is important to note that the incident in question was not an isolated one. Still, it was part of a larger ongoing controversy within the school district regarding diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives. Although no formal complaints were directed toward me, I learned after my dismissal about concerns from a small but vocal group of parents in the community regarding the content and displays in the library. These concerns reflected the broader societal tensions and pressure exerted by specific segments of the community, highlighting the need for continued efforts towards creating an inclusive and equitable environment for all.

I’m far from alone

Many school librarians in New Jersey have been caught in the crossfire of ongoing culture wars, facing numerous challenges and legal battles due to their commitment to maintaining inclusive library collections. Martha Hickson and Roxana Caivano are New Jersey librarians who have had to navigate turbulent waters. Hickson has repeatedly been forced to confront book challenges at North Hunterdon Regional High School. At the same time, Caivano is currently embroiled in a defamation lawsuit in response to baseless accusations.

Elissa Malespina is a teacher librarian at Union High School in Union Township. She served on the South Orange-Maplewood Board of Education from 2021 to 2024. Malespina is the founder of Educational Equity Advisors. She can be followed on Threads and X through @elissamalespina and reached through her website, elissamalespina.com.
regarding the content of her library. These librarians’ experiences testify to the importance of defending intellectual freedom and the right to access diverse perspectives in our schools.

In today’s world, culture wars are becoming increasingly common, and unfortunately, they can have severe consequences for those targeted. These repercussions extend beyond the professional realm and can manifest in personal attacks, including online harassment and even death threats.

Protecting ourselves and intellectual freedom

To counter these threats, protective measures such as filing police reports and arranging security during public engagements have become necessary for other librarians and me. Despite these obstacles, my transition to Union High School in Union County has been met with overwhelming support from the community. It’s heartening that the district values diversity and inclusivity and is dedicated to working toward creating a safe and welcoming environment for all its students.

The toll these battles take on mental and emotional health cannot be overstated. Speaking from my journey, I’ve navigated through anxiety, sunk into the depths of depression and battled the relentless waves of PTSD, all stirred by my experiences over the last few years. My experiences echo fellow librarians and educators who have been victims of the culture wars.

We must show our dedication to maintaining school libraries that are inclusive and open to all, where students can develop their understanding and imagination under the guidance of passionate librarians.

During School Library Month we acknowledge the importance of libraries and are prompted to take action. This month is a call to action to champion intellectual freedom and renew our commitment to maintaining libraries as safe havens for learning and exploration for all students. Below are action steps that educators can take to help support intellectual freedom.

Educate yourself

As we strive toward fostering a society that embraces intellectual freedom, we must emphasize continuous professional development. This entails actively seeking out diverse educational opportunities that promote the value of intellectual freedom. Pen America (pen.org) and the American Library Association (ala.org) offer a wealth of resources and toolkits filled with essential information.

Educate others

By developing programs highlighting the richness of diverse voices, we can enhance our collective understanding of the significance of intellectual freedom. To this end, we can organize author talks, book discussions and clubs dedicated to exploring banned or challenged books. These initiatives can ignite meaningful conversations within our communities and foster a deeper appreciation for the importance of intellectual freedom.

Reinforce policies and procedures

Advocating for solid library policies safeguarding intellectual freedom has become increasingly important. These policies must provide transparent and equitable procedures for handling book challenges. By working with school boards, administrators and other stakeholders, we can refine and strengthen these policies to ensure our libraries remain safe and welcoming spaces for free expression and exploration. Explore the Resource Material and Public Complaints policies and regulations of the South Orange Maplewood School District, which are excellent examples of policies supporting intellectual freedom.

Community engagement

Another effective way to promote intellectual freedom is by expanding community engagement. This can be achieved by forming alliances with local bookstores, community organizations and fellow libraries. By doing so, we can amplify our advocacy for intellectual freedom and create a broader coalition dedicated to preserving the open exchange of ideas.

In addition, targeted outreach programs for parents and community members can be developed to dispel myths and build support for diverse collections. These partnerships and outreach programs can help us foster a more inclusive and supportive community that values intellectual freedom and diversity of thought.
Leverage social media

Leveraging social media in the battle against book banning and censorship is a strategic approach that significantly extends the reach and impact of advocacy for intellectual freedom. Through platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Threads, X and TikTok, we can disseminate compelling stories and factual information as we engage a wider audience, including those unaware of censorship’s implications. Shareable content such as infographics, videos and live discussions raise awareness and spark broader conversations.

Highlight personal experiences

Emphasizing personal experiences of censorship is vital in the fight to protect intellectual freedom. Highlighting the personal experiences of librarians, educators and students who have encountered censorship firsthand sheds light on the consequences of limiting access to information. By revealing the real-life effects of censorship, these stories underscore the critical need to protect various ideas and literary works. They are potent testimonies that connect with a broad audience, generating empathy and prompting collective action.

School Library Month serves as a reminder of the critical role of school libraries and librarians in fostering student’s educational development. It is also a time to reflect on the challenges faced by these institutions, especially in light of cultural and political divisions that can lead to censorship.

As we move forward, we must prioritize diversity, equity and inclusion and defend intellectual freedom and the right to access diverse perspectives in our schools. By doing so, we can create a safe and welcoming environment for all students and ensure they have unlimited access to knowledge and resources to explore the world beyond their classrooms.

NJEA welcomed ANTONIO CASTANON LUNA to NJEA staff on Feb. 16 as the manager of Human and Civil Rights, Equity and Governance. Castanon Luna comes to the position with considerable experience in advocacy for educators and public education. Most recently, he had been the executive director of the Mississippi Association of Educators (MAE) since 2021. Prior to his service at MAE, Castanon Luna had been the manager of UniServ, Membership and Organizing at the Georgia Association of Educators and worked as an organizing specialist for NEA since 2018. Castanon Luna’s experience also includes working as a regional organizer for the Laborers’ International Union of North America in Washington, D.C. and as an organizer for the American Federation of Teachers in Metairie, Louisiana.

Castanon Luna was born in Mexico City and came to the United States as a child. He and his mother settled in Georgia. Given that he was impacted by his immigration status growing up, Castanon Luna became engaged in work around the DREAM Act and the implementation of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) as a youth organizer. This experience continues to impact his work. In his free time he enjoys doing community service and supporting youth in sports.

Castanon Luna holds a master’s degree in public health from George Washington University and a bachelor’s degree in biology from Birmingham-Southern College. He also competed in men’s soccer and track and field during his collegiate career.

Employment Opportunities at NJEA

Questions? Call the NJEA Human Resources office at 609-599-4561.

NJEA is an equal opportunity employer. Visit njea.org/jobs.
THE PATH IS RARELY STRAIGHT

Whether you’re recently certified or a veteran educator, we have a graduate program or endorsement for you!

Counseling
- School Counseling
- Student Affairs & College Counseling

Curriculum & Instruction
- Early Childhood P-3 Education
- English as a Second Language
- Initial Teaching Certification (M.A.T.)
- Literacy
- Master of Education (M.Ed.)

Speech-Language Pathology

Special Education
- Applied Behavior Analysis
- Autism
- Autism + Applied Behavior Analysis
- Learning Disabilities Teacher-Consultant
- Special Education with Supervisor Endorsement
- Teacher of Students with Disabilities

Leadership
- Principal
- Supervisor
- School Administrator
- Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership
- Teacher Leader Endorsement

Many online program options available.

EXPLORE YOUR NEXT LEVEL:
INFO.MONMOUTH.EDU/EDUCATION

MONMOUTH UNIVERSITY
HARRAH’S HOTEL AND CASINO • ATLANTIC CITY

Session I – July 27-29 (Saturday to Monday)
Session II – July 29-31 (Monday to Wednesday)
The 2024 NJEA Jack Bertolino Summer Leadership Conference will offer a broad menu of workshops that equip members to become stronger association advocates. Most workshops offer 7.5 hours of training. A longer workshop providing additional hours of training is available for newer presidents.

If you are an NJEA member, you are eligible and encouraged to attend. You will find topics among the 32 workshop offerings that will prepare you for your current or future roles, sharpen your leadership skills, and show you how your local can develop to its full-functioning capacity.

- Session I – July 27-29 (Saturday to Monday)
- Session II – July 29-31 (Monday to Wednesday)

Not all of the 32 workshops are offered in each workshop period. The workshop descriptions provided on the following pages indicate when any given program is scheduled. To accommodate educational support professional members (ESP) who may wish to limit use of vacation or personal time, Workshop Number 22 runs from Friday evening, July 26 to Sunday afternoon, July 28.

For all other workshops, registration begins on Day One at 1 p.m. The opening session commences at 3 p.m. Day Three ends with a brunch, which is served at 10:30 a.m. following the final workshop session.

This year’s Summer Leadership Conference will take place at Harrah’s Hotel and Casino in Atlantic City. The conference is dedicated to developing association advocate representatives. Accordingly, no professional development credit is given for attendance in any seminar.

How do I register?

The purpose of this article is to alert members to this training opportunity and describe the workshop programs available this year, but to register you need to talk to your local and/or county association president.

Local and county association presidents will receive registration brochures with detailed information on the 2024 NJEA Jack Bertolino Summer Leadership Conference. You must contact your local president and consult that brochure to learn more about lodging, daily schedules, accommodations for members with special needs, and registration.

Registration forms can also be found at njea.org/slc.

Special needs

If you have a special physical or communication need or other disability that may require assistance or accommodations to permit or facilitate your attendance and participation, or if you have any questions or concerns about housing arrangements, please contact NJEA by June 1 at slc@njea.org or at 609-599-4594, ext. 2270.

Scholarships

Scholarships are available for first-time attendees. See your local and/or county president for more information.

Health and safety protocols

SLC is planned to be an in-person conference this year. However, all arrangements are subject to change in response to public health directives. Registrants will be notified of the health and safety protocols, if any, well before the conference so necessary precautions can be made to meet the requirements.

Pricing and payment

Conference costs for all attendees include workshop materials, self-parking, organized meals and coffee breaks, entertainment, taxes, and service fees. Pricing for members staying overnight also includes hotel accommodations and taxes.

The pricing for all workshops, except Workshop #1 is as follows:
- Commuter – $275 per session
- Double Occupancy – $325 per session
- Single Occupancy – $450 per session

Since an additional training occurs in September for Workshop #1—Now That I’m President, What Do I Do?—the costs are higher for it. Pricing for Workshop #1 is Commuter – $400; Double Occupancy – $500; Single Occupancy – $675.

Checks must be made payable to “NJEA/SLC” and returned with registration material to: NJEA Summer Leadership Conference c/o WSFS Bank
PO Box 13661
Philadelphia, PA 19101-3661

Please note that registrations and payments are mailed to the bank first where checks are deposited. Afterwards, registration materials are sent to NJEA for processing. Therefore, deposited checks should not be viewed as confirmation that a registration has been accepted and processed. If the conference is sold out, a refund will be issued.

Which workshop(s) should I take?

NJEA offers many advocacy conferences with a large array of workshops. Selecting which to take can be a daunting task. Whether you are currently serving in a leadership position or you aspire to become involved in some capacity within your local association, there are trainings that can help develop and hone your skills. To guide you, positions within the association are listed on the next page, followed by workshops that would be beneficial to you.

You will discover that being an officer is not the only position within your association, and there are opportunities to get involved in other ways. Additionally, we have included a track for those exploring future leadership. Please note that not all of these workshops are offered at the Summer Leadership Conference and may be offered at other conferences throughout the year. These courses are not listed in any particular order and are not mandatory to serve in any position. Not all of the workshops offered at the Summer Leadership Conference are listed on the next page, so please review this entire booklet before making your selection.
**PRESIDENT**
Now That I’m President, ................................. 1
What Do I Do? ........................................ 1
Vital Skills for Local Leaders ......................... 2
Leadership Development 101 – A Beginner’s Guide for Association Leaders .... 3
Basic Collective Bargaining .......................... 12
Advanced Collective Bargaining ...................... 13
Basic Salary Guides .................................... 14
Advanced Salary Guides ............................... 15
Legal Issues Affecting School Employees ........ 9
PERC Law .............................................. 10
Grievance Processing I – Grieve, Don’t Grieve 6
Grievance Processing II .............................. 7
Grievance Processing III .............................. 8
Organizing for Power ................................. *
Bridging the Member Involvement Gap ............... *
Engaging All Members ............................... *
How to Be a Powerful Public Speaker ............. 30
Understanding Your Union: Governance Fundamentals with an Equity Lens .... 18

**VICE PRESIDENT**
Basic Collective Bargaining ......................... 12
Grievance Processing I – Grieve, Don’t Grieve 6
Legal Issues Affecting School Employees .......... 9
PERC Law .............................................. 10
Managing Conflict Effectively ...................... 17
Leadership Development 101 – A Beginner’s Guide for Association Leaders .... 3
Understanding Your Union: Governance Fundamentals with an Equity Lens .... 18
How to Be a Powerful Public Speaker ............. 30
Vital Skills for Local Leaders ....................... 2

**TREASURER**
Basic Treasurer’s Training .......................... 4
Advanced Treasurer’s Training ....................... 5
Membership Chair Training ......................... 21

**ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVE (AR)**
AR – Key to a Strong Organization ............... 11
Managing Conflict Effectively ...................... 17
Grievance Processing I – Grieve, Don’t Grieve 6
Legal Issues Affecting School Employees .......... 9
Basic Collective Bargaining ......................... 12
Moneywise Members ................................ 32
Organizing for Power ................................. *
Leadership Development 101 – A Beginner’s Guide for Association Leaders .... 3
Understanding Your Union: Governance Fundamentals with an Equity Lens .... 18

**MEMBERSHIP CHAIR**
Membership Chair Training ......................... 21
Effective Membership Conversations .............. *
Moneywise Members ................................ 32
Managing Conflict Effectively ...................... 17

**NEGOTIATIONS TEAM**
Basic Collective Bargaining ......................... 12
Advanced Collective Bargaining .................... 13
Basic Salary Guides .................................. 14
Advanced Salary Guides ............................. 15
Bargaining Health Benefits ......................... *
Advanced Salary Guides ............................. 14
Health Benefits and Pensions for Your Local .... 16
Your Job, Your Benefits, Your Future ............. *

**GRIEVANCE COMMITTEE**
Grievance Processing I – Grieve, Don’t Grieve 6
Grievance Processing II .............................. 7
Grievance Processing III ............................. 8
Legal Issues Affecting School Employees .......... 9
PERC Law .............................................. 10
Managing Conflict Effectively ...................... 17

**ESP**
AR - Key to a Strong Organization ............... 11
The ESP Balancing Act: Supporting Students While Empowering Yourself .... *
Basic Collective Bargaining ......................... 12
Grievance Processing I – Grieve, Don’t Grieve 6
Organizing for Power ................................. *
ESP: You Are Essential, You Matter! .......... 22
Leadership Development 101 – A Beginner’s Guide for Association Leaders .... 3
Legal Issues Affecting School Employees .......... 9
Understanding Your Union: Governance Fundamentals with an Equity Lens .... 18
How to Be a Powerful Public Speaker ............. 30

**EXPLORING LEADERSHIP**
Managing Conflict Effectively ...................... 17
Understanding Your Union: Governance Fundamentals With an Equity Lens .... 18
Bridging the Member Involvement Gap ............ *
Leadership Development 101 – A Beginner’s Guide for Association Leaders .... 3
How to Be a Powerful Public Speaker ............. 30
X’s & O’s for Local Leaders ....................... *

**EVALUATION COMMITTEE**
Preparing for Your Evaluation ...................... *
Trust the Process: Making the Most of Educator Evaluation .................. 25
Managing Conflict Effectively ...................... 17

**LEGISLATIVE ACTION TEAM (LAT)**
Effective Political Advocacy Through Your LAT .................. *
Nuts & Bolts of Local LAT Chairs .................. 23
Calling All Policy Wonks! ........................... 242

*Workshops not offered at 2024 SLC; please check future NJEA conferences.*
Workshops

1. **Now That I’m President, What Do I Do?**  
   (offered Sessions I & II)  
   **PART 2 – 9/27-28 – 1-½ Day Workshop**  
   **For: Newly elected presidents**  
   The job of an effective local president is the most challenging you’ll ever face in your association. This workshop is designed to help newly elected presidents identify those challenges, develop strategies to deal with them, and build a strong, effective association. We will discuss advocacy topics so you leave empowered and with all the information you need to lead your association.  
   This training begins prior to the start of the conference at 1:15 p.m. Participants should plan to arrive by 12:45 p.m.  
   * Since an additional training occurs in September the costs are higher for this workshop.  
   **Commuter:** $400  
   **Double Occupancy:** $500  
   **Single Occupancy:** $675

2. **Vital Skills for Local Leaders**  
   (offered Sessions I & II)  
   **For: Local association presidents and leaders**  
   This workshop is redesigned to include not only presidents but members of your executive committee, as well. As local leaders one of the most vital roles you play is that of organizer. In this workshop, you will learn skills from the presenters as well as from each other that will enhance your organizing skills to make your association not only survive but thrive! With the lens focused on membership, advocacy, and communication, you will work to create an organizing plan to implement in your association.

3. **Leadership Development 101 – A Beginner’s Guide for Association Leaders**  
   (offered Session II only)  
   **For: All members**  
   In this workshop, we will explore principles of effective leadership and team building, effective communication and listening skills, time and stress management, facilitation skills for leaders, the importance of change management, and leadership scenarios for association leaders.

4. **Basic Treasurer’s Training**  
   (offered Sessions I & II)  
   **For: Local treasurers**  
   In this workshop, you will learn the ABCs of being a local treasurer, including the fiduciary responsibilities of this important association role. We will cover building a budget and fiscal issues, implementing time management tools, taking the fear out of treasury audits and payroll, and laying the foundation for a computerized treasury. Lastly, we will go over the benefits of the Local Association Financial Assistance Program (LAFAP) form and learn how to complete a LAFAP through our online system.

5. **Advanced Treasurer’s Training**  
   (offered Session II only)  
   **Prerequisite: Treasurers who have completed Basic Treasurer’s Training**  
   This course is designed for the experienced treasurer interested in using Quicken® to maintain the association’s books and conform to Local Association Financial Assistance Program (LAFAP) reporting requirements.  
   **Enrollment limited to 18 participants (one per local). Computers will be provided.**

6. **Grievance Processing I – Grieve, Don’t Gripe**  
   (offered Sessions I & II)  
   **For: Any member who is new to grievance processing**  
   This workshop will introduce participants to the basic vocabulary, essential tools, complete process, and changing laws of grievance work from the local association level through court appeals. Problem-solving ideas and strategies will be reviewed through case studies illustrating specific solutions to real problems. Members will be asked to determine whether gripes are grievable or should be handled in other ways.  
   **Participants need to bring a copy of their collective bargaining agreement.**

7. **Grievance Processing II**  
   (offered Session II only)  
   **Prerequisite: Grievance I workshop and/or knowledge in processing grievances**  
   Participants will learn the following grievance processing concepts: past practice, clear versus ambiguous contract language, just-cause standards, management rights, maintenance of benefits, and duty of fair representation. Participants also will be trained on the differences between grievance, an unfair labor practice, a PERC hearing, or a commissioner’s case.
8. Grievance Processing III  
(offered Session I only)  
Prerequisite: Grievance II workshop and/or experience in processing grievances  
Learn the skills needed for the local association to present grievances effectively at the board of education level—and learn why such presentations are necessary. Case studies and role playing will be utilized in group activities in order for participants to present a grievance to a board of education. Participants will write and present multiple grievances before simulated boards and make decisions on whether to settle or go to arbitration. This workshop is intended for members currently serving or training to be on a grievance committee.

9. Legal Issues Affecting School Employees  
(offered Sessions I & II)  
For: All members  
This workshop is an in-depth review of pertinent provisions of school and labor laws and administrative and legal decisions affecting members. We will examine the impact of school and labor laws on employment, analyze techniques for proper forum selection for dealing with disputes (i.e., role of PERC, the commissioner of education, courts, and agencies), review decisional law and legislative enactments, recognize statute applications/interpretations through case-by-case determination, and examine, analyze, and review association roles.

10. PERC Law (offered Sessions I & II)  
For: Negotiators, grievance committee representatives, and other association leaders  
To assist in negotiations and representation, this workshop will focus on unfair labor practices and court cases outlining negotiability/arbitrability disputes including discipline, transfers, extracurricular assignments, and duty of fair representation. What constitutes past practice, just cause, and relief from unilateral changes in working conditions will be explored in depth.

11. AR – Key to a Strong Organization  
(offered Sessions I & II)  
For: Association representatives; open to all members  
Learn the fundamentals and develop skills to become an association advocate. This program concentrates on contract enforcement, basic school law, member benefits, membership promotion, emerging instructional issues, legislative action, and your state and national association.

12. Basic Collective Bargaining  
(offered Sessions I & II)  
For: New and inexperienced negotiators  
Master the essential phases of bargaining with particular emphasis on the role of laws in the negotiations process; organization of and preparation for negotiations; negotiations tactics and techniques; the use of mathematics in negotiations; the 2010 bargaining law; impasse resolution including mediation, fact-finding, and superconciliation; job actions and communication; and ratification.

13. Advanced Collective Bargaining  
(offered Sessions I & II)  
For: Experienced negotiators who have completed Basic Collective Bargaining or members who have actively participated in the bargaining process as a member of a team  
Advanced Collective Bargaining workshop topics include hot topics at the table, how to get to where we want to go, salary guides (alternative methods of distribution), what to do when the going gets tough, legislation affecting bargaining, and bargaining health benefits.

14. Basic Salary Guides  
(offered Session I only)  
For: New local negotiators preparing for successful salary negotiations  
Methods of costing, analyzing, and understanding salary guides will be presented. Successful salary negotiation techniques such as developing comparisons, member input, district’s ability to pay, planning salary guide workshops, and planning a successful ratification will be emphasized. Challenges facing ESP and inclusive local associations will be stressed. We will discuss current issues of importance and present successful strategies.  
Participants must bring their current scattergram and collective bargaining agreement, including all salary guides.
15. **Advanced Salary Guides**  
*(offered Session II only)*  
**Prerequisite: Basic Salary Guides**  
The workshop will give participants an understanding of how salary guides are constructed and calculated. Participants will construct a base-year cost-out and salary guides for three additional years on an Excel spreadsheet. Knowledge of how a spreadsheet functions is essential. This training will expand on issues raised in Basic Salary Guides, as well as explore additional concerns and techniques.  

Enrollment limited to 18 participants (one per local). Computers will be provided.

16. **Health Benefits and Pensions for Your Local**  
*(offered Session I only)*  
**For: All members**  
Become your local’s go-to person for all your members’ health benefits and pension questions. Learn the ins and outs of what you need to know when assisting your members in understanding health plan options, minimizing out-of-pocket health care costs, premium sharing contributions, preparing for retirement, understanding their pensions, and more.

17. **Managing Conflict Effectively**  
*(offered Session II only)*  
**For: All members**  
This workshop is designed to increase personal and association effectiveness in dealing with conflict in a positive fashion. Participants will learn a variety of techniques that enhance this process by developing new strategies for identifying and handling conflict. Discussion will focus on what causes conflict and how better communication can help prevent or resolve conflict.

18. **Understanding Your Union: Governance Fundamentals with an Equity Lens**  
*(offered Session II only)*  
**For: All members**  
Knowledge is power. Understanding the organizational structure of our local, state, and national affiliates help to empower both new and seasoned union members. In this training, participants will unpack their understanding of the fundamentals including knowing your constitution and bylaws, and equity-centered policies.

19. **Honest Conversations Around Undoing Racism**  
*(offered Session II only)*  
**For: All members**  
Participants will engage in honest conversations around race and racism and the role of educators in understanding and undoing these systems of oppression. Conversations will be based on topics broached in the interviews of Ta-Nehisi Coates and Bryan Stevenson. Finally, there will be an introduction/review of anti-racist principles that we hope will guide participants in their work and journey to becoming anti-racist educators.

20. **Civil Rights & Racial Justice: History and Current Issues in Education**  
**For: All members**  
This immersive workshop will focus on racial justice and civil rights history and further discuss issues impacting public education and unions today. Participants will hear stories about the long and ongoing struggle for racial equality and equity from NJEA staff, community partners, and a representative from the National Park Service Little Rock Central High School Site. Learn how NJEA and NEA members were and are involved in movements for racial justice and civil rights.

21. **Membership Chair Training**  
*(offered Sessions I & II)*  
**For: All membership chairs: novice and experienced**  
During this course, we will examine the calendar of yearly responsibilities, as well as best practices and new techniques to help you meet those requirements. The course will be broken into four parts that will include redesigning your new employee orientation, how to make the membership ask, authentic engagement and follow-up, and member retention.

22. **Educational Support Professionals (ESPs): You Are Essential, You Matter!**  
*(offered Session I only)*  
**For: ESP members**  
Join fellow ESP members and experts on ESP issues in this lively workshop where you’ll gain the tools necessary to build your career and safeguard your interests. Just as you play an essential role in your school, your contribution to this workshop will ensure its success. Don’t miss out!

*This workshop has a special schedule. Registration is at 6:30 p.m. on Friday, July 26 and the workshop concludes with lunch on Sunday, July 28.*
23. Nuts & Bolts of Local LAT Chairs  
( Offered Session I only)  
For: Legislative Action Team (LAT) chairs and members aspiring to fill that role in the future  
Learn the basic requirements of the role and best practices for increasing member engagement in PAC, campaigns, and other political initiatives. Learn about the Snowflake Model of organizing and how to use it to supercharge your local's LAT while reducing the workload and stress on the LAT chair.

24. Calling All Policy Wonks!  
( Offered Session II only)  
For: All members  
Are education issues and education policy on your mind? Do you consider yourself a wonk? Learn about the policymaking process and hear from experts on current issues facing public education. Hear from lobbyists and policymakers who work on education policy and join the discussion on why we need to be part of the organizing and lobbying process in order to achieve good outcomes.

25. Trust the Process: Making the Most of Educator Evaluation  
( Offered Session II only)  
For: All members  
With a focus on action planning and goal-setting, this workshop will delve into AchieveNJ, TEACHNJ, and other aspects of the educator evaluation system. Through conversations and scenarios, attendees will craft a dynamic yearlong timeline that can be used by individual members or as part of larger association work around professional development advocacy. We know members invest a great deal of time in the evaluation process; join this workshop to make the most of it.

26. Teacher Leadership: Organizing and Advocating for Instructional Practice  
( Offered Session I only)  
For: All members  
Teacher leadership is the process by which teachers as individuals or collectively influence their colleagues, administrators, and school districts on issues of teaching and learning. This workshop will explore the Teacher Leader Model Standards, which have been adopted by the state of New Jersey as the basis of the teacher leader endorsement. Ways in which members can organize to influence professional practice with their colleagues, in their schools, and in their school districts will also be explored.

27. Advocating and Organizing Around School Culture: Strategic Thinking and Planning  
( Offered Session II only)  
For: All members  
Schools continue to reacclimate to in-person learning, addressing challenges that existed before the pandemic as well as challenges that have emerged or been exacerbated by the last few years. This workshop will focus on ways that local associations can organize and advocate around various issues related to school culture. We will guide participants on convening relevant stakeholders, diagnosing challenges, and accessing, understanding, and utilizing relevant school and district data in order to develop action plans.

28. Labor Management Collaboration: The Ultimate Tool for Member Empowerment, Involvement, and Organizing  
( Offered Session II only)  
For: All members  
By creating an avenue for members and administrations to work jointly, labor management collaboration gives power to members’ voices and creates an environment where their perspectives are sought after in making district decisions. This session will teach practical skills, tools, and strategies to engage your full membership through collaboration by establishing a clear process for joint district decision making and problem solving. Through collaboration, members no longer need to sit in their own sense of dissatisfaction. They now have a practice that honors the full diversity of their experiences and concerns.

29. Digital Communication Tools with NJEASites  
( Offered Session I only)  
For: Association editors and webmasters with an NJEASites website in the newest Ocean theme  
This session will cover how to customize your website and build pages using Page Builder with custom NJEA Modules. Other topics covered include creating posts, events, galleries and forms, sending email with Sendy Creator, text messaging tools, and other digital communications resources.  
Enrollment limited to 18 participants (one per local). Computers will be provided.
30. How to Be a Powerful Public Speaker
(offered Session I only)
For: All members
Learn how to look and sound your best when presenting to a group. Participants review techniques for preparing and delivering a speech. Each participant will be videotaped for self-reflection and group feedback.
Enrollment limited to 18 participants (one per local).

31. Social Media for Local Associations
(offered Session I only)
For: Local association social media editors
Learn how to create and optimize a social media presence for your local association. Once established, social media can support your ability to activate your membership, engage your community, and maximize your organizing efforts. This workshop is for advanced social media users.

32. Moneywise Members
(offered Session II only)
For: Member Benefits coordinators and all members
This training will encompass all programs and services offered through NJEA Member Benefits. Attendees will learn more about the full referral service of AID-NJEA and important financial matters including life insurance, income protection, supplemental retirement income, and member discounts on everyday items and services.

NJEXCEL
New Jersey EXpedited Certification for Educational Leadership

Register for an Info Session at www.njexcel.org
Teacher Leader Certification is available through NJEXCEL or a 10-month NJTLC program. For details, go to www.njtlc.org.

(609) 860-1200
www.njexcel.org

Do you aspire to be a supervisor, principal, or superintendent but lack the necessary certification?
Is your master’s degree in a field other than educational administration?
Do you really want to take the time and pay the cost for a second master’s degree through a college or university?
Here’s the good news: You don’t have to!
In as little as 12-18 months, you can earn your certification through NJEXCEL, the Foundation for Educational Administration’s school leadership certification program.
No health and safety committee?
What to do

By Dorothy Wigmore

Just found a health or safety hazard at work? Trying to figure out if something is a hazard? Worried about on-going symptoms you or others have?

What if there’s no union health and safety committee? While it’s a good time to organize one, what do NJEA members do before that happens?

"Members don’t have to do it alone," says Judi Meyer. The long-time UniServ consultant and former special education teacher is based in the Region 3 office serving Burlington and Camden counties. "There’s always someone to help, people like me who deal with the issues."

Like all reps, Meyer has backup. There’s the NJEA health and safety staff person, Mike Rollins, and the New Jersey Work Environment Council (WEC), which helps with technical issues, analyzing reports and education.

What’s the process?
Districts have procedures to report health and safety issues. Start there. The state requires those with more than three schools have electronic systems. However it’s done, keep a copy of whatever you submit.

If it needs to be dealt with right away, tell the principal and then fill out the form, Meyer says. Then tell the local president who will call the UniServ rep for advice and support.

Reporting a problem or concern isn’t enough. "You can’t assume that once you tell the administration that they’ll respond," Meyer says. "We have to keep after them until they realize we’re serious."

This is particularly important when things change over time, like temperature and humidity.

One local Meyer worked with sent daily temperature and humidity readings to the administration to show the problem wasn’t fixed. Locals can purchase or borrow equipment that measures both; while more expensive, a device that includes carbon dioxide (CO2)—an indicator of fresh air—has multiple uses. Be sure the device is, or can be, calibrated—checked to ensure accuracy.

Documentation is essential. "Emotions can run high. People may think it’s one thing when it’s another," Meyer says. When it comes to things that may smell, like mold, she reminds members that not everyone reacts the same way, or members may be comfortable at different temperatures. (Women tend to feel the cold more than men do.)

Documentation does not always mean tests. Results may not represent on-going conditions and there can be issues with how tests are done. (See “Pros and Cons of Industrial Hygiene Sampling” in the NJEA Health and Safety Manual.)

Where to start?
Union members can work together to collect facts and data without an official committee.

“They don’t have to know all the information, but we want them to know where to get it,” Meyer says. “We’ve got to be where we are by asking questions.”

Open questions—ones that don’t get “yes” or “no” answers—usually work best. Talk to others throughout the school, tailoring questions to the situation. What’s

Dorothy Wigmore is a long-time health and safety specialist and WEC consultant. She has worked in Canada, the U.S. and Mozambique, focusing on prevention and worker participation to solve job-related hazards.
the air like? Have they seen mold? Where? What do the custodial or facilities staff know? What chemicals are used inside or outside? If others know you’re “investigating,” they may want to help too.

Local association leaders may have heard something. Talking to them can provide help for the immediate issue, and for setting up a health and safety committee. It’s all part of organizing for effective action.

Keep track of things. Meyer recommends a binder for notes and a map of the building. Start with the fire hazard and emergency exit maps. Add maps that you and others draw, using information from conversations, walk-arounds, etc.

These hazard or workplace maps come in different forms. They can be adapted to specific issues or expanded for an overall view. Meyer helps members color code for indoor air issues, using red for areas where people have symptoms or are sick, green for mold and brown for smells/odors. WEC runs mapping workshops and there are online resources about hazard and body mapping (to find out how hazards affect people).

Pictures also help. Take close-ups and shots from further away for context. Add them to the maps or complaints. Share them with the union and co-workers.

To the binder, add a copy of the NJEA Health and Safety Manual and relevant health and safety columns that date back more than 10 years—all available njea.org. Search there for specific topics. (Printed versions are often easier to read.)

For example, the Health and Safety Manual has an indoor air quality checklist based on the state’s Indoor air quality standard (pages 60 to 62). Meyer pointed out section 13.4 (c).

“It says the employer has to remediate damp or wet materials by drying, replacing, removing or cleaning within 48 hours of discovery, and continue until the water intrusion is eliminated,” she says. “It’s a biggie.”

Finally, whatever happens, use your new knowledge and skills to help set up a health and safety committee. It’s a route to more training and health and safety fixes that benefit the full cross-section of local members. Like other job-related issues, solidarity is important.

Documentation is essential.

Resources

Beautiful Trouble: Creative Tools for a More Just World
beautifultrouble.org

Labour Occupational Health Clinics
Academic Research Collaboration (LOARC)
Health and Safety Representation: Writing the Workers Back In
bit.ly/loarcworkersguide-1

New Jersey Work Environment Council
njwec.org

NJEA
For information about indoor air quality, other hazards and how to deal with them, check out:
- Website: Health and safety page njea.org/health-safety
- Brochure: Organizing for Better Indoor Air Quality njea.org/download/9272
- NJEA Health and Safety Manual njea.org/download/9266

NJEA Review
Health and safety columns, such as:
- “Health and Safety Committees: Knowledge + Action = Change” njea.org/hscomm-kac
- “Key Resources to Help NJEA Members Use Health and Safety Rights” njea.org/key-hs-resources
- “Tackle Harmful Heat with Ventilation and AC” njea.org/harmful-heat
- “Mercury-Laced Floors Don’t Belong in Schools” njea.org/mercury-floors

Wigmorising.ca
Body mapping (with links to workplace mapping) wigmorising.ca/body-mapping
WHAT IS NJREA?

The New Jersey Retirees’ Education Association (NJREA) has long been called the “Daytime Face of NJEA.” NJREA members are available to take on tasks and responsibilities during the workday while actively employed NJEA members are occupied educating the next generation of New Jersey’s public school success stories.

How to join NJREA or gift a membership

Any actively employed professional or educational support professional staff member who is eligible for a New Jersey state pension may join NJREA prior to retirement at the current lifetime dues rate. The active employee becomes a pre-retired lifetime member of NJREA, NJEA, NEA-R, and a County Retirees’ Retired Education Association (CREA) and begins to receive publications and information about retirement issues.

Some local associations or friends of a retiree purchase memberships for retiring NJEA members. Local school district associations can do this to honor their retiring staff instead of giving them a plaque or clock. Children, grandchildren, friends can “gift” a membership for a relative, a colleague, an already retired educator.

For more details about this opportunity, and payment information, call the NJEA Membership Division at 609-310-4546, Option 9, and follow the prompts.

The benefits of NJREA membership

When you join NJREA, you belong to one of the largest retired public school employee organizations in the nation and you maintain your membership with NJEA, NEA-Retired, and your CREA (this can be in the county in which you worked or in which you reside).

In addition, you will receive the NJREA Newsletter, an award-winning quarterly publication with information that keeps you informed about your pension, medical benefits, and more. You will also receive the NJEA Review, which has a section on retiree issues every month, as well as the retiree edition of NEA Today.

Most importantly, you will receive assistance from NJEA professional staff on pension and medical benefits questions, in addition to assistance on all retirement concerns. This service is only available to dues-paying NJREA members.

Members also receive:

• Personal Legal Services – free consultation and 30% discount on services.
• Buyer’s Edge, Inc. – guaranteed best prices negotiated on your behalf on major purchases.
• NEA Members Insurance Trust – term life insurance.
• NEA-sponsored auto and home insurance.
• NJEA Member Discount Program.
• Access Discounts – more than 315,000 discounts and counting.
• Lowest prices on eyewear.
• NJEA travel discounts.
• NEA financial programs.

VISIT NJREA’S WEBPAGE

NJREA’s webpage, njea.org/njrea, provides valuable information for retired public school employees, from information about Medicare to tips on benefits coverage while traveling to assistance for survivors following the passing of an NJREA member.

One of the most frequently asked questions concerns the rules governing retired public school employees who would like to work or volunteer in New Jersey’s public schools. The information under “Working After Retirement” provides many answers on post-retirement employment—especially concerning your pension.

RING! RING!

NJREA’s dedicated phone line

NJREA has a dedicated phone line. Should you need to reach NJREA with a question or concern, please call us at 609-310-4546.
Around the counties

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
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

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.

MIDDLESEX COUNTY REA
June 13: Scholarship meeting/luncheon with officer installation at The Grand Marquis on Old Bridge. Cost is $43. To attend, contact Susan Jaynovitch at 732-925-1606 or andyjace@aol.com by June 3.

MONMOUTH COUNTY REA
April 9: Spring luncheon/meeting at Falco’s in Ocean Township. Cost is $45. To attend, call Debbie Adamchak, 848-459-2672 by March 29.

MORRIS COUNTY REA
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 Whippley. Cost is $35 for members and $53 for guests. To attend, call John Beekman at 973-514-1080 by April 24.

June 12: Scholarship Awards Ceremony and 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 June 1.

OCEAN COUNTY REA
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
June 5: Summer 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.


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.
Systemic change to improve mental health

By Amanda Adams

Historically, mental health has been overlooked and misunderstood, but now there is a greater understanding of the impact it can have on both teachers and students. The COVID-19 pandemic created the first global event in recent history where people experienced a collective trauma that impacted our mental health in a variety of ways. The high stress situation of dealing with the unknown, isolation and the loss of loved ones has created lasting effects on the mental health of children and adults alike.

As I have traveled around the state facilitating workshops on understanding trauma and its impact on mental health, teachers have reported feeling overwhelmed, anxious and depressed post pandemic. Some teachers feel as though there hasn’t been enough attention paid to the mental health and well-being of educators and their students.

In a study conducted by the American Psychological Association, researchers found that over 50% of teachers reported high levels of stress during the school year. High levels of stress not only affect educators’ mental health but also impact their job performance, leading to decreased job satisfaction and increased burnout rates. Therefore, prioritizing teacher mental health is essential for creating a positive and conducive learning environment.

Multi-tiered systems of support

When students are emotionally well, they are better equipped to engage in their education, develop healthy coping mechanisms, and form positive relationships. Creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment is crucial for addressing these challenges. This most effectively accomplished by creating a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) for mental health in every school. MTSS is a framework that provides a range of supports within a school community, ensuring that mental health is prioritized at all levels.

At the primary prevention level, schools implement universal practices to promote mental health and provide early interventions. This may include social-emotional learning programs, mindfulness activities and regular mental health check-ins.

The secondary prevention level focuses on providing targeted interventions to students who may require additional support. School mental health professionals play critical roles in identifying and assisting students who exhibit signs of mental health difficulties. Collaboration between school staff, families and mental health professionals is key in providing these interventions.

Finally, the tertiary prevention level focuses on intensive interventions for students who require more specialized support. This may involve individual therapy, referral to external mental health services, or the creation of personalized support plans.

New Jersey Statewide Student Support Services

New Jersey offers every school free mental health support through the New Jersey Statewide Student Support Services (NJ4S). NJ4S adopts the MTSS framework, which provides a multi-tiered approach to addressing students’ needs. NJ4S offers professional development, community partnerships, guidance, resources, and community engagement. To learn more visit nj4s.nj.gov/s/.

By prioritizing mental health, schools in New Jersey can address the alarming rates of stress, burnout, and mental health difficulties. Through the implementation of multi-tiered systems of support, teachers and students can receive the necessary resources and interventions to thrive academically, emotionally and socially. Improving student and staff mental health improves the overall health in the community for generations to come.

Amanda Adams is an associate director in the NJEA Professional Development and Instructional Issues Division and a coordinator for the NJEA ACCESS Model program. She can be reached at aadams@njea.org.
POETRY AS QUEER LIBERATION AND JOY

By Amy Moran, Ph.D. and Kate Okeson

April is National Poetry Month, and I have been thinking about the role of the arts in helping us see ourselves, connecting us in experience and feeling to others.

When I was in high school, my teacher took a group of students who were part of a “Young Writers” program to the Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival, which was then hosted at Waterloo Village in Stanhope, New Jersey. This biennial celebration of poetry, the largest in North America, is a four-day festival that dedicates one full day to students and another day for teachers. The magnitude of this structure wouldn’t be apparent to me for some time, but it’s safe to say my 16-year-old self was not at all prepared for what would happen once I stepped off that school bus.

Poets were among us. Literally walking around. Student, student, poet, teacher, poet, student, poet, student, Lucille Clifton! When these poets who I would soon come to know took to the Mill, or Chapel, or Barn or Main Tent for readings and conversations on poetry, these writers transformed their experiences into an embrace for all of us.

The poets wrote their lives, their sadness, their joy and did so while letting us know exactly who they were: parents and children; those loved deeply and also those exiled by family; queer folks, lovers, survivors, witnesses; similar to some, and not like any others at all.

I saw people I didn’t think existed and simultaneously I also felt seen. And for my friends and all the other students there that day, there were poets sharing their work that made them feel seen, connecting them to possibility and shared futures. Certainly, hearing about love—queer love—in some of the poems at that time made me feel more whole, and it made the challenges of being who I was as a teen in the 90s more bearable.

But there was a broader impact it had as well—poetry, the living library I was given access to on that festival day, was liberatory. It freed my voice, and I know in the decades since, it has provided open windows, sliding doors, many mirrors and space to be ourselves.

When we read, we free ourselves from the rigid sense of who others think we can become, and instead are offered a plurality of possible futures.

It’s this set of memories that are present for me as I hear about books being pulled from the shelves of schools, of the brouhaha over gender and sexuality and race and ethnicity being voiced by authors for young people. To think that any one identity, any single narrative, could be what is appropriate for youth! The freedom to read is integral to discovering ourselves and others. And when we read, we free ourselves from the rigid sense of who others think we can become, and instead are offered a plurality of possible futures.

Sadly, these approaches—the limiting of information, of art, of language—have devastating effects, and we would be remiss to not connect the restriction or removal of art, poetry, books in general, and classroom content to the significant rise in bias incidents in schools across the nation. These connect indelibly to tragedies like the death of Nex Benedict, an Indigenous nonbinary sophomore, after being attacked in a high school bathroom after ongoing bullying in Oklahoma, where recent anti-trans legislation limits civil rights for trans and nonbinary people.

The Dodge Poetry Festival, now in Newark and entering its 38th year, still opens its collective heart to everyone looking for spirit and connection. Poetry remains a way to live out a truth, to share that truth with others, to keep love and liberation alive.
One of the most pressing challenges for today’s teachers is preparing students for standardized tests. Though the benefits of such testing are debatable, that schools are pressured to improve test scores is undeniable.

Thus, teachers have resorted to designing assessments based on standardized-test formatting. From formative quizzes to final exams, multiple-choice tests and timed writing assessments dominate countless English departments. The English department in which I taught gave critical reading assessments, close reading assessments, reading checks, even a 35-question final test for *To Kill a Mockingbird*, all of which contained primarily multiple choice questions. The ubiquity of standardized-test formatting, however, has not always translated to improved standardized test scores.

Instead, I believe the solution to preparing students for standardized tests is simple and requires far less prepping or grading: low-stakes, choice, independent reading.

Independent reading happens when students read by themselves without interruptions. This builds reading stamina, a crucial skill for standardized ELA testing. Students can read independently at home or in the classroom, but providing time in class is imperative for fostering a habit of reading.

“Choice” refers to allowing students to choose which texts they read—not from a list of options and not from a certain genre or time period or region. No qualifications. Students read what they want to read. In her 2022 doctoral dissertation “Perceptions and Identities of Adolescent Reader: A Mini Ethnographic Case Study,” Rebecca Rose Johnson, Ed.D. explains her finding that allowing students to choose from texts that correspond to their interests increased students’ motivation to read. For students to reap the benefits of independent reading, choice is crucial.

Finally, “low-stakes.” You may have heard this term in relation to “low-stakes testing,” but I use it here to mean ungraded, with no associated assignments. I anticipate this being the most controversial aspect of my proposition, but I need not remind my fellow educators that the love of reading fizzes away as students reach high school, where paradoxically nothing is low-stakes.

*Maggie Machado is a student at The College of New Jersey and an NJEA Preservice member.*

For students to reap the benefits of independent reading, choice is crucial.
Internalizing grammar and mechanics

Frequent reading also builds students’ knowledge of Standard English grammar and mechanics. Have you ever read a word often but never said it aloud, so your mental pronunciation was incorrect? (I pronounced “indictment” phonetically in front of my sophomores, which went over as well as you might imagine.) When students read, they unconsciously internalize spelling and grammar conventions, much like you internalized the spelling (and an incorrect pronunciation) of those words. The more they read, the more skilled students become at recognizing grammar and spelling errors and the more naturally they recall language conventions when writing, both crucial skill sets for standardized-test performance.

And students like reading. During my student teaching, I brought a few dozen books for my sophomores to browse during Halloween. I brought books ranging from elementary scary stories collections to young adult horror novels. I even found a Halloween-themed “MadLibs” book. I devoted about 20 minutes to book browsing and reading, and my students loved it.

“Aw, I remember reading this in middle school,” one student gushed to her friend after picking up Mimi McCoy’s Her Evil Twin.

“There’s no way this is even scary,” said another after picking up David Lubar’s Invasion of the Road Weenies. After I assured him they are as “warped and creepy” as the collection’s subtitle promises, he took it to his desk, flipping through the pages.

One student asked, “This isn’t graded, right? Like there’s no assignment we have to do?” and when I said no, he began to browse and said, “A’ight bet.” My rough translation: “That’s awesome. I’m so excited to read.”
Showcase experiences have been endorsed by NJEA’s Professional Development Institute and are also posted on njea.org. Those seeking endorsement of a professional development experience that they will provide should call NJEA’s Professional Development Division at 609-599-4561.

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

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

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

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

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

Registration and information
Registrations will be accepted until May 1, 2024, unless capacity is reached prior to that date. Dates and rates are firm. Please plan accordingly to account for school processing time and regular mail.
Visit njtesol-njbe.org/spring-conference for more information and to register.

For other conference questions email Caia Schlessinger, Conference Coordinator, at conference-coordinator@njtesol-njbe.org.
MORE TO LEARN

NEW JERSEY SCHOOL OF CONSERVATION HOSTS OPEN HOUSE AND IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE

As explained in more detail on Page 13 the New Jersey School of Conservation is 240-acre tract of land in Stokes State Forest in Sussex County. It is the nation’s oldest and largest environmental education center.

The school is hosting two workshops in the coming months that touch on different aspects of environmental science.

The school has so far scheduled five workshops in the coming months that touch on various aspects of environmental science. Details on all five—and any added after that—can be found at njsoc.org/events/category/educators. Among the current five, two are described below.

Open house

An Educators’ Open House, held May 18, will demonstrate the school’s approach to hands-on learning—something the school believes is critical for sparking long-term interest in conservation. Educators will learn about the school’s new climate change field experiences while also taking classes on topics including nature art, poetry, metalsmithing, water ecology, and archery.

Note the registration requires a $20 deposit. After you attend the event, the deposit is refunded.

For more information and to register, visit bit.ly/njsoc-open.

Residential immersive experience

The second opportunity is a week-long residential program for middle- and high-school teachers held Aug. 19-24. Educators will participate in an immersive experience, living in cabins on campus and sharing meals in the school’s lodge, while learning about several aspects critical to understanding aquatic ecosystems.

Teachers will work alongside university researchers and also learn how to use the iNaturalist app while participating in a National Geographic project designed to engage with citizen scientists.

The program is free—but is limited to successful applicants in a competitive process. Scholarships are funded by National Geographic and a private donor. Scholarships include all meals, cabin-style lodging at the NJSOC and workshop materials.

Interested applicants should be in a current position teaching middle or high-school aged students and be able to demonstrate a strong interest in natural history, field biology and ecology. Some activities will involve walking several miles over moderate terrain and take place outdoors in daytime and at night, rain or shine. Accommodations will be made for successful applicants with mobility challenges.

The deadline to apply is May 1. Applicants will be notified by May 15.

For more information and to apply, visit bit.ly/njsoc-immersive.

WEBCAST ON Sexting, Cyberbullying and Media Manipulation

Educators, school leaders, attorneys and members of the public are invited to join the New Jersey State Bar Foundation for an eye-opening interactive discussion with an author, attorneys, and experts in behavioral health to discuss these important issues. Attendees will leave with strategies and tactics they can use right away to stay safe online and ensure they understand the latest issues in the digital world. For more information and to register, visit njsbf.org/sexting-texting.
We help NJEA Members SAVE BIG on Major Purchases

www.BuyersEdgeInc.com Username: 3386 Password: NJEA

Savings on many Major Purchases!
Appliances-TV’s 800-377-3700
Cars - New & Used 800-543-8381
Credit Repair (see website)
Furniture-Mattresses 800-631-0286
Home Security Sys. 888-995-2661
Jewelry-Diamonds 800-635-9136
Kitchen Cabinets 800-327-3599
Mortgage Financing 800-971-7721
Moving Service 800-356-7771
Pet Insurance (see website)
Real Estate-Buy/Sell (see website)
Solar Electricity 800-558-1920
Travel-Cruises 800-634-8538
...and many more!

Need help M-F, 9-5: 800-755-5008

Alternate Route Programs
Under $5950 for NJEA Members

- Physics
- Chemistry
- Biology
- Mathematics

njctl.org/NJ/

*Pricing reflects 20% Member Discount
NJEA Member benefits helps you save and simplify homebuying

Find more information about the NJEA Homebuying Program at memberbenefits.njea.org/homebuying.

Before purchase

Realtor
- 15% commission rebate on purchase or sale of home
- Buyer’s Edge Real Estate
  800-232-6766

Credit repair
- Fix your credit with a FREE credit analysis. Save 20% on credit repair package.
- Better Qualified (Buyer’s Edge)
  888-533-8138

Mortgage lender
- Guaranteed Rate (Buyer’s Edge, Inc.)
  800-971-7721
- First National Bank of Omaha Home Mortgage Program (NEA Member Benefits)
  855-290-9454

Attorney review and closing
- 30% off personal legal services through NJEA Legal Services. Visit njea.org/networkattorneys or call 609-599-4561, Option 6

After purchase

Home insurance
NEA Sponsored Auto and Home Insurance by Travelers Insurance. Call 866-605-6045 or visit neamb.com

Appliances/TVs
Shop first for exact make and model number. Call 800-377-3700 for Buyer’s Edge pricing.

Furniture and mattresses
Royal Furniture (Buyer’s Edge) FREE delivery and removal. Call 800-631-0286

Kitchen cabinets and countertops
Virtual or Showroom appointments. Free 3D design and quote. Call 800-327-3599

Moving service
Van Express Moving (Buyer’s Edge). Call 800-356-7771

Solar panels
$0 out-of-pocket solar installation plus $0 payments for first three months up to $500. Contact Buyer’s Edge Solar at 800-558-1920

For even more information, resources, and discounts: memberbenefits.njea.org

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

FACEBOOK: Follow @NJEMemberBenefits on Facebook for discounts and services that save you money.
Explore our new online investing tools or Partner with a financial professional to help reach your goals.

Visit neamb.com/retirementprogram
Get it funded, just like these NJEA members!

**Patchwork** – Children at Old Farmers Road Elementary School in Washington Township, Morris County learn about math through the art of quilting. By bringing math to life through the vibrant colors of quilts and encouraging family members to sew with students, teachers are showing the common threads between what students learn in the classroom and the rest of their lives.

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

The only foundation of its kind in New Jersey, the Hipp Foundation supports initiatives to promote excellence in education. Since 1993, the foundation has disbursed more than $2.3 million in grants for innovative educational projects.

Applications are due by March 1 each year. Applications are closed at this time, but learn more and start thinking about your grant ideas and explore previous grants at njea.org/hipp.
The NJEA Delegate Assembly met at the Hyatt Regency, New Brunswick, 2 Albany Street, New Brunswick, N.J. on September 10, 2022, at 9:30 a.m.

The meeting was called to order by President Sean M. Spiller. The roll call and the seating of delegates was taken by Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson. There were 123 members present and a quorum was met. Alternates were seated as follows: Newman for Mooney, (Burlington County); Lobasso for Giannotti (Essex County); Willis for Lopez (Essex); Healey for Balaity (Gloucester); Pizzuta for Rispling (Gloucester); Fields for Ebler (Middlesex); Wilson for Fresse (Passaic County); Carswell-Avery for vacancy (Passaic County); and Elliot for Jones-Brown (Warren County).

Absent without alternates were the following: Houck (Atlantic County); Turner (Camden County); Curry (Hudson); Eckersley (Morris County); and Kaspereen (Warren County).

Gene Woods, from Bayonne EA, Hudson County, gave the Inspirational Message and along with President Spiller, led the delegation in the Flag Salute.

Spiller reported that the New Jersey Department of Education has reached out looking to do a joint campaign with us to promote education.

Spiller asked Communications Director, Steve Baker to speak to a few of our Pride in Public Education ads.

Spiller recognized Lois Yukna, Middlesex County, as the newly elected president of the National Council of Education Support Professionals.

Robertson highlighted the following:
- Christine Sampson-Clark’s re-election to the NEA Executive Committee
- NEA-RA
- Restorative Justice and NJEA
- Membership update
- NJREA

Executive Director’s report

Executive Director Steve Swetsky stated this would be his last September DA meeting as his retirement is effective March 1, 2023.

Swetsky highlighted the following:
- The work of the Education Law Center
- The work of the New Jersey Center for Teaching and Learning
- Educator Pipeline

Nondelegate speakers

Jon Coniglio, president of Dover Education Association, Morris County spoke about the growing number of locals that field reps are responsible for. He also spoke to the meals at the Summer Leadership Conference not being good. He reported that he had four new members attend this year’s conference, and they reported that the food was a 100% turn off.

Reports of committees without recommendations

Elections Committee

Spiller asked the DA to review the report from the Elections Committee, which was included in the report to the Delegate Assembly for review. Gary Melton, staff contact, spoke to the report because the committee chair was unable to be at the meeting.

Reports of committees with recommendations

Affiliation Committee

Gerard Campione, Middlesex County, chair of the Affiliation Committee presented the committee’s report recommending affiliation of the Passaic County Technical Institute Support Staff Association (Passaic County) and South Brunswick Association of Behavioral Technicians (Middlesex County).

Jennifer Herrick, Middlesex County, moved the recommendations. It was duly seconded.

Rule Recommendation: that the affiliation of the following two associations be approved:
- Passaic County Technical Institute Support Staff Association
- South Brunswick Association of Behavioral Technicians

The recommendation was adopted.

 Minority Leadership and Recruitment Committee

Tiffanie ThrBak, chair of the Minority Leadership and Recruitment (MLR) Committee presented the committee’s report recommending a change to the name of an award annually conferred by the committee.
ThrBak, a delegate from Cumberland County, moved the recommendation. It was duly seconded.

Rule Recommendation: that NJEA MLR ethnic-minority champion award be changed to the Dr. Judith Owens Spirit Award and continue to be awarded based on no changes to the following criteria, nomination, and selection process.

CRITERIA
Nominees: Must have been an NJEA active or retired member in good standing for the past three years. Must complete application form and submit by the deadline.
1. Impacts ethnic-minority NJEA members.
2. Performs one of the following activities:
   • Establishes programs that engage and involve the community in the improvement of public education for all students.
   • Promotes the inclusion of diversity and social justice education in in-service and pre-service programs as well as in association training.
   • Works in partnership with other agencies/groups to promote ethnic-minority educational issues within their community.
3. Demonstrates leadership in ethnic-minority issues.

New Business
New Business Item #1
Laurie Schorno, Morris County moved that NJEA will discontinue their policy of mandatory mask wearing at all NJEA events.
Amended NBI language – Management look to work with the NJEA staff union to discontinue mandatory mask wearing at NJEA events.
The motion was seconded and adopted.

For the Good of the Order
Chris Cannella, Essex County regarding staff asking students for their gender pronouns.
Michael Frank, Higher Ed. moved to adjourn the meeting.
The motion was duly seconded. The meeting was adjourned.

What would you do if YOUR PAYCHECK suddenly stopped?

Help protect your income with the NJEA endorsed Income Protection Plans—Disability Insurance, Hospital Indemnity Insurance, and Critical Illness Insurance Plans, issued by The Prudential Insurance Company of America.

From your paycheck to your savings, NJEA wants to help you protect what’s important to you should an unexpected disability, injury, or illness occur.

Applying is quick and easy. Visit enroll.njea.org to learn more!
Celebrate and study cultural heritage all year long

By Carolyn Kellerman

Imagine if all classrooms provided education based around cultural heritage. It’s time to create a better understanding of each other for our future generations. In my 22 years as an educator, I often contemplate how we can consistently incorporate cultural heritage into all school curricula. Recent incidents in schools, such as racial comments escalating into frightening situations, prompt reflection on positive interventions. Changing our curriculum, fostering a safer environment, and addressing antisemitism, Islamophobia, racism and all other forms of bias require a closer look at our school system.

Teaching cultural heritage from an early age is crucial. Classrooms should celebrate diversity as well as inviting families to share their cultures. Weekly lessons on cultural heritage could bring students closer, fostering respect. Despite being a frequently asked question in interviews for teaching positions, cultural diversity isn’t consistently incorporated into curricula across the board. How can we change this?

Carolyn Kellerman is a teacher of students with special needs and a member of the Haddon Heights Education Association.

Ensuring a safe learning environment is crucial to our education, especially given the frightening issues children face today. Educators possess the gift of making a difference. Implementing regular cultural heritage lessons can create a positive impact. Weekly discussions, coffee talks with families, and workshops for families addressing concerns can contribute to a more inclusive educational setting.

Cultural heritage, a shared human characteristic, should be taught on a weekly basis.

Teaching this in the classroom helps students appreciate their peers. When students emotionally connect with their heritage, they become inspired, creative, and confident. Making cultural heritage a regular lesson paves the way for a future where students appreciate diverse cultures, fostering acceptance and safety. The transformative leadership of education can create a positive effect, influencing future students to embrace and appreciate differences. It’s time to act for a more inclusive and secure educational environment.
APRIL & beyond

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

**APRIL & beyond**

**FRI TO SUN**
- **APR 12-14** Higher Education Conference
- **APR 12-14** Higher Education Collective Bargaining Summit

**MAY 10-11**
- Carol Watchler LGBTQIA+ Advocacy Conference

**JUN 07-08**
- MOC Empowerment Conference

**APR 13**
- **SATURDAY** Preservice Conference

**MAY 10-11**
- **MAY 10-11** MOC Empowerment Conference

**JUN 14**
- **FRIDAY** Executive Committee

**APR 20**
- **SATURDAY** PDII Transform Conference

**MAY 17**
- **FRIDAY** Executive Committee

**MAY 18**
- **FRIDAY** Delegate Assembly

**JUN 15**
- **SATURDAY** NEA RA Statewide Caucus

For more information go to NJEA.org

---

**SAVE THE DATE**

**MAY 10-11**

**njea**

Carol Watchler
LGBTQIA+
Advocacy Conference

Registration and details at njea.org/lgbtqia+conference

Contact LaQuia Norment (lnorment@njea.org) with questions.
Over the last year, three articles in the NJEA Review have directly addressed artificial intelligence (AI). In a March 2023 Speak Out column, Bergen County Academies social studies teacher Jonathan Lancaster described ChatGPT as disruptive, but nonetheless a “disruption that teachers should embrace and leverage.”

In November, River Dell High School teacher Glen Coleman and his students, Naomi Roth, Isabella Iturrate and Tessa Klein wrote an article for the Review that reported on the results of a survey they conducted concerning student knowledge about, and use of, ChatGPT.

In this edition of the Review, Taylor Trost, an elementary school teacher in Hightstown, writes that she initially considered AI an issue for the middle and high school levels. That was until she overheard her fourth graders talking about the “silly stories” they had written using various AI platforms.

Coleman’s students found that the top two actions students at River Dell High School wanted their school to take were to “offer more instruction on using AI” and to “develop more guidelines around it.”

While River Dell students may have been thinking specifically about their own school, their call for guidelines are echoed in a new report from the National Education Policy Center (NEPC) titled “Time for a Pause: Without Effective Public Oversight, AI in Schools Will Do More Harm Than Good.”

The study’s authors note that while ChatGPT has been the focus of media attention, tech companies “are swiftly expanding AI in education in several ways,” such as selling access to digital systems to schools that enable the analysis of institutional and student data; adding AI features to products such as Google Classroom; and integrating AI applications into new or upgraded products.

“OpenAI, for example, partners with ed tech companies to integrate its language models into services it promotes as ‘AI teaching assistants,’” the researchers note.

The researchers express concern that “The theory of learning built into AI chatbot applications … prioritizes data-based numerical profiles of students—considered ‘objective’ measures of performance—while undermining teachers’ ability to make professional judgments about their students and devaluing teachers’ subjective experience, subject matter expertise, classroom interactions, and contextual knowledge of a given child, class, or social setting.”

The researchers suggest a pause in the rush to adopt AI applications until “policymakers have adequate time to fully educate themselves about AI and to formulate legislation and policy ensuring effective public oversight and control of its school applications.” They add that “any development of AI for schools should be conducted under ‘responsible AI’ frameworks in partnerships with schools.”

As policymakers and researchers debate the risks and benefits of AI, educators are dealing with day-to-day concerns, such as the extent to which they should use AI as a teaching tool, the extent to which students can use AI to assist them with assignments, and how to evaluate student work in an era when it is increasingly difficult to assess who (or what) did the work.

Glen Coleman’s students approach these questions with optimism. In her portion of their joint article, student Tessa Klein wrote, “As AI becomes increasingly integrated into our society, teachers and students should have the right to explore AI in a safe environment that aims to enrich and expand students’ horizons.” And as a group, the students concluded, “Let’s figure out how to use [ChatGPT and AI technology] to enrich our schools and our lives.”

Their parents and educators, however, may remember the optimistic promises of social media in its early days and how that has turned out—for good and for bad. Policymakers would do well to heed the lessons learned from social media and from the work of researchers such as those at NEPC.

Read more about it
National Education Policy Center
Time for a Pause: Without Effective Public Oversight, AI in Schools Will Do More Harm Than Good (2024), by Ben Williamson, Alex Molnar and Faith Boninger.

nepc.colorado.edu/publication/ai
6 REASONS NJ EDUCATORS CHOOSE ROWAN UNIVERSITY

Rowan University is a leading force in preparing professionals who use knowledge to transform our global society.

- Discounted tuition for NJ Teachers through NJTOP
- More than 40 graduate-level programs in education
- Flexible course formats including online, on-campus, or hybrid
- Small class sizes with high level of interaction between students and faculty
- Practical, hands-on experiences and service-learning opportunities
- 100-year history of preparing educators

Whether you plan to move into administration, excel in the classroom, teach special education, or promote student well-being, Rowan University can help you achieve your goal.

Browse our programs and get started today!
It’s MORE IMPORTANT than ever!

NJEA’s Teacher Leader Academy is a N.J. Department of Education approved one-year 12 credit program* for candidates seeking to earn the NJ Teacher Leader Endorsement. A new cohort opens in July 2024.

APPLY NOW!
Space is limited.

For more details, visit njea.org/tla

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

Apply today to join a dynamic community of educators who are finding ways to lead from the classroom as they share ideas, support their colleagues, and work with school and district leaders to create systemic change that supports high-quality teaching and learning.

WEB: njea.org/tla

EMAIL: teacherleader@njea.org

EARN 12 GRADUATE CREDITS through Thomas Edison State College*

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.)