

REVIEW



an education and advocacy resource



200K
Conversations
Every Member Counts

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ANTI-PRIVATIZATION
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SEL DAY



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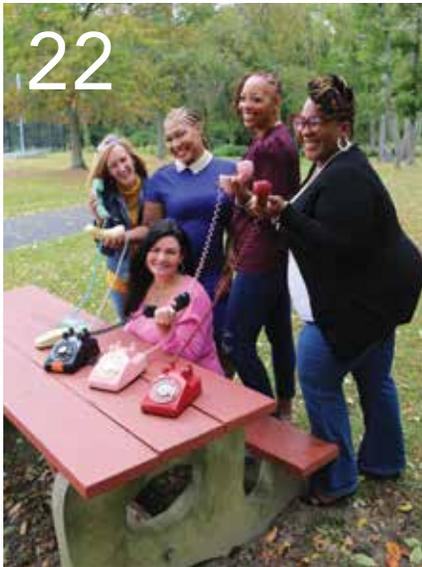


In early October, **Burlington County** volunteers from the NJEA Members of Color Network gathered at the Taste of Soul By Ms. Nancy restaurant in Burlington where they wrote postcards to members in support of the reelection of Gov. Phil Murphy and Lt. Gov. Sheila Oliver.



The **Bay Head Education Association (Ocean County)** was one of many sponsors who volunteered for, and donated to, the Bay Head Shark Run 5K, a fundraiser hosted by the Bay Head Home and School Association. The event was held Oct. 2. Pictured from left are BHEA members Beth Fallivene, June Monticello, Kim King, and Lauren Galarza who also helped direct traffic and hand out snacks. Galarza also ran in the 5K.

FEATURES



22 | 200K CONVERSATIONS

In an era when people are more likely to use their smartphones for TikTok than talk, and to only answer their landlines when they recognize the caller—if they have a landline at all—98 NJEA members spent six weeks last summer holding over 44,000 authentic, one-on-one conversations with other NJEA members.

BY PATRICK RUMAKER



34 | SEL ON THE DOT

International Dot Day opens the space for classes to explore the themes of bravery, creativity and self-expression through a book called *The Dot*. These themes naturally align with the five social-emotional competencies of self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, social awareness and relationship

BY KATHRYN COULIBALY



28 | SOUTH JERSEY ANTI-PRIVATIZATION COALITION

Since 2013, NJEA members have been building a powerful network to fight privatization. Today, the South Jersey Anti-Privatization Coalition is a model for other member-driven movements within the state.

BY KATHRYN COULIBALY



38 | GET READY FOR SEL DAY 2022

Get ready for SEL Day, to be celebrated on March 11, 2022, by reading about some great ideas from last year's celebrations in Bridgeton, Butler, Edison and Sparta. Last year, hundreds of schools in New Jersey joined in the celebration of the second International Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Day.

BY MAURICE J. ELIAS AND JENNIFER LY

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44,374

The number of quality phone conversations that NJEA member-callers held with other NJEA members as part of the 200K Conversations initiative. Callers attempted to reach every member twice, resulting in 424,554 dials. See Page 22.

Source: NJEA 200K initiative.



On the cover

Participants in the 200K Conversation initiative making mock phone calls on vintage phones.

With 98 other NJEA members they dialed every phone number for ever NJEA member, yielding over 44,000 quality conversations over six weeks. Standing from left: Eileen Roche, Shinese Harvey, Deidre Woodhouse, and Damita White-Morris. Seated: Katie Quinn.



PHOTO BY
Jennifer C. Marsh



GOOD NEWS

Reading Scores Are the Nation's Best

Compared to New Jersey, no other state in the nation has a statistically higher percentage of public school fourth graders scoring at the highest two levels in reading in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

Source: National Center for Education Statistics. 2019 NAEP Reading: Nation's Report Card.



REVIEW



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

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PRESIDENT'S *Message*

United in excellence

NJEA members share many traits in common: a commitment to caring for every student, a belief in the power of public education to lift people up and help them to reach their full potential, and a desire to constantly improve our skills as educators and advocates to fight for our shared values.

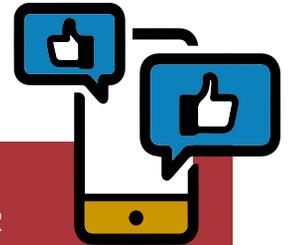
These areas of commonality are reflected in some of the activities this month, including the annual NJEA Convention, American Education Week, and Veterans Day.

The NJEA Convention is once again adjusting to the times. This year it will be held both virtually and in person in Atlantic City. While taking the utmost precautions, it's an opportunity to continue to network, build skills and celebrate excellence in education. We know the importance of being lifelong learners, and whether you join the convention in person or online, you are taking the time to expand your reach as educators.

Following the NJEA Convention, American Education Week is an excellent time to reflect on the hard work that educators, regardless of job description, are doing every day to ensure that students learn in safe, healthy and equitable environments. With a week of activities to recognize and encourage public school employees, it's a wonderful opportunity to acknowledge our colleagues and take a moment to celebrate our achievements. Our work will never be finished, but we are part of something continuous and powerful.

On Nov. 11 and throughout the month, NJEA members organize many activities and ways to honor veterans in our communities for Veterans Day. It's also important to recognize the many veterans who have found another career in our schools. NJEA members who are military retirees, veterans, JROTC instructors, reservists, and New Jersey National Guard are building a coalition, called the NJEA Patriots Alliance, based on the common bonds of service to country and community. The alliance works to inform members of their rights as veterans and public employees, and provides a network that supports and understands their challenges.

We have so much to celebrate as NJEA members. Thank you for all that you do to make our public schools great, and thank you for fighting to preserve one of the best systems of public education in the world.



SEAN M. SPILLER

Facebook

@SpillerforNJEA: Great to welcome Vice President Kamala Harris to NJ along with Governor Phil Murphy and Congressman Donald M. Payne Jr. #BuildBackBetter @govmurphy @repdonaldpaynejr

On Oct. 8, NJEA President Sean M. Spiller shared photos of Gov. Murphy, Congressman Donald Payne and himself as they stood on the tarmac to welcome Vice President Kamala Harris to New Jersey. Spiller represented NJEA members as he greeted Vice President Harris, who arrived in New Jersey at the Newark Airport.

STEVE BEATTY

Facebook

@SteveBeattyNJEA: This afternoon, I had the honor of helping to bestow the title of New Jersey State Teacher of the Year to Theresa Maughan, a social studies teacher at STEM Academy in East Orange. Having been on the committee that reviewed all 21 candidates from the county teacher of the year pool, Mrs. Maughan's application and its tale of a divine educator, representative of our diverse organization and state, was a cut above. Seeing the outpouring of genuine love and admiration from Theresa's students, peers, and administration bore true testimony to the intense and compassionate commitment she has made to her school and community. And let it not be lost on anyone that our National ESP of the Year, Kimberly Scott Hayden, and our newest NJ Teacher of the Year both hail from East Orange.

On Oct. 6, NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty congratulated 2021-22 New Jersey State Teacher of Year Theresa Maughan by sharing photos he'd taken that day as her recognition became official. Beatty presented Maughan with a rental car, sponsored by NJEA and equipped with E-ZPass, that she can use to travel the state as she visits public schools.

PETAL ROBERTSON

Facebook

@petal.robertson.7: Calling all new Local Presidents. The NEA is holding its New Local Presidents Training in October. This is a great crash course for new (or kind of new) leaders.

NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson continues her work to elevate the voices of all NJEA members through the empowerment of local leaders. On Sept. 30, Robertson shared with her Facebook followers an all-call to new and relatively new local presidents, asking them to join in NEA's New Local Presidents Training that took place in October.

OFFICERS ONLINE

KNOW. LEAD. ACT.



CHECK OUT THE NEW NJEA.ORG!

NJEAs website, njea.org, has a new look and improved functionality for members and leaders. *NJEA.org* continues to be your resource for all things related to your career, but with an improved search function and a design refresh, it will now be easier than ever to access the content you need.

The site is moving away from a focus on news to one that is more engaging for members, and to help them make the most of NJEA's resources. In addition, potential members will find detailed information on the value of membership and the impact that NJEA has on student achievement, advocating for the profession, and quality of life for school employees.

The redesign was based on usage statistics, industry standards, and design trends and has resulted in streamlined content and menus, improved applications and an updated member user profile, regional map and committee information, and more personalized content. Best of all, the site will load faster to make it easier than ever for visitors to explore.

Here are just a few things that members can expect to find at njea.org:

- Professional development, including webinars
- Good news facts about the great things happening in New Jersey's public schools
- Pension and benefit information
- Updates and ways to be involved in NJEA's social justice work
- Grants, contests, and partnerships to help educators bring resources back to their schools
- Political and legislative news that affects you and your students
- Member benefits programs to help you save money every day.

NJEA has also developed several microsites on the topics that matter most to you, including:

- NJEA Member Benefits
- NJEA Convention
- Action Center
- NJEA Together
- The REAL Movement
- Professional Development.

Every category of membership can find something that helps members make the most of their union membership, from NJREA to educational support professionals, preservice members, early career members, the Members of Color Network, public charter, and higher education members.

Go to njea.org today to see what's new!

MY REVIEW LOOKS DIFFERENT

As reported in an email to all members last month, because of supply chain interruptions and labor shortages at the plant that prints the *NJEA Review*, the October issue of the magazine arrived in your mailbox at least two weeks behind schedule.

When it did arrive, you may have noticed that it was bound differently, bound with staples rather than glue, eliminating the flat spine. This change is likely to continue through January and is also the result of labor shortages and supply chain issues.

MEMBER BENEFITS OFFERS WEBINAR SERIES

Maximizing Membership Webinar Series

This new yearlong webinar series includes workshops on how to access Member Benefits, homebuying, car-buying, student loan debt relief, money for college, saving for retirement and more!

FAFSA 101: Saving Money for College

Through an NJEA Member Benefits partnership with Visions Federal Credit Union, four free webinars are offered for NJEA members and the public to encourage completion of the FAFSA, or Free Application for Federal Student Aid.

For individual workshop titles and schedules, and to register, visit njea.org/mbwebinars.

USDOE ANNOUNCES OVERHAUL OF PUBLIC SERVICE LOAN FORGIVENESS PROGRAM

The U.S. Department of Education announced in October that it will implement an overhaul of the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) Program over the next year, to make the program live up to its promise. As a result, 22,000 borrowers who have consolidated loans—including previously ineligible loans—will immediately become eligible for \$1.74 billion in forgiveness without the need for further action on their part. Another 27,000 borrowers could potentially qualify for an additional \$2.82 billion in forgiveness if they certify additional periods of employment.

Visit bit.ly/usdoeloan for details. For a fact sheet on the overhaul, visit bit.ly/2Xc4dZa.

SISP CORNER

For the 2021-22 school year, Sheila Caldwell, a school nurse in Matawan-Aberdeen Regional School District, is serving as an NEA Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (SISP) Fellow. Caldwell is writing a monthly online column that will go live the first of each month at njea.org/sisp. Be sure to check it out.



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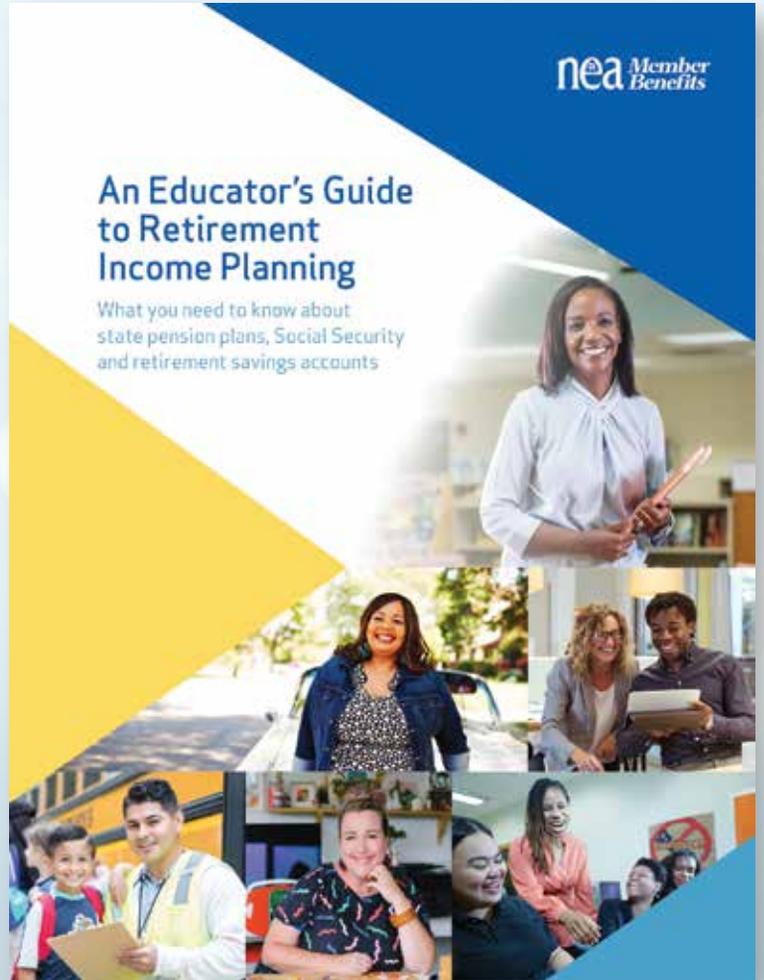


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COOL STUFF

A+ EFFORT

Wall High School teacher named Outstanding Educator in Visual Arts



Jill Alexander, an art teacher at Wall High School was named the Outstanding Educator in Visual Arts by Monmouth Arts, the leading independent art advocacy organization in Monmouth County. Linda Krebs, a parent of two Wall High School students, one recently graduated, nominated Alexander for the award.

“Miss Alexander is an encouraging and passionate art educator,” Krebs said as she introduced Alexander. “She brings out the best in her students, pushing them to explore different

media and hone their skill and craft.”

Krebs noted that Alexander is also a working artist and an inspiration to the students she mentors, many of whom go on to pursue further study and a career in the arts. As a working artist, Alexander is the illustrator of two children’s books that are soon to be released: *Little Owl in the Big City* is due for publication this month, and *On Eagles’ Wings* is due for publication in August 2022.

After thanking Krebs, Monmouth arts, her colleagues, her principal her husband and her mother, Alexander talked about teaching.

“Being a teacher is a very challenging, yet rewarding, profession,” Alexander said. “Each day my classroom is filled with discovery, laughter and creativity with opportunities to expose student to new ideas and information that ultimately could guide their lives and careers. My goal is to spark not only knowledge but passion within my students, which is theirs to keep wherever the journey of life takes them.”

Alexander went on to say that her students spark that same passion and creativity in her.

“They challenge me every day with their fresh perspectives, their thought-provoking questions, and surprise me with their amazing, amazing, amazing works of art.”

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.



RECYCLE INK, FUNDRAISE FOR HIPPI!

The NJEA Frederick L. Hipp Foundation 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 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.

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



HELP PREVENT HUNGER

Be a part of the solution to prevent hunger.

Take your students on a journey with free, ready to use lessons. “Explore.Act.Tell.” is a free program for sixth through ninth grade students to help them become aware of food insecurity issues

in their community. Through the program, they can practice the skills needed to be good advocates for community involvement and service. The program includes four interactive lessons, a hunger solution project and a promotional PSA video. “Explore.Act.Tell.” works in a virtual or in-person setting. This program is funded by ACME’s Markets Foundation and is free to all educators and students.

For more information and to register, visit Explore.Act.Tell.org.

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THE EXPANSION OF INCLUSIVE CURRICULA IN NEW JERSEY

BY KAITLYN DUNPHY, ESQ., CHRISTINE MILES, ED.D., AND GABRIEL TANGLAO

The state of New Jersey's efforts to expand school curricula to be more inclusive and equitable continue to broaden in scope as the state aims to widen students' education. In March of 2021, a bill that amended and strengthened the Amistad mandate was signed into law. It requires school districts to include diversity and inclusion in their K-12 curricula, and it took effect in this school year.

According to the law, district curricula must "highlight and promote diversity, including economic diversity, equity, inclusion, tolerance, and belonging in connection with gender and sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, disabilities, and religious tolerance." Not only must curricula promote diversity, they must also examine the roles unconscious biases and economic disparities have played in society. An environment that is safe, welcoming, and inclusive must be created for students of all backgrounds.

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Gabriel Tanglao is an associate director in the NJEA Office of Human and Civil Rights, Equity and Governance. He can be reached at gtanglao@njea.org.

This new legislation joins the ranks of other state-supported diversity initiatives that have developed over the years. Currently, New Jersey requires instruction on the Holocaust and genocide, contributions of persons with disabilities, contributions from the LGBTQ+ community, and the recently updated Amistad mandate. The initiatives were first enacted in 1994, when the state required Holocaust and genocide instruction for elementary and secondary school students to teach that genocide is a consequence of prejudice and discrimination. The instruction shall "emphasize the personal responsibility that each citizen bears to fight racism and hatred whenever and wherever it happens."

In 2002, the Amistad Commission was formed to help create a curriculum that educated students about the trans-Atlantic trade of the enslaved, enslavement in America, the burdens and vestiges of enslavement in America that still exist, African American history, and the contributions of African Americans to the United States. In August 2018, NJEA convened a stakeholder task force to strengthen and deepen the impact of the Amistad curriculum inclusion law. This team provided key recommendations and priorities for the work, including providing professional learning, developing collaborative partnerships, creating the Amistad Award, conceptualizing the Amistad Journey, and reenvisioning the Amistad curriculum.

In the Summer of 2021, under the leadership of Dr. Christine Miles, NJEA engaged a team of member practitioners to develop an overview for

a reenvisioned Amistad curriculum. This team simultaneously conceptualized the framework for a National Education Association Great Public Schools grant application that, if successful, will result in the creation of the NJEA Consortium for Representative Curriculum Development. (For more information, please see Page 21).

Additionally, as of 2019, school instruction must also include the political, economic, and social contributions of both persons with disabilities and the LGBTQ+ community. This instructional requirement applies to middle and high school students and continues New Jersey's history of providing students with an inclusive, well-rounded education.

On Aug. 7, 2021 the NJEA Executive Committee requested "...a plan to address the current issues regarding race, equity and the LGBTQ inclusion." NJEA's new office of Human and Civil Rights, Equity and Governance coordinated a cross-divisional effort to develop a strategic framework to further support members as they navigate the rising tide of these violently racist, homophobic and transphobic times. Supplementing our "offensive strategy," created by the vital curriculum work, we have prepared a "defensive strategy" that will provide members with new opportunities for professional development, leadership training, organizing support, and advocacy tools to push back. If you are ready to get involved now to help grow our movement for racial equity, affirmation and literacy, then go to real.njea.org for more information. 📌



NJEA Report

Theresa Maughan named 2021-22 New Jersey State Teacher of the Year



NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty presents Theresa Maughan with a rental car to help her travel to speaking engagements and meetings across the state.

Theresa Maughan, a high school social studies teacher at East Orange STEM Academy in East Orange, Essex County, has been named the 2021-22 New Jersey State Teacher of the Year.

Maughan, who was born in Belize, Central America, emigrated with her family when she was in elementary school. Her social studies teacher's efforts to save her family from deportation after their visa expired inspired Maughan to recognize the power educators have in their students' lives and to pursue a career in education.

Maughan earned a bachelor's degree in history and secondary education from Rutgers University. She earned a master's degree in administration and supervision of urban schools from New Jersey City University and is completing a second master's degree in American history from Pace University.

An educator for nearly 40 years, Maughan credits her longevity in the profession to her lifelong commitment to professional development and to the camaraderie and collaboration embedded in her professional learning communities. She is

passionate about learning and tells her students that she tries to learn something new every day.

Maughan is a curriculum writer and has developed and presented several interdisciplinary professional development workshops for her school district. She has served as a mentor for new teachers and students studying history. She has previously been named the Teacher of the Year at East Orange High School, East Orange Campus High School and East Orange STEM Academy. She is also the 2021 Essex County Teacher of the Year and the NJ History Day/National History Day Patricia Behring Senior Division Teacher of the Year. For more than a decade, Maughan has attended the summer workshops held by the New Jersey Amistad Commission, and she is proud to be serving as an Amistad Scholar.

Maughan lives in Randolph with her husband, Niall. They are the parents of Bre, a social studies inclusion teacher in Livingston, and Ryan, a recent graduate of The College of New Jersey now working in marketing and sales.

"Teaching has always been a noble profession and now more than ever, it is important we have people of strong character, steeped in the principals of truth and knowledge," said NJEA President Sean M. Spiller. "It is fitting that in this moment, at this time, we have a history teacher as our State Teacher of the Year. Theresa's expertise and voice serves as a guiding path to show how educators teach critical thinking skills, how students learn to draw conclusions based on facts, and how important it is to share the stories of all people."

"Theresa Maughan represents the very essence of our profession," said NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty. "She has an infectious passion for her curriculum that is matched only by her passion for her students. Leading with compassion and a palpable desire to see her students succeed, she will serve as a perfect representation of New Jersey's teachers on the national stage."

"When I think about what makes great teachers, I think about Theresa Maughan," said NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson. "As a history teacher, she infuses the present into the past, and, in doing so, illuminates new worlds for her students. It is her thoughtful and honest approach to teaching events of the past that ensure every student feels seen and valued. Teachers like Theresa are building a brighter future for students and public schools."

While the global pandemic may alter or delay some of the perks of being the State Teacher of the Year, as the New Jersey Teacher of the Year, Maughan is entitled to an all-expense paid, six-month sabbatical from January through June 2022 to attend national and state conferences, to tour the state visiting classrooms and to work on various initiatives at the New Jersey Department of Education, courtesy of program sponsor ETS. ETS also provides \$3,000 worth of technology equipment.

NJEA will provide a rental car, equipped with EZ Pass, to help Maughan travel to speaking engagements and meetings across the state. NJEA also will provide complimentary access to all major NJEA workshops and training opportunities, a \$500 clothing allowance, media training and communications support, and funding for a trip to Washington, D.C. to meet with the other state teachers of the year and President Joe Biden.

Educators are essential to healing ACES

Just one compassionate adult can make a difference

By Dave Ellis, executive director, New Jersey Office of Resilience

In July 2020, I left my home state of Minnesota to come to New Jersey and begin an exciting role as the first-ever, executive on loan and executive director of the newly created Office of Resilience. It's less of a job than a calling, really. After working closely with the NJEA for two years training educators in Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), I knew that New Jersey was ahead of the rest of the country in recognizing and addressing trauma in children and youth. Even more so, I knew that there were already some governmental and nongovernmental agencies and organizations that were already taking steps to "be the change."

So, I got to work. In partnership with philanthropy, the Departments of Children and Families, Education, Health, Law and Public Safety and the community—families most impacted by ACEs—we issued a Statewide ACEs Action Plan (see bit.ly/acesaction), which laid out our goals to prevent and mitigate the lasting effects of ACEs on children's health and well-being.

Nationally, two of three children have experienced at least one ACE, defined as a stressful or traumatic event that occurs before age 18. ACEs are everywhere. They influence the lives of people from all walks of life, in communities throughout New Jersey. The pandemic certainly has affected students, but so have civil unrest, systemic racism and extreme weather events. As our communities and schools embark on a new school year, the conversation about student mental health has never been more urgent.

Through ACEs training, educators, school staff and other professionals can embark upon a journey to understand themselves and the root causes of their trauma, while helping to improve the lives of children in New Jersey.

For years, I've conducted trainings across the country to help educators and other professionals learn about ACEs and understand the potential life-long impact of trauma on our health. The trainings require us to reflect on our own lives at the same time we learn how trauma affects youth, and build the skills needed to mitigate the impact of ACEs.

TOP 5 REASONS TO PARTICIPATE IN TRAINING

I encourage everyone to participate in an ACEs training as the foundation of all work we do to support youth in our state. What follows are the top five reasons to participate in an ACEs training.

- 1. We can all speak a common language—and by using the same terminology, we can solve problems together.** When I came to New Jersey, I noticed we were generally talking about the same ideas, but we were using a variety of words with different meanings. During an ACEs training, we come together around a common language. Our shared language has already started to be used regularly among educators and other professionals that engage youth in our state, making it easier for us to collaborate with each other to solve the challenges facing children.
- 2. We start to focus on the root causes of trauma.** When we understand the root causes of ACEs, we can create solutions that directly respond to these challenges. Science shows us that trauma can change the brain during the earliest phases of life, even during pregnancy. By understanding the root causes of ACEs, we can start to develop solutions that address these fundamental issues that contribute to trauma.
- 3. We begin to understand ourselves—and our own trauma—better.** I believe the first step in this work is understanding yourself and the trauma you may have experienced in your life. Understanding ourselves helps us collectively form a clearer vision for how to support others, especially youth. Often, ACEs training is the first time we get permission to explore and make meaning of what happened in our lives—and to start the journey toward healing. I often see a lightbulb moment when people in ACEs trainings realize what happened to them doesn't make them a bad person; in fact, it helps to form and build on their core gifts.
- 4. When we learn about ACEs, we can better support young people.** Simply put, we need to do this work so we can more effectively help children reach their full potential. We want children to grow up in healthy, protective relationships and have meaningful engagements with the adults in their lives. We want to reduce ACE scores and we want children in New Jersey and beyond to thrive. ACEs training helps to create a crucial shift in our mindset—from asking a child, "what's wrong with you?" to, "what happened to you?"
- 5. We discover that ACEs are not our destiny.** A key discovery I've made in this work—and about myself over the past 60 years—is that ACEs are not our destiny. The number of ACEs we experience does not define our future. Rather, they are the start of a conversation about the context that helped define our strengths and gifts.

The more we know, the more meaningfully we can engage with people affected by ACEs. A growing community of diverse professionals around our state who understand ACEs and resilience will benefit from a shared vision for what it means to build a self-healing community together.

NJEA members have many opportunities to learn how ACEs affect their students and their parents, and themselves—including through professional learning opportunities offered at the NJEA Convention. Our team from the New Jersey Office of Resilience can also help organize a community-based ACEs training presentation in English or Spanish. And we host regularly scheduled ACEs trainings that are open to the public. Trainings are interactive and engaging as they explore the impact of childhood trauma across a person's lifespan.

By taking simple actions and building supportive relationships with children, we can all help reduce the impact of childhood trauma. Learn more and take the pledge to get involved at Actions4ACEs.com.

Survey reveals educator views on emergency preparedness, fire and lockdown drills

By Derek G. Shendell, D.Env, M.Ph., Maryanne L.F. Campbell, B.S.,
Lauren N. Gonzalez, B.S., M.A., Juhi Aggarwal B.A., MPH Koshy Koshy Ph.D.

Gun violence can occur in elementary, middle and high schools as well as higher education. Everytown for Gun Safety reported over half of past gun violence on K-12 school campuses were homicides or nonfatal assaults involving specific individuals, escalated arguments, acts of domestic violence, parking lot altercations and robberies.

U.S. schools have existing emergency preparedness practices, but these sometimes failed because of lack of structure or poorly managed implementation. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in 2016, larger school districts were statistically significantly more likely than smaller districts to provide funding for crisis preparedness, such as trainings. Healthy People 2020 included objectives to improve school preparedness, response, and recovery plans for emergencies. A recent U.S. Government Accounting Office report revealed that improving security and addressing health hazards were major priorities among school districts.

NJ Safe Schools Program (NJSS) reviews safety and health plans regarding environmental health and workplace safety regulations for high school career-technical-vocational (CTE) programs for students in hazardous occupations once every five years for the New Jersey Department of Education. The plan aims to reduce injury and illness and increase safety practices. However, the only aspect of the plans pertaining directly to violence involving weapons is a cross-reference to required procedures for fire, evacuation and lockdown drills. New Jersey state law requires every school to have at least one fire drill and one security drill each month.

We assessed perceptions of educational professionals at New Jersey public high schools on specific emergency preparedness initiatives and safety practices in place related to gun violence and other physical security threats such as fire drills and lockdown drills. The target study population comprised credentialed teachers and administra-

tors in CTE programs at high schools including school districts and charter schools, and private schools for students with special health needs. These educational professionals previously participated in NJSS trainings, paid and free, in-person and online.

“
School funding is a major determining factor affecting if and how initiatives can be implemented.

WHAT WE FOUND

Overall, 151 participants from each of 21 counties in the state answered the survey. The number of participants by county ranged from two to 21. Of the 151 participants, 128 completed full survey and 23 had certain unanswered survey and/or demographics questions.

Participant rankings of perceived effectiveness of school emergency preparedness initiatives were:

1. Provide relevant information and trainings
2. Organize and conduct drills
3. Assist schools in developing emergency plans
4. Provide equipment and supplies.

It is important to note that school funding is a major determining factor affecting if and how initiatives can be implemented in many New Jersey schools.

See the sidebar for educators' sense of safety and preparation for fire and lockdown drills and their concerns about the likelihood and preparedness for a mass shooting.

CTE EDUCATORS SUPPORT FIRE AND LOCKDOWN DRILLS

Study results suggested current school security measures such as the fire and lockdown drills practiced statewide in New Jersey, are valued as important by high school educators. However, gun safety policies and additional measures can be addressed and implemented.

There is limited previous peer-reviewed research for comparison to the present study on active assailant protocols such as lockdown drills at U.S. schools. However, the National Association of School Psychologists and National Association of School Resource Officers have developed guidance outlining alternative non-technology-based best practice considerations for active shooter drills other than lockdown drills. Alternative preparations include information-sharing discussions to prepare students and staff to respond to violent threats, without hiding under desks and tables or in closets and bathrooms.

STRENGTHS, LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

We collected primary data determining perceptions directly from a statewide sample of New Jersey high school education professionals who supervise students in work-based learning opportunities. We addressed an important and necessary gap in examining occupational safety, security and well-being of high school educational professionals regarding emergency preparedness and gun violence. Only New Jersey CTE teachers and administrators were surveyed, not school educational support professionals (ESPs) due to lack of access contact information. Some professionals participating in NJSS trainings did not work in school settings, but at an outside agency providing school-appointed workplace supervision.

We could not follow-up with participants about details of training received and drills practiced. We assessed neither multi-option responses to

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school shootings, i.e., drills informed by classroom discussion-based exercises and options such as barricading, evacuating, and/or actively resisting an individual with a gun, nor new technologies to deter potential mass shooters. Finally, participants were asked to answer some survey questions on behalf of their students. This secondary information may have introduced some information bias.

This study's results suggested campus lockdown drills should continue, as they are perceived as an effective safety measure, and practiced throughout the school year with state and nationally mandated fire safety drills. Most teachers and administrators are confident in the knowledge of students in handling a school emergency and feel safe in their school/workplace.

New Jersey school districts should continue to prioritize school emergency preparedness, response, and recovery plans while keeping up with evolving health concerns and technology. Future survey-based research should be extended, with a survey beyond teachers and administrators to include other educational professionals working at schools—nurses, psychologists, counselors—plus ESPs and students, on gun safety and mental health.

Results of the survey

Perceptions of Fire Drills

85.6%: Feel safe; fire drills are necessary

6.8%: Feel safe; fire drills are unnecessary

7.5%: *Feel unsafe; fire drills are necessary

*Nine of these individuals said fire drills are not practiced enough

75.9%: Feel safe; fire drills practiced enough

17.9%: Feel safe; fire drills are not practiced enough.

73.5%: Confident that students know what to do in an emergency

Perceptions of lockdown drills

89.7%: Feel safe; lockdown drills are necessary.

7%: Feel unsafe; lockdown drills are necessary

74%: *Lockdown drills are practiced adequately throughout the school year

*91.7% of these respondents reported feeling safe, but nine individuals felt unsafe

*Of 38 respondents who reported that they do not believe lockdown drills are practiced enough, 36 indicated they nonetheless feel safe.

Level of concerns about the potential for mass school shooting

142 total responses

104 *Lockdown drills being practiced enough

*Of those 57 indicated that they worry about the potential for a mass school shooting; and 47 indicated no worry about the potential for a mass school shooting.

28 individuals stated school lockdown drills are not practiced enough and worry about potential for a mass school shooting

10 indicated lockdown drills are not practiced enough and that they do not worry about a potential mass school shooting.



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For further reading

The Magazine of the National Fire Protection Association

"Considering Targeted Violence Events When Conducting Emergency Egress Drills in Schools," By Kristen Bigda bit.ly/3Fi5aQD

NAASP Bulletin

"Experiences With and Preparedness for Emergencies and Disasters Among Public Schools in California," by Megumi Kano and Linda B. Bourque bit.ly/3aAI35W

MMWR Morbidity Mortality Weekly Report

"School District Crisis Preparedness, Response, and Recovery Plans: United States, 2006, 2012, and 2016," CDC, by Judy Kruger, Nancy Brener, Rebecca Leeb, and others bit.ly/3aAMnSA

National Center for Education Statistics

"Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2019," by Lauren Musu, Anlan Zhang, Ke Wang, and others bit.ly/3BHLi7r

"Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2018." bit.ly/2YLplpm

U.S. National Association of School Psychologists and National Association of School Resource Officers

"Best practice considerations for schools in active shooter and other armed assailant drills, by National Association of School Psychologists," April 2017 bit.ly/3azHSrv

U.S. Government Accounting Office

"K-12 Education: School Districts Frequently Identified Multiple Building Systems Needing Updates or Replacement," June 4, 2020. gao.gov/products/GAO-20-494



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Getting our house in order

Rebuilding curricula for representation, inclusion, and intersectionality

By Dr. Christine Miles

"We in the developed world are like homeowners who inherited a house on a piece of land that is beautiful on the outside, but whose soil is unstable loam and rock, heaving and contracting over generations, cracks patched but the deeper ruptures waved away for decades, centuries even. Many people may rightly say, 'I had nothing to do with how this all started. I have nothing to do with the sins of the past. My ancestors never attacked Indigenous people, never owned slaves.' And, yes. Not one of us was here when this house was built.

"Our immediate ancestors may have had nothing to do with it, but here we are, the current occupants of a property with stress cracks and bowed walls and fissures built into the foundation ... We are the heirs to whatever is right or wrong with it. We did not erect the uneven pillars or joints, but they are ours to deal with now, and any further deterioration is in fact on our hands."

– Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste*

Historically, curricula dangerously present a single story—a story clouded by partisan politics and kind only to those who have written it. Although efforts to increase inclusion, representation and intersectionality have grown in recent years, our communities have become deeply polarized. To extend Wilkerson's metaphor—this house we have inherited is crumbling before our eyes, and it is long past time to act.

REBUILDING: CURRICULUM AS BLUEPRINT, STANDARDS AS BUILDING CODE

Curriculum is a blueprint

Curriculum is a compelling vision and detailed plan of not mere knowledge to possess, but critical skills to cultivate in our children. As educators, in addition to teaching content, it is our role to intentionally craft and facilitate lessons that hinge

on the deep development of the skills successful adults possess.

"As a construction supervisor, we wouldn't simply drop off materials and tools at a worksite and have the workers 'go at it,'" Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe wrote in 2012. "Instead, we would begin with a blueprint—an overall vision of the desired building to guide its construction. Without an overall end in mind, teachers can create wonderful individual rooms that won't necessarily fit together within and across floors or achieve the intended results."

Content area standards are building code

Standards allow us to identify discrete knowledge and skill expectations within each content area. While they must be addressed, standards are not the end goal, nor do they dictate how to arrive at the end goal.

"The house to be built is designed to meet the needs of the client, while also meeting the building code along the way," Wiggins and McTighe also wrote.

A VISION FOR INCLUSIVE, REPRESENTATIVE, AND INTERSECTIONAL CURRICULA

As Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop noted, curricula must simultaneously serve as windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors for all of our beautifully diverse students. Curricula offer a window to students by putting the realities of our world and communities on full display—the familiar and unfamiliar, the comfortable and uncomfortable. They serve as a mirror, reflecting back to us aspects of ourselves, our lives, and our lived experiences. Finally, curricula serve as sliding glass doors, opening and welcoming students in to explore the new, previously unknown and unfamiliar.

Inclusive, representative, and intersectional

understanding-focused curricula are heavily grounded in purpose. This work intentionally moves beyond acquisition of factually and historically accurate content knowledge and toward exploration, meaning-making, and deep transfer of understanding. Understanding-focused curricula cultivate students who can independently and critically evaluate social, cultural, political and historical narratives.

When done well, understanding-driven curricular design work breaks down barriers and ensures representation of the trials and triumphs of historically marginalized peoples. It drives students to question distorted representations and challenge assumptions in ways that balance power and privilege. Through this work, our students will know the struggle while building a world that doesn't force them and future generations to live it.

THE NJEA CONSORTIUM FOR REPRESENTATIVE CURRICULUM DESIGN

NJEA is actively pursuing a National Education Association Great Public Schools Grant to conceptualize and build the NJEA Consortium for Representative Curriculum Design. Through the consortium, NJEA will bring the aforementioned vision to life by leading and supporting teams in the design of high-quality, representative curricula that not only meet, but intentionally advance the Amistad, Holocaust, LGBTQ+, and Persons with Disabilities curriculum inclusion laws.

Additionally, we intend to be truly representative in our work by infusing the trials and triumphs of historically marginalized communities/identities not yet represented by one of the state commissions.

The consortium, in partnership with a core team of NJEA members, content scholars, and community representatives, will provide professional learning, community engagement, and curriculum design support for teaching the truth. For more information, please reach out to me at cmiles@njea.org. 

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

200K Conversations

NJEA phones every member during
"Education Summer"

By Patrick Rumaker



In an era when people are more likely to use their smartphone for TikTok than to talk, and to only answer their landlines when they recognize the caller—if they have a landline at all—98 NJEA members spent six weeks last summer holding over 44,000 authentic, one-on-one conversations with other NJEA members.

And they were persistent. Callers attempted to reach every NJEA member at least two times. All 424,554 numbers on file for NJEA's 200,000 members—mobile phones and landlines—were dialed.

It was all part of an initiative called 200K Conversations.

The member-callers were persistent because each of them had committed to having 600 quality conversations in addition to all the wrong numbers, the calls that went unanswered, and the ones that ended before they really got started.

Bridgeton Education Association member and caller Michael Morton broke down those numbers.

"It was 600 conversations in six weeks: that's 100 conversations a week or 20 conversations a day for five days," Morton said. "Each day that meant spending about four to five hours on the phone calling about 120 to 150 members in order to get those 20 conversations."

HOW ARE YOU?

For those members who answered the phone, the most surprising aspect of the call was that they weren't being asked to do anything. They were simply asked, "How are you?"

"We weren't phone banking!" NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty said. "It was not a call trying to talk about something NJEA wanted members to do. It was not a call supporting a candidate or a call to get members to come to a rally or come to a conference. It really was just a call to ask, 'How are you?' and 'What are your biggest concerns?'"

Beatty said these questions and other prompts were about getting a conversation going—to really listen to what members had to say.

"The whole premise of this was so different from anything I've ever worked on before," said Gene Behme, a caller and member of the Parsippany-Troy Hills Education Association. "You end up having really great conversations because they're authentic. We were calling members to talk about what matters most to them."

"I think that it was natural for me to gravitate to this program because I've always enjoyed having conversations with members," Behme said. "I think

that as an organization we can sometimes lose sight of the end goal, which is finding out what matters most to our members."

The authenticity of the conversations also drew Behme in.

"I expected this to be like what I was used to dealing with: keeping people from hanging up the phone because they assume you're a telemarketer," Behme said. "But when you start the conversation and you first introduce yourself as a fellow educator—in my case, I teach fifth grade—suddenly a connection is made. The next thing you know you're trying to bring the conversation to a close because it's lasting over 30 minutes."

While there was some friendly competition among callers to get in the most calls each day, Behme said that after a while it really wasn't about the numbers.

"It was more about the quality of the conversations," Behme said.

GETTING STARTED

Attempting to call every member on the phone is a massive task that takes intention and resources to be sustainable, but Beatty notes that it's really nothing new. Strong unions, he said, make sure that every member knows they're welcome and finds their space and their voice in the union.

At one point during the 2019 NEA Representative Assembly in Houston, NJEA's leadership team reflected on the growing success of the member-driven approach to achieve job justice for educational support professionals (ESP)

and relief for all members from the high cost of health insurance premiums under Chapter 78. The leadership team is composed of the NJEA president, vice president, secretary-treasurer, executive director, and deputy executive director. It was in that conversation that Beatty proposed an idea.

"We should be talking to every single one of our members," he said. "We have to put something in place where we are literally trying to achieve that."

Beatty worked with the leadership team to gather an NJEA staff work group led by UniServ regional directors Mayrose Wegmann and Thomas Hardy to build something that would put members' voices at the center and ultimately be led by members.

"We wanted to build something that was going to be sustainable and really be born of member voice," Beatty said. "With that in mind we assembled a team early on to map out what this would look like and how it would work. What are the structures we have to build to support it, and what other things we need to consider?"

BETA TESTING 200K CONVERSATIONS

Before NJEA dubbed the summer of 2021 "Education Summer," when 98 callers, supported by 16 NJEA consultants and more than a dozen full-time NJEA staff members, there was a volunteer effort to test out calling members with no agenda other than to listen to them.

Demonstrating the member-driven nature of what was to become 200K Conversations, Katie Quinn, a Freehold Regional Education Association



Zoom was a key means for teams of callers to share ideas and motivate one another.

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



Eileen Roche



Damita White-Morris



Deidre Woodhouse



Katie Quinn



Shinese Harvey

member and now an NJEA UniServ consultant in the Region 3 office in Voorhees, said that the volunteers came up with the conversation prompts in meetings with local leaders and volunteers who had worked on previous NJEA initiatives, and NJEA leaders and staff.

“It was nearly all volunteers, and we started meeting monthly and then it became weekly,” she said. “We, the members, wrote the script together. It went in the direction the members wanted.”

“When we talk about something being member-driven that doesn’t mean that NJEA staff and leaders don’t offer practical support and resources,” Hardy said. “It was members saying, ‘Here’s something we want to do.’ And unless it violated policy, we afforded them the latitude do what they wanted, and they did the work. They didn’t turn to staff and say, ‘We want to do this, this and this, now you go do it staff.’ It was genuinely member-driven.”

Beginning in the summer of 2020, these member volunteers sat themselves at their home computers and, following approval to participate, logged into a system that dialed random members’ phone numbers. They made the calls knowing little more than the members’ names, their local and county associations, and their membership categories (i.e., professional or ESP).

“There was no pressure, so I figured I’d give it a try,” Morton said. “On Saturday mornings and Tuesday evenings I practiced calling some of our members. I felt pretty comfortable with it, so when I applied to work with the program this past summer, I was able to say with good faith that I was already doing it.”

“The short-term plan was to get it moving, to study how it can work, and to get as many people as involved as possible,” Beatty said. “That gave us the data to come back and say that it was worth resourcing.”

Those resources, which among other expenses provided stipends to the 98 callers who applied for the work this past summer, were funded substantially through a grant from NEA. NJEA’s national affiliate was as interested in the outcomes of the 200K Conversations initiative as NJEA was.

CONSULTANT SUPPORT

The 98 callers were not going it alone. They worked in one of 12 regional teams that were each supported by one or two of 16 consultants. The teams met through Zoom with their consultants twice per week. Each caller met one-on-one with their team’s assigned consultants once per week.

NJEA consultants are part-time NJEA staff who are also NJEA members and public school or community college employees. NJEA employs consultants in its UniServ, Professional Development, Communications, Organizing, and Government Relations divisions. The NJEA Research and Economic Services Division employs part-time pension consultants who are retired educators and members of NJREA. For the 200K conversations program, the consultants were drawn from the Organizing or UniServ divisions.

Because the callers were engaging in something that hadn’t been done on such a large scale before—calling every member, but with no specific request—it was in many ways up to them and the consultants supporting them to establish

the protocols and develop resources to support their work. NJEA consultants and full-time staff provided practical and moral support and advice to assist the callers.

Antoinette Blaustein, a North Hunterdon Regional High School District Education Association member who is a UniServ consultant in the Region 21 UniServ office in Livingston, was asked by Hardy to consider serving as a consultant for the 200K conversations. She was assigned to work with one of the two teams in Essex County. With eight years of experience as a consultant bargaining contracts processing grievances, addressing legal matters, and assisting with arbitrations, Blaustein noted that working with the 200K Conversations callers was challenging in a different way.

“It was a balancing act to try to manage a group of people virtually through something that has never really been done before,” Blaustein said. “There was a lot of emotion involved in the whole project, which is very different from the cut-and-dried work of dealing with a grievance or bargaining a contract. I had 11 people in my group, and they all brought their own individual perspectives to the assignment.”

In addition to the biweekly meetings with their teams, biweekly meetings with the other consultants, weekly meetings with each individual team member, and bimonthly meetings with the entire group 200K participants, consultants like Blaustein were essentially on-call seven days a week, all day for the entire six weeks. This included vacations.

Blaustein recalled visiting friends in Maine

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**All 424,554 numbers on file
for NJEA’s 200,000 members
were dialed.**

for a vacation that had been planned before she was assigned to the 200K project. She and her husband arrived at their friends’ home on a Tuesday in July at about four in the afternoon. By 4:30 p.m., Blaustein was borrowing their office and their internet connection to attend a team meeting.

“This is the beauty of doing it all virtually, because I could do it just about anywhere,” Blaustein said. “I’d be at my mother’s house or I’d be at my sister’s house, and it was just something that became a part of my normal day to respond to WhatsApp messages, text messages or to attend virtual meetings.”

Consultants were also there for the callers when a conversation with a member was challenging.

“I was sort of the coach, the therapist, and the technical advisor,” Blaustein said. “One of my team members called me in tears. She just had a really unpleasant conversation with a member, and she just needed for me to tell her that it was going to be OK, that we have to be understanding of where everybody is. I suggested she take a break from her calls; perhaps take a walk to decompress.”

Blaustein believes she learned a lot from serving as a consultant to the 200K conversations program.

“As hard as it was, and as draining as it was, I feel like I could do any organizing because I really got a sense of how to encourage people and keep them motivated,” Blaustein said.

“Our roles as consultants were to support the members and to help them in whatever way we could to get to those 600 calls,” Quinn said. “And a lot of it, especially for my team, was just pumping each other up, being there for each other and having fun.”

At times serious discussions would arise between the consultants and the callers.

“Some members were really in crisis,” Quinn said. “That’s when we consultants would have to step in. We needed to know whether we should have the member reach out to their local president or their field rep. Maybe there was some other kind of assistance we could direct them to. We ended up making a ‘200K guide’ for the callers so that when somebody needed help with something, the caller could find exactly where to send the member.”

It was a growing document as callers and consultants identified needs. For retirees, especially those for whom the phone was a more likely way to connect than the website or email, lists with the names and contact information for the presidents of the county retiree education associations was added to the resource guide.

“A caller on my team might say, ‘Listen, I’m really worried about this person—she’s 90 and no one’s checking in on her. Can we have someone from the NJREA make sure she’s OK?’” Blaustein said. “I would pass that information along, and someone from NJREA would email me back to say, ‘Thanks for letting us know; we went, and we checked on her. She’s fine.’”

“This was an intense program,” Blaustein said. “It was a roller coaster of emotions.”

Quinn and Stacey Williams, who was also a consultant on their Cumberland/Gloucester team, reassured their callers that it was OK to be more concerned with the quality of the conversations than achieving 600 calls.

“Stacey and I kept telling them not to worry about the numbers,” Quinn said. If they just put in the time they were going to be OK. We told them that it was



more important to have authentic conversations. And everybody ended up reaching the 600 calls anyway.”

SUPPORTING ONE ANOTHER

Through team meetings, WhatsApp, and a Facebook group page, callers were eager to support one another. The Facebook page in particular became a place to ask questions and to share resources, ideas, successes, and stressors.

Virtual meetings and social media even became a place to figure out very practical considerations such days and times when members were more likely to answer their phones. Quinn noted that Morton shared with their team a checkmark system to gather data on various factors, including what days and times of day yielded more phone pick-ups.

“We started to see patterns for when people would pick up their phone,” Blaustein said. “Team members might say, ‘It’s raining, so I’m getting a lot of pickups today,’ followed by ‘Yeah, because nobody went to the beach today.’”

LESSONS LEARNED

A key lesson of 200K conversations is that while NJEA members have a wide diversity of opinions, job titles, political affiliations, races, ethnicities and genders, they care deeply about their work and the students, families and communities they serve. Far more unites NJEA members than divides them. Members love talking about their work, and many calls lasted much longer than someone aiming to have 20 conversations a day really had time for.

Most members who answered the call, were delighted to receive a call from a fellow NJEA member, regardless of whether they agreed or disagreed with NJEA’s official positions on a variety of issues.

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We were calling members to talk about what matters most to them.

“Our members care about their association and each other,” Beatty said.

“What was amazing was that even though the caller could be from East Orange and they’re calling a member who works in Hunterdon County, there was always common ground because we all are working in a school environment,” Blaustein said.

Given that the calls were occurring during the pandemic, many conversations revolved around how members had navigated their work since March 2020.

Morton noted that early-career members, especially those whose first year of teaching occurred during the pandemic, had the fewest complaints.

“I’ve come to find out that those who had the least complaints were the ‘earliest’ of the early career members, because they really didn’t know anything but remote instruction,” Morton said. “But the other 95% of us were beat up by remote instruction. We didn’t like it. We’d never wanted to do it again.”

“I think sometimes we forget how important it is that every single member is able to give their opinion—to give their voice to somebody who’s listening,” Quinn said. “Our team was reaching out to people in Bergen County all the way from Cumberland County. They shared the same kind

of stresses and the same kind of situations in their school buildings. And they felt more connected to their union than ever because there were people who on an individual basis were feeling just like us, even though they were in another part of the state.”

MEMORABLE CONVERSATIONS

Morton said his most memorable called was with a retiree. He said the NJREA member was reluctant to talk until he realized that Morton really wanted to listen to what he had to say. He went on to tell Morton that he had just survived sepsis, an experience that changed his outlook on life.

Disabled by his illness, the NJREA member decided to sell things that he could no longer enjoy, including his Harley-Davidson motorcycle. Rather than wait for a better sale, he ended up selling it to someone who could only afford half the asking price. If somebody wanted his prized possession, he was going to do everything he could to make it affordable for that person.

“He said it was because he realized how important life was and that we only get one chance at it,” Morton said. “Then he gave me some advice: ‘Make sure you tell people you love them and make sure you enjoy what you’re doing—tomorrow is not promised to anyone.’”

Caller Shaye Brown, a member of the Paterson Education Association, described the experience of being a caller as something of a reality check.

“It was a heavy summer, but it was such a thankful summer,” Brown said. “I’ve got to say it made me humble. You hear other people’s experiences, and it really does bring you back down to Earth.”

Brown noted that many members were grateful to talk to someone who knew what they were going through—from active educators whose spouses just heard their stories as complaints to NJREA members who had no one to talk to on a day-to-day basis.

One of the conversation prompts asked members what issues the member would like NJEA to prioritize.

“Is it COVID safety? Is it health care issues? Standardized testing?” Brown said. “We were definitely talking about those issues, but it was really about listening to the member. Really listening.”

Brown remembered one call that went on for over an hour with a member named Michael. He had recently retired but, according to Brown, he loved being a teacher and kept in touch with his former students.

Brown said that she and Michael talked like they were old friends, even though they had never met.



Michelle Murphy



Lisa Marie Fahrenfeld



On Aug. 18, the 98 callers, 16 consultants, and NJEA leaders and staff celebrated a successful summer having over 44,000 quality conversations with members.

“There’s just this camaraderie when it comes to educators,” Brown said. “What I loved is the call got even longer because after we talked about him, he asked me the same question I first asked him: ‘How are you doing?’ That’s when I realized that I needed this call as much as he needed this call. That was the call that made this 200K conversations program all make sense.”

That led Brown to talk about the importance of mental health for educators.

“Our mental health is really key,” Brown said. “But none of us were prepared for the situation we were thrown into when COVID hit. As educators, we talked a lot about social-emotional learning for our students, but no one was saying that we needed to look at our educators. Michael understood it on every level and showed that he was concerned about my mental health.”

With such long phone calls, Brown worried that she wouldn’t reach the goal of 600 calls. She nearly quit, but the consultants she worked with, Javier Fresse and Chris Cannella, assured her that she was on the right track.

“They told me that if a call goes into many minutes or an hour, go with it,” Brown said. “They reassured me that that’s what 200K is about.”

By the end of the six-week program, Brown exceeded 600 calls.

Caller Timothy Casale, a member of the Cherry Hill Education Association may very well have

had the longest long-distance call to a member.

Casale spoke with a member who after only teaching a few years in a district in Burlington County moved to Nigeria to teach for there for two years.

“I was actually speaking to her in Nigeria!” Casale said. “It was 3 p.m. here and 8 p.m. there. We had a lovely conversation, and she probably could have talked for an hour or so.”

Casale also spoke with an NJREA member from the much closer Bergen County. They “instantly clicked” because she was a fifth grade teacher, the same grade Casale teaches. They talked for over 45 minutes while the retirees’ husband, a retired administrator, listened in the background. They covered curriculum, memorable lessons and classroom stories.

The retiree asked Casale where he taught and the name of his superintendent. She said she wanted to let his superintendent know of the “lovely chat” she had with him. Casale was pleasantly surprised to learn that she actually did contact his superintendent, who forwarded her email back to Casale.

“It made me think about the power that these conversations are having and how our members really do like to look out for each other,” Casale said. “One of my favorite organizing quotes is ‘Hope is a discipline,’” said Wegmann. “Through these 200K conversations, our member callers

provided immense hope, and they spoke with members about their hopes for their union and for public education. We were disciplined in bringing hope during an incredibly challenging time in our lives.” 🏠

200K Conversations by the numbers

- 98 NJEA member callers completed the summer program
- 2 attempts (at least) to reach every NJEA member with a number on file
- 424,554 phone numbers were dialed
- 44,374 authentic, one-on-one conversations were held
- 703,000 minutes of conversation, that’s:
 - 11,717 hours of conversation
 - 488 days of conversation

BEHIND THE SCENES

OF THE SOUTH JERSEY

ANTI-PRIVATIZATION COALITION

Building a network to fight the education policy battles
that affect students, school employees

By Kathryn Coulibaly



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One of the keys to the South Jersey Anti-Privatization Coalition's success is that they believe in their power.

It began with a phone call. John Staab, then the local association president in Pine Hill and an NJEA UniServ consultant, got a call from his superintendent. The superintendent announced that the district would be privatizing support staff positions. John Staab hit the roof.

“I told the superintendent that I would be calling in NJEA’s ‘hounds of hell’ and we would expose everything the district was doing wrong,” John Staab recalled.

By 2 p.m., the superintendent called John Staab back and said, “Please, don’t call NJEA; we’ll figure this out.” Bob Antonelli, the NJEA staff person who has primary responsibility for educational support professional (ESP) issues, including privatization, said, “Well, that was the fastest privatization fight in history.”

For John Staab, who is now an NJEA staff member, this was a breakthrough moment.

“I guess I was very convincing that this would be traumatic for him as the superintendent,” he said. “I came up with the idea that we needed to instill this fear in other school boards and superintendents. And, because privatization fights were happening all the time, across the state, we needed a wide network to give districts the ‘hounds of hell’ treatment.”

Since 2013, NJEA members have been building a powerful network to fight privatization. Today, the South Jersey Anti-Privatization Coalition is a model for other member-driven movements within the state. Previously, the members of the network hesitated to share their story because they didn’t want the exposure to affect their ability to fight—and win. Now, with the passage of two ESP Job Justice bills, and a shift in how these fights are handled, they are eager to share their strategies in the hopes that members across the state will benefit from their experience.

ROOTS IN PARCC ORGANIZING

The coalition was based on strategies that emerged during NJEA members’ fight against high-stakes standardized testing, and John Staab had a front-row seat to those activities. His wife, Colette Staab, an art teacher in Pine Hill, Camden County, was a vocal opponent of high-stakes testing.

Along with a core group of activists that included Chrissy Kosar, Kelly Ann Morris, Heidi Brown, Carolyn Corbi and many others, they used their skills to help local associations address board members, education department officials, and politicians to educate them on the misrepresentation of standardized testing.

Colette Staab, who shares three sons with John, lives in Washington Township, Gloucester County. She created a Facebook page for her community to help parents interested in refusing the PARCC test. The activists also organized members to address board meetings in other towns including Pitman, Camden, Swedesboro and more.

“They helped us; we helped them,” Colette Staab said. “And it worked. We got amazing numbers and we built our confidence. As we started to have more privatization fights, John wanted to organize groups of people to fight. We used what we’d learned during the PARCC fight to combat privatization.”

For Kosar, activism is simply a part of her life. “I love to facilitate things; I love to bring someone on board and show them some things and watch them soar.”

Kosar welcomed the chance to speak out on education issues in her community and in other parts of the state. Kosar met Heidi Brown fighting against PARCC.

“I had a lot of ESPs saying, ‘Why are you fighting against PARCC? It’s a teacher thing.’” Kosar recalled. “I said, ‘Not really. Funding for standardized

testing comes out of the district budget; when that money is put elsewhere, ESPs lose their jobs.’ If you look at the whole picture, then you learn that different aspects affect different people in this profession. Ultimately, it affects everyone.”

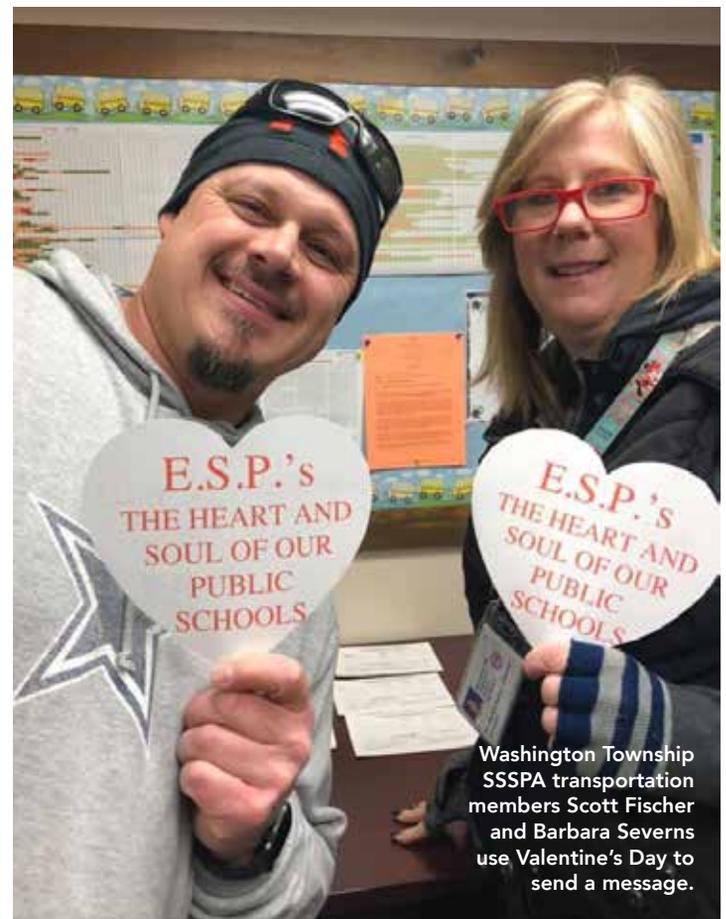
PACKING BOARD MEETINGS, ORGANIZING ONLINE

John Staab, who worked in building maintenance at Pine Hill before being hired as an NJEA field representative, had insight into ESPs’ experience with privatization.

“I know what it feels like to be an ESP and have your job threatened,” he said. “I totally understand the fear, the anger, and the concern that I was pushing too hard and could lose my job if I continue to push. Many times, our ESP members don’t want to push for the same reason. They need their colleagues to rally around and support them.”

One of the major issues with fighting bad education decisions is a perceived power imbalance. Many members believe the board of education has all the power. One of the keys to the South Jersey Anti-Privatization Coalition’s success is that they believe in their power and know how to wield it.

“I saw how an outsider speaking to the board with facts and without fear of retribution got results,” John Staab noted.



Washington Township SSSPA transportation members Scott Fischer and Barbara Severns use Valentine’s Day to send a message.

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



Top: Members of the coalition rally in front of Sen. Fred Madden’s office.
 Middle: Fighting for ESP rights in Gloucester County.
 Bottom: Going door-to-door during the Millville privatization battle. Standing from left: Ashanti Rankin, Eileen Roche, Anthony Cappello, Toni Guerra, and Desiré Brennan. Seated from left: Cathy MacManiman and Tina Dare.

“ESPs felt alone until they found that there are so many other people dealing with the same fears and anxieties of being privatized,” Antonelli said. “This group gave them a place to connect so they can see they are not alone. It really is a lifeline. Members reach out to the coalition through the Facebook group and everyone starts jumping in to provide assistance.”

BUILDING THE TEAM

“We had the very first meeting at the ESP overnight workshop in Gloucester County,” John Staab said. “We had a breakout to talk about ideas with the members. We tested our ideas during a privatization fight in Deptford and many more people jumped in from other counties who were ESP advocates. It didn’t have a name yet; it was just a bunch of people doing things.”

They created a task force with staff. It included an NJEA field representative from each office in the southern region. “I was brand new, so I wanted to make sure I had experienced people working with me,” John Staab said. “I looped in people from different divisions, with different areas of expertise.”

The NJEA staff team that John Staab and Bob Antonelli convened grew to include Nancy Holmes, Myron Plotkin, Greg Yordy, Jim Jamison, Christy Kanaby, Mike Kaminski, Caroline Tantum and others. They initially met with county presidents to roll out the team’s ideas, get feedback, and build support. The county presidents were enthusiastic.

NJEA consultants also played a major role in the coalition, including Lou Randazzo, now an NJEA field representative, and Anthony Cappello.

At the first meeting with members, they decided to create a Facebook group to help them organize and communicate. Someone suggested it, and Colette Staab had it built within minutes and began inviting people. Prospective members must answer several questions and page administrators verify membership to ensure as much as possible that only NJEA members are able to access the group. NJEA members across the state can request to join the “South Jersey Anti Privatization Coalition.”

“Not everyone likes Facebook, so we instituted different ways to communicate,” John Staab said.

Beth Parker, administrative assistant in the Mullica Hill NJEA UniServ Regional Office, created a list that grew to include more than 700 members interested in fighting privatization. The group included members from across several counties and included almost every job description. Many teachers got involved because they had experienced the devastating impact privatization had on their school communities, and because they truly valued the important work their ESP colleagues performed.

“We originally had contacts in each county in the south but we found that there was a core group of people who were just warriors,” John Staab said. “We ultimately made them the captains. They were the ones stirring the pot, getting information and spreading the word. We tried to pick a professional staff member and an ESP member in each county; it didn’t always happen that way, but it often did.

“To activate the coalition, members have to contact their NJEA field representative and then they can contact the network. We ask the local association what they need. The privatization coalition concentrates solely on external organizing and research. A lot of the things that they do, the members of that local association might not be aware of. For example, our members are really good at finding things on the internet.”

For example, during a privatization battle in Cape May County, members of the coalition went online and discovered that a superintendent intent on privatization was on the zoning board in the town and that her taxes were \$15,000 less than her neighbors. They shared that information with the community, calling into question the superintendent’s motivation.

In Evesham, the board wanted to drop paraprofessionals’ hours so they would lose benefits. The coalition showed up before a board meeting and held a rally. People were standing in the roadway with signs. They stopped every board member on their way into the meeting and talked to them and had them talk face-to-face with the Evesham paraprofessionals.

Not only did the Evesham members thank NJEA and the coalition for

their efforts, they asked how they could help others.

“We supported each other to develop the coalition,” Antonelli said. “But really we gave the members the tools and they built it. Because every privatization fight is different, the strategies change every time. There’s no manual on the shelf that we can pull from. It helps that there’s no one person in charge. They’re constantly bouncing ideas off each other. Schools can be so hierarchical; the coalition sees everyone as equal and gives them a chance to work together in a different way than perhaps they’re used to seeing.”

“The freedom to do what they want gets them excited and motivated to do things,” John Staab noted. “It’s fun for us, too, because we can be creative and try new things. It was important for these members to feel that they have power and it made them stronger members, while allowing them to flex their muscles and influence their union. They now have the ownership that if you’re not happy with something, you have to get involved and try to change it.”

An important element is packing board meetings with well-informed, passionate, and fearless advocates who live outside the district, protecting them from retribution.

“Once this started happening and members in affected districts saw people coming from other districts, they shared information with them about what was going on, strengthening the coalition members’ comments when they got to the microphone. In turn, after these members were helped by the coalition, they turned around and returned the favor by attending board meetings and becoming outspoken anti-privatization activists in other districts,” John Staab said.

“I’ve got to be honest; the work was tiring,” John Staab said. “These were long days for our members who get up early to drive kids to school. After the board meetings, we’d all be so fired up, it was hard to come down. But we really felt like the NJEA staff and the members were one. We were all in this together; and we all felt that way.”

Colette Staab has practical advice for advocates. “Balancing advocacy with parenting, work, and real life is challenging,” Colette Staab said. “No one is

going to be mad at you for not going to every board meeting. Go, bring a crew, go to dinner before or after. The point is building that teamwork and the connections that help us support each other.”

During the pandemic, and before the ESP bills were passed, privatization fights were still occurring; they just happened over Zoom.

“It’s difficult to fight privatization in a Zoom meeting,” Antonelli said. “But boards that allow people to speak hear from people beyond just the people in their district. More than 250 people got on the Zoom at the last privatization battle. The coalition members are so dedicated; they will go anywhere, anytime. Whether it’s a Zoom meeting or they have to drive there. Everyone in the coalition has been affected by privatization and they’ve had enough.”

ACTIVATED TO PASS JOB JUSTICE BILLS

“Chrissy Kosar and Donna Rose are two fierce anti-privatization activists who are both bus drivers,” John Staab said. “Because of their schedules, they were up early and had time during the day to reach out and talk to people about these issues before they did their after-school runs. Thanks to them, the bus drivers in the Kingsway school district became extremely active. Chrissy and Donna met a bus driver from Kingsway and they ended up visiting legislators to talk to them about the ESP Job Justice bills. They were instrumental in getting votes for those bills,” John Staab said.

The battle to pass the ESP Job Justice bills went on for years. The bills had passed numerous times in previous administrations, but never made it to the finish line.

In an understatement, Kosar said that she and her fellow activists worked “very hard” to get the ESP bills passed.

“We had a couple of rallies and got a meeting with Sen. Fred Madden,” Kosar recalled. “He promised to sign on to the two bills but he didn’t. So I kind of made his life misery.”

“I would get on the radio at 9 a.m. and ask the drivers to meet me at Madden’s office after our run,” Kosar said. “We trolled the internet and



Willingboro EA and their supporters show up in force to fight privatization.



NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty, John Staab, and Bob Antonelli confer during a rally.

discovered that with his pensions and stipends, he was pulling in a significant salary. We pushed hard against that.”

“We did a big Christmas thing with county leaders and some NJEA staff and we rallied in front of Madden’s office,” Kosar said. “Mike Kaminski dressed up as Santa Claus with two candy canes stuck in the ground to look like two J’s for Job Justice. We took him a bag of coal because he’d been naughty and hadn’t kept his word. It was funny, but it was serious.”

“An aide came out and brought me in and asked me to meet with the senator, and he signed onto the bills that day,” Kosar said. “A couple of months later, those bills passed.”

GROWING INTO THE FUTURE

Even as they celebrate an extraordinary and hard-fought victory, Antonelli is concerned that the privatization fight is not over. “Even as the law has changed, we there is still danger to our school employees. We have to find new ways to fight privatization. And the thing is, this coalition always shows up.”

Antonelli calls on more teachers to get involved in the anti-privatization fight. “Teachers need to speak up and declare that they can’t do this work without support staff. They have seen firsthand the impact that unqualified, unprofessional, \$10-a-day workers can have in our schools. Many teachers have joined the coalition, but many more should be speaking out for their colleagues.”

The coalition members feel strongly that they need to build on what they have created to ensure that ESP members are heard in their union, at the bargaining table, and with administration. John Staab sees the network changing to focus more on helping ESP members deal with contract issues, internal politics, privatization and promoting the profession.

Kosar, who is now the Gloucester County Education Association president, has big dreams for her ESP colleagues. The coalition, which is changing its name to the ESP Action Network (ESPAN), will help guide associations and develop best practices to fully embrace ESP issues. Kosar envisions all-inclusive associations adopting a dual leadership model, with co-presidents composed of an ESP and certified representative. She’s working with ESP to



With police support, Colette Staab used a police microphone to inform attendees during a privatization battle.

“

Those who created the coalition find it to be one of the most rewarding movements they have been part of during their careers, and they invite others to share in it.

take on leadership positions in their local, county, statewide, and national associations.

“The pandemic really showed the value of what ESP do,” Kosar says. “Bus drivers worked with cafeteria staff to deliver food; special needs students were able to get food and supplies delivered right to their door. Our associations donated much-needed food and we’ve kept that up for more than a year because the need is very real in our communities. And we see that because no one is more connected to our communities than ESP.”

Kosar is calling on NJEA to create a dedicated division for educational support professionals.

“NJEA must work with the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) to develop free members’ only trainings that provide accredited programs for ESPs,” Kosar said. “By establishing a certification program that makes them invaluable to school districts, we will be growing a pool of highly qualified, highly employable staff who will be well-compensated for the services they offer. Accelerated by the impact of the pandemic and the Great Resignation, districts are now seeing how their treatment of support staff is making it extremely difficult to fill essential positions.

“They need to take this moment to invest in their employees and recognize the failure of outsourcing!”

As ESPAN evolves, Colette Staab is eager to see their practices expand to other subjects.

“We were trying to engage people on health and safety issues, even before the pandemic,” Colette Staab said. “We were working on mercury in the floors, lead in the water, mold, and other health and safety issues in schools. I didn’t get as much passion for that as I expected. But I do feel that this model could be applied there. In addition, we have seen the social justice coalition using this model.”

“With a lot of these issues, it’s more effective for NJEA to be hands-off: it has to be locally driven and locally run,” John Staab said.

Those who created the coalition find it to be one of the most rewarding movements they have been part of during their careers, and they invite others to share in it.

“The people who get involved in this group are tired of losing,” Antonelli said. “They ask, ‘how do we start winning again?’ This group can’t guarantee a win, but they can guarantee that you will not fight alone.” 🏠



From left: Eileen Roche, Fatimah Hayes, and Chrissy Kosar attend an anti-privatization strategy meeting.

South Jersey Anti-Privatization Coalition Captains

Burlington County
Cathy MacManiman
Dona Rose

Camden County
Kelley-Ann Morris
Michaelene Stiles

Cape May County
Tim Day

Cumberland County
Temika Langston-Myers
Eileen Flynn Roche
Mildred Johnson

Essex County
Kimberly Scott-Hayden

Gloucester County
Chrissy Kosar
Roberta Rissling

Hudson County
Keith Olkewicz

Passaic County
Nikki Baker

ESP Committee Chair
Joann Houck



SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING ON THE DOT

USING INTERNATIONAL DOT DAY
TO CREATE CONNECTIONS FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

BY KATHRYN COULIBALY



Shawna Longo poses with some of the musical instruments she uses in class.

The music is pumping, the students are dancing and singing, and the teacher is wearing a wireless headset and commanding the stage like the rock star she is. It's just a typical Wednesday at Durban Avenue School in Hopatcong.

Sussex County Teacher of the Year Shawna Longo likes to get the students up and moving as soon as possible. For this class of 17 first graders, it's a welcome opportunity to move and sing and unleash their inner rock stars.

In 2019, she received the inaugural 2019 Teach Rock Star Teacher Award from The Rock and Roll Forever Foundation. Gov. Phil Murphy and legendary New Jersey rocker Steven Van Zandt presented the award, a platinum record proudly hanging on Longo's wall at home. Van Zandt returned to watch Longo teach a lesson.

"Mr. Van Zandt had a blast interacting with the students and the parents could not contain their excitement over meeting him," Longo said.

Longo's district became the first district to partner with the program and uses its free curriculum and resources.

"Every student in our district receives at least one Teach Rock lesson a month, which is full-on arts integration and STEAM," Longo said.

The program is another opportunity for the district to bring the world to their small town. Longo is constantly looking for ideas and strategies to utilize the arts to teach students about the world around them.

"In my school, I serve as the music teacher teaching every child within the school, and I also

am an arts integration specialist," Longo said. "So I am afforded the opportunity to work with all the teachers to develop authentic arts-integrated lessons across the content areas, and then to go in and teach those lessons with my colleagues. It's an amazing opportunity to work together and increase the collaborative culture and climate within our school, while pulling in the arts and teaching social emotional learning."

Today's theme is centered on dots, inspired by *The Dot* by Peter Reynolds, a book in which Vashti, a young artist, doubts her abilities. When her teacher encourages her to look at the dot she has drawn in a different, more creative way, it unlocks the power of her imagination. The book follows her as she explores all the things that the dot could be, and, in the end, she inspires another student to be more creative and self-confident.

In Longo's classroom, students stand on dots to help them socially distance. Today, those dots are tied into the theme of International Dot Day, held annually around Sept. 15, the date that *The Dot* was officially released.

Longo uses Reynolds' other books, *Sky Color* and *Ish*, in her classroom. "The storylines are inspiring for students and present social-emotional learning concepts in an exciting and relatable way. The illustrations are also done in a way that supports literacy through analyzing the pictures from an artist's perspective to support the text and expand on the storyline."

International Dot Day opens the space for classes to explore the themes of bravery, creativity and self-expression through *The Dot*. And, these themes naturally align with the five social-emotional competencies of self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, social awareness and relationship skills. These skills are experienced through the powerful and

compelling message in this children's book, which encourages students to try something new and believe in themselves: "Make your mark and see where it takes you!"

And there isn't a better time to focus on SEL, particularly in early childhood education. Like many adults, students are still working to process the emotional rollercoaster that we have all been on since March 2020. Many of our youngest population haven't had the same exposure to preschool education, playdates, and all that typically comes with those early years. They are coming into school with an even smaller foundation—educationally and emotionally. By authentically integrating social-emotional learning into our classrooms, we are able to help build a solid foundation of skills that they can use in all facets of their life.

Three critical words to keep in mind when integrating SEL into a classroom: embedded, intentional, and sustained. This isn't just one lesson that "checks the box." SEL needs to be an intentionally embedded practice that is sustained throughout the year within every classroom.

The arts provide students with an outlet to process and express their emotions and feelings. Children also naturally and authentically connect with the arts, providing an opportunity for students to internalize skills. New Jersey has been leading the research and advocacy of the synergistic connections between social emotional learning and the visual and performing arts. More information can be found at selarts.org.

Longo works closely with other subject area teachers to show students the interconnectedness of what they are learning and how they can apply it in their lives. Learning about different cultures and different ways that people go about things all through a lens that they feel comfortable with, which is music and all of the arts, because I am not just the music teacher. It is every teacher's responsibility to tear down our silos and make as many connections between and across content areas and culture for our students so that they can better see and understand our world.

"I love working with the little kiddos," Longo said. "I love laying that foundation. I just switched to what I call little land about two years ago after 16 years of middle school and high school. This shift really empowered me to look at music and teaching through a different lens—through these young children's minds. I am passionate about learning and music is my vehicle, along with the arts, in general, to drive that passion and instill a love of learning in students. Plus, having fun while they're doing it!"

One instance where Longo was able to really focus on SEL through a culturally responsive lens occurred through a project with the Asian Pacific American Center at the Smithsonian Institute. Longo was tasked with working with an artist to create an arts integrated lesson, pulling in a

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Students color and draw on dots as part of Longo's lesson on The Dot.

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Three critical words to keep in mind when integrating SEL into a classroom: embedded, intentional, and sustained.

global perspective. Theirs was titled, Portraits of a Global Perspective, to really drive home social-emotional learning and culturally responsive concepts through an arts lens.

The module series curated four distinct artmaking lessons that cross different cultures and SEL competencies. Each educator was paired with an artist and an art historian to learn more about each other's lives, why they teach, why they create and/or study art, and what drives each of their practices. Through collaborative conversations, ideas for these artmaking lessons emerged that intertwine the educator's, artist's, and art historian's practice and vision, while centering opportunities for students to reflect on their own global interconnections through creating art.

Longo was paired with artist Helen Zughaib, professional artist and author of the book, *Stories My Father Told Me*. Although their background, experiences, and journeys seemed very different on the surface, there were similar underlying themes. It was through these connections that emerged an arts integrated lesson focusing on increasing students' global perspective through empathy while building social-emotional skills focusing on self-awareness, social awareness, responsible

decision-making, and relationship skills. The complete modules include a full lesson plan, step-by-step Learning Lab collection with images and videos illustrating steps in the artmaking process, and a recorded webinar where visitors can meet the creators of the lesson and see how it could be used with students. More information can be found at smithsonianapa.org/learn/making-art/#01.

Through experiences like these where students are given a voice to speak about their experiences and learn about the experiences of others, Longo works to light that spark, so that in whatever capacity they want, her students are comfortable being in front of people. They are comfortable expressing who they are, and they're comfortable exploring things that they may never have tried before.

It is also important to partner with the support system existing within our schools when approaching SEL and culturally responsive teaching. For instance, Longo works hand in hand with the school counselor to further understand how she can assist students in processing their emotions and how to respond to each other through authentic experiences that she provides in and through the arts. "I really try to create an

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Children naturally and authentically connect with the arts, providing an opportunity for students to internalize skills.

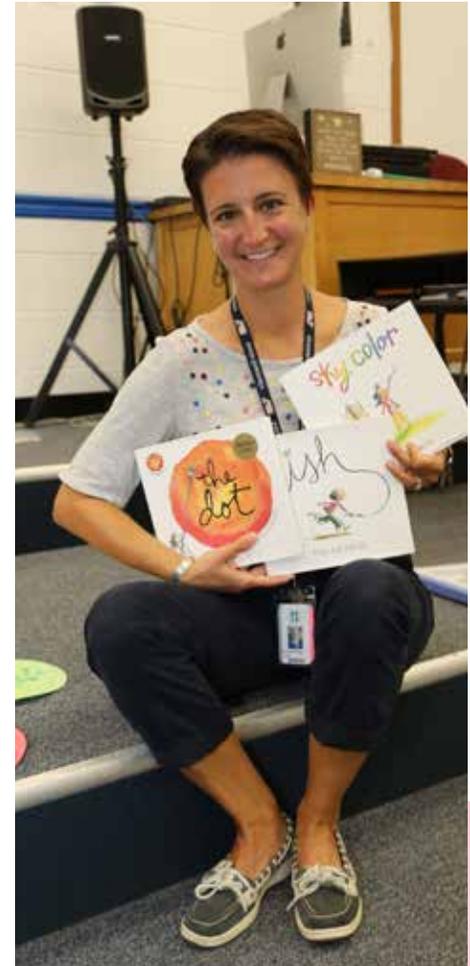
environment where the kids are super excited and having fun and they're learning a ton, but they don't realize it," Longo said. "That's so important to me. My motto is three simple things: keep it simple, keep it fun, and keep them engaged. If I'm achieving those goals, I guarantee you, students are learning through all of that."

Longo has always been a champion of social-emotional learning, but this year, in particular, she sees the necessity of it—for students and teachers.

"I think it's imperative, especially as we're coming out of this unusual year that we've had, that we take a step back and shift our focus, because we've been working so hard to make education work for our students," Longo said. "But I think that at the end of the day, we need to focus on our students, and we need to make sure that they are socially and emotionally ready and prepared and able to move forward and process what has happened to them, their families, and their ability to learn. We can't just forget about what they went through and what we went through over the past two years. Not only do we need to make sure that they're prepared, but I think that in order for us, as teachers, to make sure our kids are OK and that we are delivering social-emotional learning effectively throughout our curriculum, we need to make sure that teachers are prepared."

Longo feels districts need to place an emphasis on helping teachers and staff process what they have been through, so they can be better equipped to assist students.

"It would be a huge disservice to not take the time to focus on the teachers and staff and what they need and for them to have the opportunity to process what they felt and are currently feeling," Longo said. "One excellent way to process strong feelings is through the arts; this is a synergistic pairing. We help educators process the pandemic by using the arts, we model for them how they can use it with their students, and we increase the collaborative environment in our schools to help educators work together to develop lessons that emphasize social-emotional learning." 🎨



Longo uses multiple media in her classroom to engage students and help them connect with the lesson.

BRINGING SEL INTO YOUR SCHOOLS

Lessons from SEL Day 2021 for SEL Day 2022

*By Maurice J. Elias and Jennifer Ly,
Rutgers University SECD Lab and SEL4NJ*





Staff at Quarter Mile Lane School in Bridgeton show their solidarity on SEL Day.

On March 26, 2021, hundreds of schools in New Jersey joined in the celebration of the second International Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Day. They shared the SEL, character, school culture and climate, and student voice activities they did on that day, during the preceding week or two, and during the whole academic year.

On that day, over 12 million social media engagements and interactions were recorded on these activities—and this was the middle of the pandemic!

As we continue into this school year, it's clear that SEL is essential for helping our students and staff deal with the past year's strong emotions. There were many losses but also accomplishments. Some aspects of learning became highly challenging, but a tremendous amount was learned about individual health, public health, social justice, history and civics, resilience, and economics; the list goes on and on. Without being able to deal with their strong emotions, feel empathy, take others' perspectives, and problem-solve ethically, our students will not be able to learn from the past

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year to grow and work constructively to make this year better.

NEW JERSEY SCHOOLS SHOW THE WAY

The Social-Emotional Alliance for New Jersey (SEL4NJ) is a voluntary, grass-roots organization of individual educators, schools, districts, professional organizations, parents, advocacy groups, and anyone else deeply concerned about the future of our youth, our schools, and our democracy. Its website is sel4nj.org.

SEL4NJ is one of 20 state alliances that are part of SEL4US, which managed International SEL Day in collaboration with the Urban Assembly network of schools. David Adams, the CEO of the Urban Assembly, is a product of New Jersey schools, including Rutgers, and sends his own children to New Jersey public schools.

SEL4NJ documented ways in which New Jersey schools responded to the challenge of International SEL Day, and we are privileged to be able to share with you some of the creative work done by four schools and districts with a strong, yearlong commitment to SEL who also stepped up with special activities for SEL Day. We hope to share additional SEL Day strategies in another *NJEA Review* article before March 11, 2022—the next International SEL Day. In the meantime, be sure to visit SELDay.org.

SPARTA TOWNSHIP PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Every morning during SEL Week, the students and educators at Sparta Township Public Schools would begin the day with one mindful minute on the morning announcements. This exercise

allowed the students to focus on their breathing and give them the opportunity to deeply self-reflect and reconnect with themselves.

Prior to SEL Week, the students, school staff members, and parents completed a survey to assess their knowledge and understanding of SEL. The data from these surveys identified what specific strengths could be highlighted and which areas needed to be developed.

“SEL Week was an opportunity for us to showcase what we have been doing throughout the school year,” says Dr. Saskia Brown, the director of Student Support Services. This is a key point—Dr. Brown used SEL Week for the purpose of focusing and highlighting SEL, but Sparta's SEL efforts are yearlong and across schools. For SEL Week, Sparta set out to bring awareness and promote SEL and highlight the district's SEL efforts and initiatives.

Sparta had a C3 Social-Emotional Learning Workgroup (see sparta.org/Page/1979), and one of its initial tasks was to produce a video that featured various educators and members of the Sparta community. In the video they defined SEL and explained the research-based evidence that shows how SEL supports learning. The video detailed Sparta's Choose Love program and the three-tiered model instituted using the SEL competencies.

Sparta wanted to target educator self-care, so educators, counselors, school administrators, and staff members were encouraged to attend the group

More about Sparta's SEL activities

Sparta's introductory SEL video for staff, students and parents that explains what SEL is, the district's SEL efforts, and Sparta's Choose Love program: bit.ly/3FsTsTA

Sparta's three-part workshop series videos: sparta.org/Page/2084

Media coverage: “Sparta schools highlight new initiative focused on student emotions, social skills,” by Kyle Morel, New Jersey Herald: bit.ly/3muraPS

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Last year, students did not have a lot of opportunities to safely express themselves and to make sense of what they were feeling.



Students in Butler creating stress balls.

workshop presented by Dr. Michelle Hinkle and Dr. Meredith Drew, counselors from Paterson University’s Department of Special Education and Counseling. The counselors highlighted the importance and necessity of wellness and self-care and demonstrated ways to incorporate self-care in their lives. Students, teachers, educational support professionals and other staff members received awards throughout the week, including gift cards or self-care products such as candles or facemasks, recognizing times they engaged in a self-care activity. You can see their Self-Care Check-in at bit.ly/3mBvfSj.

In partnership with the Northeast and Caribbean Mental Health Technology Transfer Center, Sparta hosted a three-part workshop series that engaged parents in the conversation about social-emotional learning in school and at home. All of the recordings and resources from the workshop were shared with parents.

This encouraged parents to learn more about SEL and help them promote wellness in their lives and those of their children.

BUTLER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The counselors at each of the public schools in Butler created a “choice board” that consisted of various activities that teachers could choose from

on SEL Day. Some of these activities extended beyond SEL Day, such as a themed bulletin board in the fifth-grade hallway on growth mindset. Other activities outlined on the choice board included leading a meditation session, creating online/paper mandalas, or engaging in brain breaks such as a freeze dance.

The students engaged in different activities throughout the day, such as going through a guided meditation, reading a poem or book that highlights SEL, journaling exercises, and more.

A series of station activities for middle and high school students was set up during their lunch periods. Walking from table to table, students made stress balls, wrote “compliments,” and created mindful mints. On bulletin board paper, students wrote coping skills and things for which they were grateful. Counselor Vikki Szabo, one of the leaders of these activities, expressed her gratitude for the fantastic work done by faculty and staff by personally delivering treats (while masked, of course) from a rolling cart.

BRIDGETON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Bridgeton values SEL in ways large and small and has focused strongly on SEL and the visual arts. Kerri Sullivan, the district supervisor for the Arts, passionately discussed how visual arts

became an outlet for students.

“Last year, students did not have a lot of opportunities to safely express themselves and to make sense of what they were feeling ... now students can connect to the arts and connect to their emotions in a way we have never seen previously.”

You might say the entire district became an artist’s palette for SEL Day, as students and staff all wore yellow. The color was chosen because it symbolizes optimism, happiness and energy. Yellow also signifies intelligence and mental focus.

An SEL4NJ and ArtsEdNJ collaborative work group intentionally considered the intersection of arts education and SEL. (See selarts.org). Art teachers in Bridgeton were equipped with a framework of the SEL competencies that were one of the outcomes of the work group. They were encouraged to use the framework to guide and support their lessons in the classroom. Visual arts became an outlet for the students to get in touch with themselves and dive deep into their thoughts and feelings.

In music class at Broad Street Elementary School, students created playlists that reflected their different moods. To develop the students’ artistic thinking, they were instructed to make playlists for an audience interested in listening to a specific mood. For example, one student made a happy playlist targeting an audience that needs to be cheered up. That exercise challenged the students’ artistic thinking and emotional and perspective-taking skills. It allowed them to see new ways the arts can have a positive impact.

Also at Broad Street School, visual arts educator Dr. Anne Marie Pai instructed students to get in touch with their emotions and thoughts. She had them learn about various artists and their techniques, such as color use, lines, and shapes, for expressing emotions. She introduced them to artists such as Edvard Munch, Joan Miro, Georgia O’Keefe, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Kristin Gaudio-Endsley, Chuck Jones, Elaine de Kooning, Mark Rothko and Alexandra Levasseur. Students went on to express their own emotions by creating paintings, drawings, sculptures, and other visual arts pieces.

Visit bit.ly/3Akxdv7 to watch video created by Bridgeton High School dance students. It is a great example of social awareness (SEL) and connecting (artistic process).

WOODROW WILSON MIDDLE SCHOOL, EDISON TOWNSHIP

Wendy Hurwitz-Kushner, a seventh-grade social studies teacher, is a leader in Woodrow Wilson Middle School’s use of SEL.

“We want to create a safe space for these students,” Hurwitz-Kushner said. “We want them to engage in more self-reflection and have everyone feel more comfortable with each other.”

If this was true last year, how much truer is it



Students at Woodrow Wilson Middle School in Edison engaged in the Wheel of Fun during the Walk, Talk, and Do lesson.

for the 2021-22 school year?

Hurwitz-Kushner got her students emotionally ready for learning by hosting yoga sessions with her in-person students, and live on a separate Zoom meeting with the students at home.

Woodrow Wilson eighth-graders had a choice menu. They decided which brief activities to do for the day. The activities ranged from taking a walk outside, shooting hoops, relaxing, coloring/drawing, listening to music, dancing, singing, exercising, doing yoga or meditating, writing a poem or story, playing with a pet, or reading something for pleasure. After completing the activity, the students were instructed to write a reflection on how they felt while doing the activity.

Teachers handed out daily check-ins on Google Forms to their students. The teachers looked for creative ways to evaluate their students' well-being. For example, a student might rate their mood using emojis or on a scale with different images of Harry Potter.

There is no doubt that Woodrow Wilson School is an ever-flowing fountain of SEL creativity!

Because of the clear data on the strong emotions that accompany the 2021-22 school year, schools in New Jersey are more focused on SEL than ever. There is no need to wait for SEL Day in March 11, 2022 to get started with SEL.

The need for SEL among staff and students is not going away any time soon. There were so many wonderful and shareable examples from New Jersey schools, we hope to share another set of activities in a future *NJEA Review* article to help everyone get ready for participation on March 11, 2022.

If you join [SELANJ.org](https://www.selanj.org), you can get access to many SEL activities that you can start using now. The sooner the better! 📌

Sample Woodrow Wilson lesson plans

Walk and Talk and Do

(Grades 6-8)

- Students work in pairs (ideally selected to foster diversity) to walk around the school.
- Signs are posted all around the school building and each pair is given a bag with markers, pencils, and a ping pong ball.
- The pair must work collaboratively to complete the tasks that are on the signs.
- At the Wheel of Fun station, students spin a wheel with a variety of activities on them.
- Another task includes questions and the pair discusses their answers (for example: If you could hang out with anyone (alive or dead), who would you choose? Why?)
- One station includes the Graffiti Wall of Kindness: Using the markers from their bags, the students write a positive message to their classmates; they are also encouraged to draw a picture with the message of kindness

Where We Are From

- Collect baby pictures from the students.
- Post them on a shared map so students can see where their peers are from.
- Have the students identify each of the photos.
- Each of the students would go around and share something on a posted sign about their childhood, what they were proud of, their values, and/or their dreams.

If I Were

- Students are given prompts to get them to talk and think about their identities
- Students go around the room and answer questions and explaining why they chose that specific identity; this allows students to recognize their qualities and reflect on themselves
- Examples: The format is, "If you were..., what? Why?"
 - If you were a book, what book or type of book would you be? Why?
 - If you were a character in a book or a movie, who would you be? Why?
 - If you were a piece of clothing, what would you be? Why?
 - If you were an animal, what would you be? Why?
 - If you were food, what would you be? Why?

Appreciation, Apology, or Aha

- At the end of the day, each of the students goes around and chooses to tell one thing they appreciate in the class, one thing that they want to apologize for, or one thing they realized.
- This is a great way for students to reflect on the lesson or their behavior in class that day, and it is a valuable activity to incorporate into regular classroom routine.

School performing arts

Going in-person during the pandemic

By Dorothy Wigmore

“I’m happy for my family. I can go home and feel confident that I’m not bringing anything home to them.” That’s Brian Toth’s take on the protocols behind in-person teaching this year as the band director at East Brunswick High School.

The measures are based on work by scientists at the University of Colorado Boulder and the University of Maryland. Their International Performing Arts Coalition Aerosol Study was funded by U.S., Canadian and European groups, including Arts Education New Jersey.

Early in the pandemic, the researchers rang alarm bells about the importance of small airborne particles carrying SARS-CoV-2 (aerosols) in transmitting the virus. Outbreaks like a deadly one in a Washington State

choir and others linked to musical performances confirmed they were right. SARS-CoV-2 is the virus that causes COVID-19.

“Since unmitigated performing arts settings tended to generate high levels of aerosols, the study was conducted to look at what can be done to mitigate and reduce risk to allow performing arts activities to continue,” explains Bob Morrison, director of the statewide arts education organization, Arts Ed NJ.

“All of our guidance is based on what we learned through that study,” he adds. “I would further argue that the performing arts has way more research supporting the strategies that we’ve put in place, than just about any other content area.”

Guidance from Arts Ed NJ’s September Forward is in the sidebar.



WHAT'S IN THE PROTOCOLS?

The measures for inside activities, updated in July, depend on local transmission rates. The table shows the two sets.

Recommendations (higher rates)	September recommendations (lower rates)
Mask students (with slit face coverings to play wind and brass instruments)	Mask students except when playing wind and brass instruments
Mask instruments	Mask instruments
Six-foot distance	Three-foot distance
Limit rehearsals to 30 minutes	Limit rehearsals to 50 minutes
Go outside, with restrictions on distancing, etc.	Go outside, without restrictions (e.g., distancing).

For both higher and lower rates, there must be good ventilation (at least three air changes/hour—others say six), HEPA air filtering units and time between classes. The protocols also include handwashing and cleaning brass spit valves. Face shields and partitions are out; they interfere with ventilation and do little to reduce inhaling aerosols.

Masks should be made of MERV 13 material, or those meeting standards for medical masks (e.g., ASTM F2100), and bell covers of double-layered MERV 13 material. (Flutes and recorders don't need covers as they don't generate aerosols.)

EAST BRUNSWICK HIGH SCHOOL USES THE PROTOCOLS

Classes in the performing arts—music, dance, theatre and visual arts—have suffered a lot in the pandemic. At East Brunswick High School last year, Toth saw about one-third of his usual number of students in person.

They followed the study-based protections for higher rates. District-provided bolts of jersey cotton were cut and clipped to cover each instrument bell (see photo).

Toth was spraying disinfectant on student contact surfaces too. To give the product time to work, he rotated desks, chairs and music stands between classes. Twice a week, others fogged the classroom at night. This year, he's spraying less, with a new product also containing hypochlorous acid and there's less fogging. (Fogging is problematic, according to NJEA and New Jersey Work Environment Council/NJ WEC. See the resources.)

"The students have been very adaptable from the get-go," Toth says. "This year, they're just glad to play with someone, instead of playing at a computer screen. We've had no close contact issues, no transmission in our classroom. There's

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Classes in the performing arts—music, dance, theatre and visual arts—have suffered a lot in the pandemic.

good air movement in the room. Would I love to see their faces? Yes, but right now we're doing everything we can, and the results are there."

"I'm proud that they have followed through and made sure we've not had any close contact or quarantine issues in our teaching space," he adds.

"We've seen far more implementation [of these measures] than a year ago," Morrison says. "We know so much more now, and our schools are back to full days."

"Everything's important when we're talking about layered mitigation strategies," he adds. "The reality is that there is no 100% safe environment."

He points to a survey the study group did in the spring. Responses from more than 3,000 schools showed those with protections had very few virus cases. Those without were about 4.5 times more likely to have outbreaks.

Morrison also urges teachers to "ask for appropriately sized air cleaners" and other upgrades from the federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds. The application deadline in New Jersey is Nov. 21.

"If you don't ask, you don't get," he says. "The investment in and of itself is good practice for any respiratory illness. There are things we're learning in this process that will hopefully live long beyond the period we get the virus under control."

WHAT CAN JOINT HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEES DO?

- Find out if performing arts staff can use the study protocols (e.g., do they have MERV 13 filter materials, effective ventilation and/or HEPA air filtering units)—if they're missing, go to bat for them.
- Educate members about disinfecting hazards, less toxic products and effective cleaning (as opposed to disinfecting) methods. See njea.org/cleaning-to-fight-covid-19-in-schools-and-at-home and assets.njea.org/njea-media/Disinfecting.pdf.
- Follow up with the administration if fogging is done or toxic products are used (see the DEP compliance Advisory nj.gov/dep/enforcement/advisories/2020-15.pdf).
- Check the ventilation in all school spaces and advocate for improvements, including use of the state's indoor air quality standard and pandemic-related recommendations—NJ WEC can help.

Resources

NJEA: Achieving Health and Safety Wins in a Pandemic

njea.org/achieving-health-and-safety-wins-in-a-pandemic

Arts Ed NJ: September Forward

artsednj.org/september-forward
Includes videos for specific performing arts

NJEA: Disinfecting Can Be Hazardous to All Staff and Students

assets.njea.org/njea-media/Disinfecting.pdf

ESSER fund information

bit.ly/2Ywuxh5

International Performing Arts Coalition Aerosol Study

bit.ly/3qLJaqm
With many links, including the study.

New Jersey Public Employee Indoor Air Quality Standard

N.J.A.C. 12:100-13.1 (2007)
bit.ly/njdoiaq

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

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Learning true African American history empowered me

By Dr. Dawn Nichol-Manning

I vividly recall when I was in middle school, sitting at my desk, and a VHS and television screen were placed in front of the class so we could watch “Roots,” by Alex Haley. At the conclusion of the episodes I can remember feeling embarrassed, angry and somewhat ashamed. I went to a school that was diverse, but the majority of students and staff were white.

There was no discussion about how the movie made us feel. We were told that this was what it was like to be a slave in America, and pretty much that was it. We moved on to the next topic in our social studies curriculum.

I remember not wanting to talk to my white peers because I was angry with them because of how I saw the whites in the movie treated Blacks. I did not understand why people depicted in the movie that looked like me were beaten, separated from their families, butchered, overworked and totally disrespected. I was hurting. This is what African American history was for me in middle school.

During high school, I was taught that just about every Black person in America was descended from slaves. I once again felt ashamed being a descendent, because history books depicted Black people as down-trodden, desolate and worthless. That is how I saw myself and now I started to feel bitter about being Black. This is what school taught, so I thought it had to be true.

During my junior year in high school I came

across a poster in a local store that my family frequented in Newark. The flyer was an invitation to attend a Black History Month event at Essex County College.

I was intrigued to find out more because the flyer had a collage of Black people wearing lab coats and stethoscopes, business suits, standing at podiums, well-dressed, and looking royal. I wanted to see what history they were talking about. In my mind Black history meant slavery, torn clothes, no shoes, and sad faces. I asked my mom and sisters to go with me and see what the program was about.

When I entered the hall, I heard drums playing. I saw red, black, and green balloons, posters on the walls of over 100 African American people who had received awards, honors and accolades throughout history. It was a sight to behold. I felt proud, and I was excited to sit down and hear what the presentation was going to be about. I sat there from beginning to end and felt butterflies in my stomach the entire time.

Speakers who looked like me came out on the stage sharing information on the Black diaspora, the trans-Atlantic trade, Black philanthropists, Black millionaires, Black architects, Black engineers, Black scientists, Black educators, Black artists, Black poets, Black musicians, and the list went on and on. I was blown away with the facts and information.

At this event I learned that Cleopatra and Nefertiti were queens who were Black, my

traditional textbook and movies I had seen of them illustrated them as women who were white. This event empowered me and changed the way I viewed myself. My esteem improved and I was encouraged to the make my way in the world.

I went back to my high school and spoke to my counselor and asked why we didn’t have a course or club that taught the information I had learned from the Black History Month event I attended. From that experience I, along with some of my peers, created a club that was based on discussing true African American history. Despite the fact that we were not allowed to call it a Black History Club, it was the beginning of breaking the systemic mold of incorrectly teaching Black history. This was in the late 80s; work was in progress.

It is important that our students learn the full story of American history, the good and the bad—those stories that make us uncomfortable and the stories of success and resilience that we can celebrate.

It is now 2021, and there is still work to do. As educators, anytime we limit ourselves by not teaching true Black history, we commit a disservice to our students. It’s important to teach all our children, Black and white, African American studies. Our children need to be culturally competent and understand especially in the United States that the fabric of our cultural has been deeply crafted and threaded by innovative, powerful and constructive African American people.

To find out ways to infuse African-American studies into your lessons visit njamistadcurriculum.net. 📖

Dr. Dawn Nichol-Manning, a science teacher at the East Orange STEM Academy High School with 29 years’ experience, is the president of the East Orange Education Association. She can be reached at dnichol725@gmail.com.



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TOP 5 TIPS FOR ATTENDING THE NJEA CONVENTION

NJEA PRESERVICE MEMBERS BENEFIT FROM THE CONVENTION EXPERIENCE

BY JENNA COOPER

In 2019, I was lucky enough to attend the NJEA Convention. I learned about the convention through the NJEA Preservice Club at Stockton University. I gathered a few of my fellow future teacher friends, and we were excited to take on the convention. Not knowing what to expect, I had planned for my attendance weeks in advance. The first thing I did before going to the convention was find a professional outfit. As a sophomore in college, I had not started any of my observations or student-teaching, so this was the start to my rapidly growing teacher wardrobe. After getting my professional outfit, I knew I was ready to take on the convention.

Two friends and I decided to get to the convention early, in fact a little too early. We were that excited! We started the convention by looking at the schedule for the day and planning out which workshops we wanted to attend. There were so many amazing workshops, so we knew we needed to plan wisely in order to make the most out of the day.

Next, we walked around and looked through all the intriguing exhibits. One of the best parts of going to the convention is meeting current educators and talking with them about the profession. The convention is such a great opportunity to network and ask current teachers questions and receive their insights.

The NJEA Convention had a long list of educational workshops to attend. These workshops were amazing. I was able to attend a workshop called How To Land A Job. This workshop showed us resumes, taught us how to apply to teaching jobs, what to look for in a job, and more. In just two hours, I felt like I could take on the world once I graduated. Another workshop I attended was on educational technology. At this workshop, a current middle school social studies teacher shared with us his love for educational technology and how to use it in the classroom. During this I also got to test out current types of educational technology that could one day be used in my classroom.

While at the convention, I also had the opportunity to attend the NJEA Preservice Power Lunch. This was an incredible experience to meet more future educators from all over New Jersey. We discussed the education programs at our colleges and universities, and I learned more about what it means to be a NJEA Preservice member.

Speaking of lunch, after attending the NJEA Preservice lunch I attended another lunch for current and graduated Stockton students—needless to say no one leaves the convention hungry. At this lunch, I was able to meet students who had finished the education program at Stockton. It was amazing to hear the advice from other students who had graduated. I was also able to speak with Stockton University's field director for education. From this, I was able to learn more about how field placements work.

“

One of the best parts of going to the convention is meeting current educators and talking with them about the profession.

If I could give words of advice for anyone looking to attend this year's convention it would be:

1. Dress to impress. You never know who you will meet or what opportunities it will bring you. You also never know if someone will take a picture of you for the convention's Facebook page. My friends and I ended up making the convention's page!
2. Wear comfortable shoes. There was so much more walking than I ever expected.
3. Attend as many workshops as you can. These are free opportunities to learn such valuable information and get certificates for them.
4. Meet as many educators as you can and ask them questions.
5. Get a free NJEA tote bag because you will leave the convention with a plethora of resources and a new reusable bag perfect for grocery shopping.

Although last year's convention was virtual, in 2021 the convention will be both online and in person. I am beyond excited to be able to attend another NJEA Convention in person. This year's convention will be held Nov. 4-5 and includes keynote speakers Henry Louis Gates Jr., Sonia Manzano, Eric Liu and Bill Nye. 🍷



njea | 2021
convention
EQUITY • JUSTICE • LEARNING

Jenna Cooper is a senior at Stockton University.

SEL, difficult observances, and GSAs/QSAs

by Amy Moran, Ph. D. & Kate Okeson

This month's column focuses on the "rainbow connection" between SEL competencies and their usefulness for approaching sensitive topics and important concerns in the month of November.

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which students of all ages acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.

The NJDOE adopted five SEL competencies in 2017, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills. These competencies are especially significant when we look at marginalized populations such as LGBTQIA+ youth. Let's focus on the power of social awareness, but we may just as easily call it *empathy*.

What skills contribute to social awareness?

- Recognizing social, verbal and physical cues to understand how others feel.
- Listening and acknowledging others' perspectives.
- Showing concern for others' feelings and demonstrating compassion.
- Identifying diverse social norms, including those that are unjust.
- Caring about and contributing to the well-being of family, friends, school, the environment, and the greater good.

Empathy is important when talking about LGBTQIA+ topics and people. Lack of familiarity with and fewer positive representations of LGBTQIA+ people are related to an empathy deficit and an increase in biases towards LGBTQIA+ folks. Improving outcomes for our students means we need to show each other empathy—with no exception.

So why talk about SEL this month? November presents us with opportunities to activate and deepen our own and students' SEL competencies—including **Transgender Awareness Week**, **Indigenous Peoples' Month** and **World AIDS Day**. Importantly, SEL competencies help us develop capacity to acknowledge, appreciate and honor experiences we may not share with people who happen to be different from us, be they transgender, Indigenous, or impacted by HIV/AIDS.

Transgender Awareness Week (Nov. 13-19) is an opportunity to raise community consciousness about who transgender people are, share experiences, and prevent discrimination and violence against this community. It culminates with Transgender Day of Remembrance (TDOR) on Nov. 20, during which people honor the lives of transgender people who were lost to anti-trans violence that year.

While Transgender Awareness Week presents multiple opportunities for education, TDOR warrants special sensitivity. In a high school GSA meeting, a 15-year-old Dominican trans girl described not imagining living to be 35 years old. She didn't see relevant examples of adult trans people like herself but saw many news reports of transgender women of color who died by homicide.

Educators can activate SEL competencies such as recognizing unjust social norms or learning things that help students become more empathetic, while contextualizing events that are devastating to young people. With those skills we can honor transgender people and their gifts to us, collectively mourn unrealized futures, and responsibly educate ourselves and *all* our students about transgender issues that warrant our support and celebration, as allies and co-conspirators for safety and justice for transgender people.

As we observe **Indigenous Peoples' Month** and approach Thanksgiving—a holiday that is fraught for Indigenous and First Nations people in North America—we have the opportunity to learn and teach about the multiple heritages of Indigenous people in our area and beyond, and to teach about myriad historical events in our nation that ask us to contend with our country's complicated and sometimes cruel past.

SEL competencies help us as we learn, for example, about the hundreds of Native children who died and were buried in unmarked graves at residential schools in the U.S. and Canada where they were sent after being forcibly taken from their families as part of a racist, assimilationist agenda. SEL competencies also provide a foundation from which we can learn about First Nations communities, acknowledge the original inhabitants of the lands we now occupy, and learn from the myriad artistic, cultural and ecological wisdoms that Indigenous people have developed and continue to evolve. We can also learn more about Two-Spirit and Indigiqueer people and identities this month and *all year long!*

November is immediately followed by **World AIDS Day** on Dec. 1, when we show support for those living with HIV, remember those who died of AIDS-related illnesses, and acknowledge the



Jeffrey Gibson's work on display at Seattle Art Museum. Photo by Jessica Goehring.

devastating impact AIDS has had on the queer community. It also allows us to analyze evolving public health policies and to honor the brilliant resistance, resilience, organizing and activism that queer people engaged in throughout the mid-eighties and beyond. In fact, AIDS activism uniquely informed public health officials' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic some 30 years later.

Two-Spirit and Indigiqueer people may find themselves at the intersections of these three observations, while others may find themselves uncertain about why these observances matter. During November, we can lean on our SEL competencies, practicing empathy toward ourselves and offering it generously to others.

While whole-school acknowledgements and in-class explorations of **Transgender Awareness Week**, **Indigenous Peoples' Month**, and **World AIDS Day** are important, November also offers the opportunity to leverage the visibility and participation of your GSA/QSA (Gay-Straight Alliance, Gender-Sexuality Alliance, Queer Student Alliance).

If your school already has an active GSA/QSA, do a quick SEL-related inventory:

- Do you discuss current events around LGBTQIA+ issues?
- Do those discussions include the intersections of multiple identities?
- Do you hold social events where members meet new students?
- Do your students share experiences in hopes of improving things at school?

If you'd like to deepen your SEL focus, try these:

- Create an affinity group between a GSA/QSA and another club or class at school to discuss current events that feel close to them, such as the November observances or, perhaps, queer issues at the Olympics or professional athletes who have recently come out.
- Work with the art classes or clubs to design a poster campaign around pronoun awareness.
- Create and share a Mindfulness Minute with health classes or other clubs and encouraging students to use that skill to "think before they speak."

GSAs/QSAs are a powerful tool with the capacity to reach beyond one-on-one support to provide education, create affinity groups, and develop a sense of activism in your school.

Please visit the resource page (QR code) for more information and—as always—we welcome your input and feedback at rainbowconnectionjea@gmail.com. 📧

Heads-up for school counselors

As a number of holidays approach, remember that in most cases our students are separated from school for longer than a weekend. School offers connection and social contact, and even with access to friends, some students go home to less than accepting households and experience disproportionate stress when "on break." We can help LGBTQIA+ kids plan for these challenges by identifying useful coping strategies in advance. Coping can be taking a nap, texting with a friend, or grabbing a snack and streaming something that feels good and authentic.

Brian Clyburn, school counselor at Columbia High School in South Orange-Maplewood, says, "Many LGBTQIA+ teens navigate through spaces and family situations during the holidays that aren't ideal for their sense of safety and security. Perhaps their only sense of community and support are at school with peers they confide in and trust. I would encourage them to stay connected and check in frequently with their inner circle. Those who are part of supportive family environments might consider "sharing" that support with a friend. Sometimes just knowing that there's a safe space to retreat to for a few hours at a time makes a huge difference."

CELEBRATE!

Jeffrey A. Gibson (born March 31, 1972) is a gay, Mississippi Choctaw-Cherokee painter and sculptor living and working in the United States. His work addresses the many aspects of his intersecting identity and is a vibrant place to start conversation in the classroom about traditions, materials, representation and meaning.

Visibility matters in media!

Reservation Dogs is a new series on Hulu about four Indigenous teens trying to leave their rural Oklahoma home. Queer-positivity is present throughout as the character Cheese introduces himself and his pronouns in a scene with strangers, and Willie Jack holds tough as a confident butch/masculine-of-center young woman who doesn't suffer fools. Devery Jacobs, the actor who plays Elora is a queer-identified person who will join the *Reservation Dogs* writing team, along with other queer contributors behind the camera, including several gay writers and a trans director.

Growing Up Trans: In Our Own Words (edited by Kate Fry and Lindsay Herriot). This 2021 collection shares stories, essays, art and poetry created by trans youth aged 11 to 18. In their own words, the works illustrate the trans experience through childhood, family and daily life, school, their bodies and mental health. It's a toolkit for all young people, transgender or not, about what understanding, acceptance and support for the trans community looks like. The book includes questions and tips on how to be a trans ally.

47,000 Beads by Koja Adeyoha and Angel Adeyoha, illustrated by Holly McGillis. Peyton loves to dance, and especially at pow wow, but her Auntie notices that she's been dancing less and less. When Peyton shares that she just can't be comfortable wearing a dress anymore, Auntie Eyota asks some friends for help to get Peyton what she needs.

Would you like to know more? Use the QR code below for more information about these topics.





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A GUIDE TO NATIONAL DECISION DAY FROM THE SCHOOL COUNSELOR

BY FARIDE HERNANDEZ



Early Career Network

This article serves to honor educators who work outside of the classroom. Here is a glimpse into the life of a school counselor.

Planning National Decision Day is one of the highlights of my school year. Our department at Dover High School starts in December by asking faculty

to wear their alumni gear on scheduled days to get students excited about the college acceptances that will soon be filling their inboxes. It also serves to start getting the idea of “college” in the minds of our younger students.

This past school year was a little different. The pandemic pushed our district to start the year completely remote. When the time came to celebrate the actual event, we had just transitioned to a hybrid model.

As the school year progresses, we ask faculty to start sending pictures of themselves wearing their alumni gear for a slideshow that will be shared with students during the National Decision Day week. We also reach out to Dover High School alumni and ask them for notes and letters to be shared with our seniors. These words and pieces of advice are well received by students because they can often relate with graduates from their own high school.

To incorporate Dover’s three elementary schools and middle school in the National Decision Day celebration, students participate in “Design a Commitment to My Future,” a pledge for students to take action to keep on the path to college. They

can also create “My College Application” as an activity for elementary and middle school students to do during National Decision Day/Week. These drawings or Google Slides are shared via social media and the district or schools’ websites.

National Decision Day or Week, depending on how you decide to celebrate, can culminate in a series of events. Throughout the week leading up to May 1, seniors can take a picture with the social media frame to celebrate their commitment to their postsecondary plans. Although it is sometimes called “College Decision Day,” we invite all seniors to celebrate their plans whether that’s college, the military, technical school, or full-time employment.

We visit classrooms to work with seniors to create mood boards to get them thinking about their future, and to help them visualize their plans. We also have “Being Mindful About Your Future” sessions where we encourage students to think about what they want 10 to 20 years into the future.

In addition, they write a letter to their best friend. In that letter, students describe their life right now, day-to-day routines, goals, likes and dislikes. They also ask questions and make predictions about their future life. Thinking about what the future likely holds helps students decide what course to take in the here-and-now.

To conclude our celebration at Dover, we invite a keynote speaker to address our graduating class. The class of 2021 provided excellent feedback on this past school’s speaker, and it is a tradition we will continue to include.

The resources for running a successful National Decision Day can be found on the Better Make Room website. Better Make Room is a campaign within the Reach Higher Initiative. The resources are invaluable and help schools create wonderful events at their schools. For more information, visit bettermakeroom.org. 🏠

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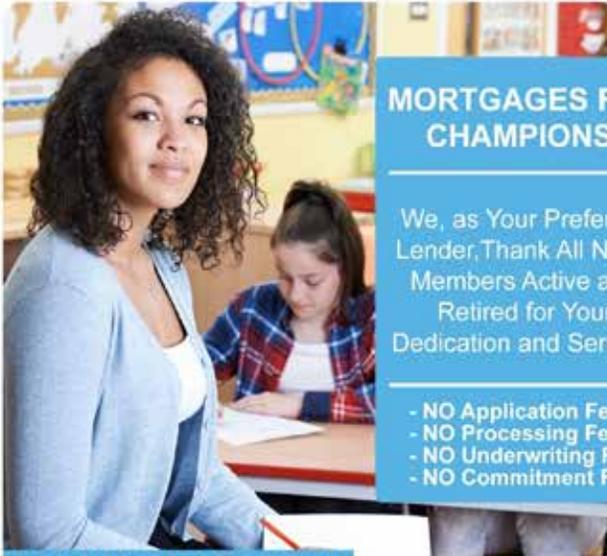
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Faride Hernandez is the dean of students in the Guidance Department at Dover High School and a member of the Dover Education Association. She can be reached at faride.hernandez521@gmail.com.

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NJREA

PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

A NEW ERA BEGINS

NEW NJREA OFFICERS SWORN IN

On Sept. 23, the NJREA kicked off its fall meeting in modern style—via Zoom. Hundreds of NJREA members from around the state joined NJREA leaders, staff and special guests to usher in the 2021-22 advocacy year.

In her final act as outgoing NJREA president, Judy Perkins opened and shared how proud she was to have represented NJREA members over the last four years. NJREA Vice President Steve Beatty then began the swearing in of the new officers, asking each if they would affirm commitment to the service of our members. The new NJREA officer team is NJREA President Joan Wright, First Vice President Kitty Sausa, Second Vice President Ron Burd, Secretary Mary Clements and Treasurer Doriann Dodulik-Swern.

Wright then assumed the meeting and introduced NJREA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson as the new NJREA officer



The NJREA Fall Meeting was held virtually.

Around the counties

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

The **BERGEN COUNTY REA'S** next general membership meeting/luncheon will be held on Thursday, Dec. 14. Should it be held in person, it will be at Seasons in Washington Township, but if COVID protocols deem it necessary, it will be held virtually. In either format, NJREA staff will be on hand to discuss the latest in health benefits news. To attend, call Randi Allshouse at 973-460-1262

Join **CUMBERLAND COUNTY REA** for its holiday meeting/tea on Wednesday, Dec. 8 at the Eastlyn Golf Course in Vineland. NJREA President Sean M. Spiller will be the guest speaker. The cost is \$35. To attend, call Irene Savicky at 856-863-8424.

GLOUCESTER COUNTY REA'S holiday social will be held on Tuesday, Dec. 7 at Four Star Event Catering in Wenonah. The cost is \$25. To attend, call Candy Zachowski at 570-710-5514.

The **HUDSON COUNTY REA** will host its holiday brunch on Wednesday, Dec. 1 at the Chart House in Weehawken. NJREA President Joan Wright will be the guest speaker. The cost is \$49. To attend, Donna Middlebrooks at 973-610-7129.

MONMOUTH COUNTY REA welcomes you to its holiday meeting/luncheon on Tuesday, Dec. 14 at Knob Hill in Manalapan. The cost is \$34. To attend, call Sue Shrott at 732-995-7754.

The **SALEM COUNTY REA WILL** hold its holiday meeting/luncheon on Monday, Dec. 13 at the Woodstown Diner in Woodstown. The Woodstown High School Chamber Choir will be the entertainment. The cost is \$17. To attend, call Rosemma Ward at 856-467-0782.

Join **SOMERSET COUNTY REA** for its winter meeting/luncheon on Wednesday, Dec. 1 at the Somerville Elks in Bridgewater. The cost is \$21. To attend, call Kathy Kapp at 908-722-7715. 908-319-1995.

WARREN COUNTY REA welcomes you to its meeting/luncheon on Wednesday, Dec. 1 at the Hawk Pointe Golf Club in Washington. Holiday music will be the featured entertainment. The cost is \$35. To attend, call Vicki Rhinehart at 908-319-1995.

liaison to the NJREA, noting her long-time work with retirees. Robertson, a Restorative Justice and English teacher from Montclair, spoke of her gratitude for retirees' efforts throughout the years.

"Thank you for all the work you have done and the differences you have made for students past, present and future," Robertson said. "You have fought for the fairness, dignity, and respect for the profession."

PRIORITIZING PENSIONS AND PAC

NJEA Deputy Director Kevin Kelleher stressed the importance of the upcoming gubernatorial election, noting the role of Gov. Phil Murphy has had in funding our pension system during his term, as well as his efforts to place an additional \$505 million to the fund.

"We need a fully funded pension system and affordable health care, and we won't have that with any other governor," Kelleher declared. "Reelecting Gov. Murphy would help us keep the health benefit plans stable and prescription plans level."

NJREA Political Action Committee Chair Pat Provnick emphasized the need for retirees to continue to donate to PAC. In her remarks, she also discussed the committee's plans to explore automatic deductions as another way in which NJREA members could contribute, in addition to the monies collected at county luncheons and meetings.

CONSTITUTION/BY LAWS UPDATES PASS

NJREA Constitution Committee Chair Mike Kruczek presented the proposed changes to the NJREA Constitution and Bylaws. These changes were published on the NJREA webpage and the September *NJREA Newsletter*. After a lengthy debate, the question was called, and the body voted in the affirmative to make the changes.

ADVOCACY IN ACTION

The National Education Association (NEA) and NEA-Retired's proposal to hold an in-person annual representative assembly in Texas created much angst amongst those in attendance. Many members felt strongly that the conference should be held virtually, expressing on-going concerns about differing COVID protocols throughout the country.

Others noted that any monies saved by hosting a virtual versus in-person conference should be sent to women's rights groups considering Texas's recent reproductive health care measures. Following robust conversation, the voting body in attendance unanimously directed NJREA to send a letter to both the NEA-R and NEA, demanding they hold their conventions virtually and to act on behalf of women's right groups.

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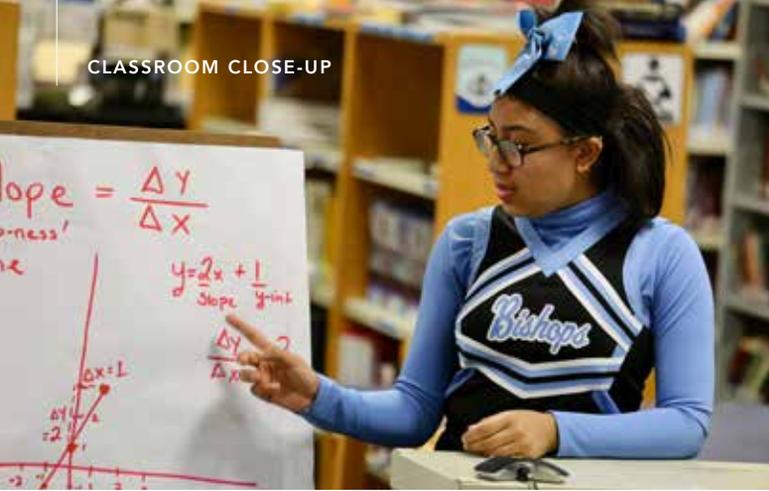
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Classroom Close-up NJ looks back at

Project Ghana

Asbury Park seventh graders exchange ideas, culture and history with students from Ghana. Dr. Martin Luther King teacher David Wronko runs Project Ghana which involves weekly video-conferencing between the two schools. The students demonstrate for each other lessons on math, science and art. The exchange gives students from both countries an opportunity to share their differences, but more importantly, their similarities.

You can view the segment at classroomcloseup.org/project-ghana.



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

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



NOVEMBER & *beyond*

In-person status of any meeting not listed as virtual is subject to change.

NOV
03

WEDNESDAY

NJEA Executive Committee meeting

NOV
10

WEDNESDAY

Teacher Leader Academy Info Session

DEC
13

MONDAY

NEA Board of Directors meeting

NOV
4/5

THURS & FRI

NJEA Convention
In-person and virtual

NOV
12/13

FRI & SAT

NJEA Health and Safety Conference

JAN
07

FRIDAY

Executive Committee
County Presidents
Council meetings

NOV
06

SATURDAY

NJEA Delegate Assembly Meeting

DEC
08

WEDNESDAY

NJEA Executive Committee meeting

JAN
08

SATURDAY

NJEA Delegate Assembly Meeting

for more information go to NJEA.org

njea Local Association Health & Safety Chair Check-ins

SAVE THE DATE

TENTATIVE DATES:
 📅 Jan. 19, 2022
 📅 April 28, 2022

As we navigate another year of public education amid a global pandemic, local association health and safety (H&S) chairs are invited to join quarterly “check-in” meetings. These meetings will provide an opportunity for new information, updates, as well as time for questions and concerns. A Zoom link will be shared with local presidents and H&S chairs two weeks before each meeting.

JOIN US FOR AN OPPORTUNITY TO KEEP UP WITH THE LATEST HEALTH AND SAFETY INFORMATION



What *unites* us

Two strangers are seated next to each other in an airport, or they're standing in the same long line at a supermarket, or they're in the service area waiting room at a car dealership. A few polite words pass between them before they discover they both work in a school. From that point forward the conversation will go on nonstop.

If either of them is accompanied by a spouse, partner or friend, they'll know this is their cue to search for the airport bar, get a taste of the supermarket candy aisle, or breathe in that new car smell in the auto showroom. They learned long ago they won't get a word in edgewise between these new fast friends.

And it doesn't matter if one is a custodian and the other is a teacher. It doesn't matter if one of them works in Phillipsburg while the other works in the Philippines. It doesn't matter if one is a Republican and the other a Democrat. It doesn't even matter if one works in public school while the other works in a private school. Schools are special places, and the people who work in them are proud of the work they do, care deeply about the students they serve, and are keenly interested in others who do the same work.

The NJEA members who led the association's 200K Conversations initiative this past summer recreated that scenario—one phone call at a time. Having dialed 424,554 phone numbers over the course of six weeks, it's likely that at some point in July or August one of NJEA's 98 member-callers rang both your landline and your cellphone. Over 44,000 members answered the phone, and like those strangers at an airport, once they knew they were talking to a genuine NJEA member, not a telemarketer, the conversation flowed freely.

It should not be surprising that 44,000 people from diverse backgrounds with diverse beliefs can so easily fall into long conversations. The truth is that even when members disagree with each other or with an official position taken by NJEA through its democratically elected Delegate Assembly or

Executive Committee, we have more that unites us than divides us.

First and foremost, we believe in the value of education and its essential place in society. In 1848, Horace Mann, the first education secretary in the first state to appoint one—Massachusetts—wrote that education is the great equalizer. That phrase can ring hollow when we consider that, while he was an abolitionist, Mann wrote those words in a state, and nation, whose industrial growth and

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Schools are special places, and the people who work in them are proud of the work they do.

place in the world depended upon the work of enslaved labor farther south. It can continue to ring hollow even in 2021 as we struggle to live up to the spirit of Mann's words.

But the fact that “great equalizer” continues to be quoted even now by educators of all backgrounds, points to our shared faith in the importance of the work we do to build a more equitable society. As educators, we are unified in our belief that all children deserve a great education that enables them to participate fully in our nation's democracy and in their communities, and to provide for themselves and their families.

We are unified in our belief that the

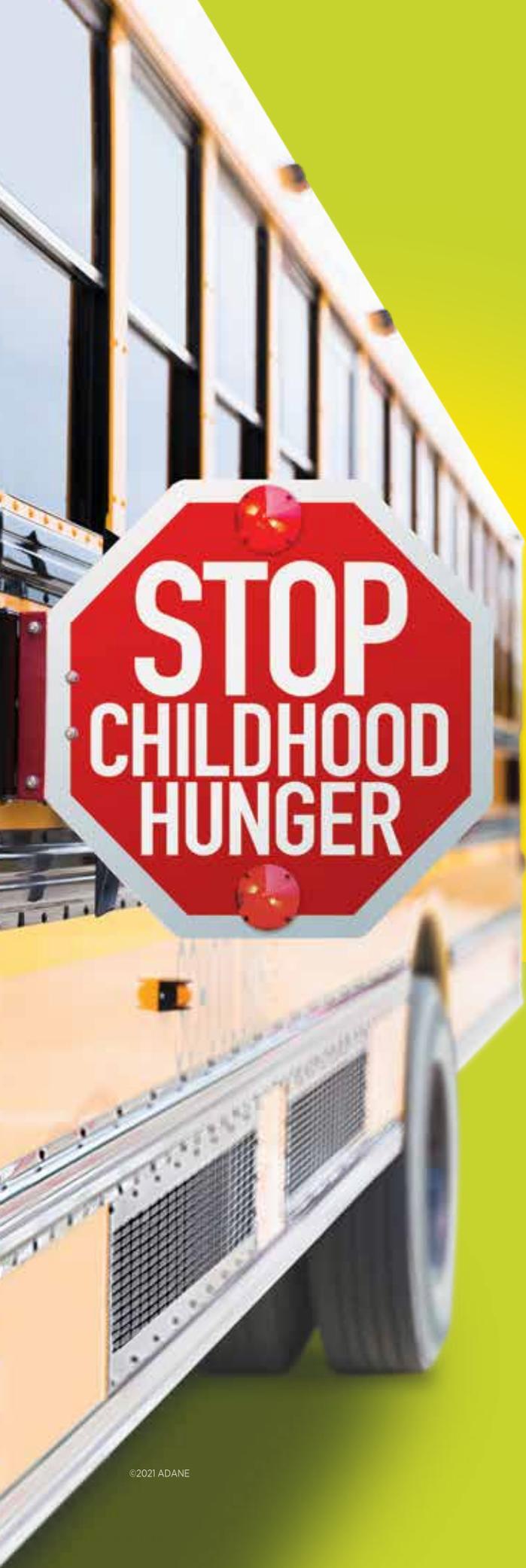
compensation for those who work in our public schools should be competitive so that those who have the most to offer to students are attracted to the work. We are unified in our belief that schools must have the resources they need so that students in our state's poorest communities have the same access to a high-quality education as students in our state's wealthiest communities. We are unified in our belief that students who have greater needs must have access to the additional services and materials they need to learn and grow.

We are unified in our belief that the buildings in which we work must be safe and healthy for us and for our students, and that students are safe as they travel to and from school.

We are unified in our belief that students need more than one great teacher working in isolation at the head of the classroom to be successful. Students need paraprofessionals, librarians, cafeteria workers, teachers of the arts and physical education, counselors, child study teams, nurses, speech therapists, custodians, school secretaries, administrators, bus drivers and transportation aides, and everyone else on the school team to provide a scaffold of support around the student.

The 31 words of NJEA's mission, and the 25 words of NJEA's vision succinctly illustrate what unifies members: “The mission of the New Jersey Education Association is to advance and protect the rights, benefits, and interest of members, and promote a quality system of public education for all students,” and “The New Jersey Education Association is a diverse, democratic organization working to create an optimal environment to achieve excellence in public education in New Jersey.”

While NJEA members may disagree passionately on the paths that will take us to the places where our mission and vision lead, we are united in our commitment to work together to get there. 🌱



With school meals, the road is clear for academic success.

Daily nutrition is integral to learning.

As students finally GO back to school, efforts to STOP childhood hunger have never been more important.

To be focused and ready to learn, students across New Jersey need the essential nutrition provided by school meals. Your support ensures consistent meal access for every student and that can make all the difference in their academic success.

American Dairy Association North East stands behind all school professionals, and we're always here to help remove roadblocks to learning.

For more information, please contact us at:

AmericanDairy.com • schools@milk4u.org



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Bring your innovative ideas to life with an

NJEA HIPP GRANT

HELP YOUR STUDENTS ACHIEVE GREATNESS!



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in Education

*Grants of \$500 to \$10,000 are available from
the NJEA Frederick L. Hipp Foundation
for Excellence in Education.*



Visit njea.org/Hipp for a grant application and tips for applying.

APPLICATION DEADLINE IS MARCH 1, 2022.