

REVIEW



an education and advocacy resource



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njea LGBTQIA+ Issues Conference

June 3-4, 2022

HILTON EAST BRUNSWICK • 3 TOWER CENTER BLVD • EAST BRUNSWICK, NJ

Agenda

Friday

- 4 p.m. Registration
- 6 p.m. Dinner
- 7 p.m. Welcome
- 7:30 p.m. Out at Work: Queer Voices In and Out of the Classroom
- 8:30 p.m. Entertainment / Networking

Saturday

- 7:30 a.m. Breakfast
- 9 a.m. Session 1
- 10:30 a.m. Break
- 11 a.m. Session 2
- 12:30 p.m. Lunch

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTIONS:

Registration required by May 18, 2022.

1. LGBTQIA+: An Overview

Understanding sexual orientation and gender identity is key to reaching non-conforming students and providing a safe and successful learning environment. This learning experience will help educators develop an appreciation of the role issues of orientation and identity play in the lives of our students and develop strategies to support those students in their learning.

2. Inclusive ELA Instruction

This workshop will look at using our students' identity to shape our ELA instruction to create a safe and brave space. Join me as we reflect on our instructional practice and plan towards creating a more inclusive classroom experience for all students in the English Language Arts classroom. The goal of this workshop is to help educators create a learning environment that helps foster a love of reading and writing through stories and writing experiences that reflect and validate students' identities and life experiences.

3. How to be a better ally to the LGBTQIA+ Community

Allyship is a necessary element in a conversation about justice for every identity that presents in the classroom. This session will lead participants in conversation about how cis-/het- allies might be in solidarity with students, families and colleagues seeking to be seen and valued in diverse learning environments. Participants will have opportunities to collaborate in designing instruction that imagines the "lavender expanse" that considers the various ways identity shapes teaching and learning.

4. Legal Issues Around Supporting Queer Students and Staff

This session will focus on legal issues educators face when creating safe environments for themselves and their students.

5. Supporting Trans Students

Transgender, gender-fluid, and gender non-conforming students often challenge us to rethink established culture and norms. The recent passage of the Transgender Student Bill of Rights requires school districts to establish certain policies to support these students. This workshop will focus on developing a better understanding of gender identity and how to develop an affirming school culture that supports all students.

6. Advocating for Queer Professional Learning

What does high quality professional learning on LGBTQ+ issues look like? Where can I find the best resources for the learner? How do I advocate for professional development for my colleagues? What do I do when I meet resistance? Join a hosted conversation to explore these topics with members from around the state who are asking the same questions.

7. MOC LGBTQIA+ Roundtable

What does it mean to be brown and queer in 2022? How do we navigate the challenges facing us because of how we look vs. those that we love? Join us for an interactive roundtable discussion on the complexities and opportunities facing MOC LGBTQIA+.

8. LGBTQIA+ Politics

For some, politics is a scary word ... but it does not have to be. In this session we will explore the ways in which politics has an impact on the lives of LGBTQIA+ folks in and out of the classroom. We will brainstorm ways that you can better understand our political system to help make our schools a safer place for our LGBTQIA+ students and members.

9. NJEA & You: Creating a More Perfect (& Queer) Union

We will start this session learning about the queer history of NJEA followed by a hosted conversation about what NJEA does for its queer members and, moving forward, what NJEA still needs to do for them to make our union more perfect and queer.

10. LGBTQIA+ Curriculum Inclusion

In this session you will learn ways to infuse LGBTQIA+ content into your lesson satisfying the new curriculum mandate. This session will be led by folks at Make It Better for Youth who helped to implement and carry out a pilot study on how to do a deep dive into LGBTQIA curriculum inclusion.

11. Gender Sexuality Alliances

Want to know how to start a GSA in your school? Need ideas for activities that will help grow your current GSA? This session will cover all of that and more!

Visit njea.org/LGBTQIA for registration details.

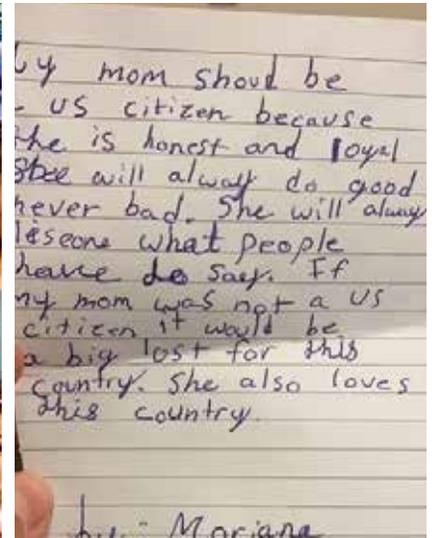
Contact Carolyn Thompson (cthompson@njea.org) with any questions.

Erika Vélez, a Spanish teacher and a member of the **Sussex-Wantage Education Association**, is congratulated by Rep. Josh Gottheimer (D-5) on becoming a U.S. Citizen. Vélez was born in a fishing village on the coast of Ecuador. Her parents left for the U.S. when she was two years old. She remained behind with her grandmother for eight years while her parents prepared a home for her in the U.S.

"As it turns out, my parents' American Dream came true. Their dream was not even theirs. It was for my sister and me," Vélez wrote to her colleagues at C.E. Lawrence School. "They wanted my sister and me to go to college, to have a family, to have a house and to have liberty to be whoever we wanted to be."

In addition to letters from her colleagues to immigration officers supporting Vélez's citizenship, her daughter slipped a note in her passport to be read by the officer.

From left: Gottheimer, Vélez, Vélez's friend Sofie Coulibaly, and Vélez's mother Betty Vélez.



Members of **Bridgewater-Raritan Transportation Association** proudly display their association banner and their new shirts—embossed with a logo designed by NJEA Communications, on shirts ordered through Logo Gear by Jackie in Bridgewater.

From left: Domenica Accreditato, Martha Ducuara, BRTA President Maria Reed, and Olga Garcia. The local association was featured in the March edition of the *NJEA Review*. You can read their story at njea.org/we-are-brta.

FEATURES



22

22 | WHAT DO SUPERHEROES LIKE TO READ?

If any high school in New Jersey looks like the lair of superheroes, it's Phillipsburg High School. Perched on a hill high above the Delaware River, it commands a view of the surrounding New Jersey and Pennsylvania countryside for miles. And it is here that Faith Roncoroni, 2021-22 Warren County Teacher of the Year, uses what was once considered an unconventional medium to challenge perspectives, engage her students and expand whose stories get told in a typical English classroom.

BY KATHRYN COULIBALY



26

26 | EVOLUTION OF A TEACHER

During my first 15 years as an educator, I taught science based on how I was taught when I was a student: students read the chapter, I would review and provide additional information through a lecture and PowerPoint, students took a quiz, we reviewed the end of chapter questions, and students took a multiple-choice test—rinse and repeat, unit after unit. But when my wife became the STEM supervisor in her district, our discussions changed my way of teaching in my district.

BY DENNIS DAGOUNIS



28

28 | STUDENT TEACHING IN A PANDEMIC

Student teaching is challenging even in the best of circumstances. But preservice educators whose clinical experience fell after March 2020 got more than they signed up for when they first decided to pursue teacher certification. A student teacher and a mentor teacher share their experiences working together during the pandemic.

BY KIMBERLY COTE AND DIONNA GONNELLA



32

32 | HONORING OUR VETERANS

With funding from an NJEA Frederick L. Hipp Foundation for Excellence in Education grant as well as local funds, Pascack Valley High School teacher Leah Jerome worked with the school's History Club to research current service members, veterans and fallen heroes who are alumni of the school. Their names and images are displayed in the school and their stories remembered.

BY KATHRYN COULIBALY



34 | THE ENDLESS WAR

A high school Latin teacher who also served in Iraq reflects on the connections between serving in a war zone and teaching in the midst of a pandemic.

BY KEITH MASSEY

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Dignity and respect

The number \$500 million



“Building Better Schools” federal infrastructure funds dedicated by the Biden administration to improve indoor air quality and energy efficiency in our nation’s school buildings.

Source: Fact Sheet: The Biden-Harris Action Plan for Building Better School Infrastructure. (bit.ly/3jHwzIH)



GOOD NEWS

NJ is #1 in the nation for education

The Annie E. Casey Foundation ranks New Jersey public schools first in the nation for their education of children.

Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation. Kids Count 2020 Data Book: State Trends in Child Well-Being. 2020. (bit.ly/3uGScJ5)



On the cover



Faith Roncoroni, a Philipsburg High School Teacher and 2021-22 Warren County Teacher of the Year, uses what was once considered an unconventional medium to challenge perspectives, engage her students and expand whose stories get told in a typical English classroom.

PHOTO BY Kathryn Coulibaly

REVIEW



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 REGION 17...Morris Co.973-515-0101... Douglas Finkel, Vickie Walsh, John Williams
 REGION 19...Hudson Co.-North201-861-1266... Thomas DeSocio, Edward Stevens
 REGION 20...Hudson Co.-South201-653-6634... Kevin McHale, Dan Suarez
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PRESIDENT'S *Message*

Honoring service and sacrifice

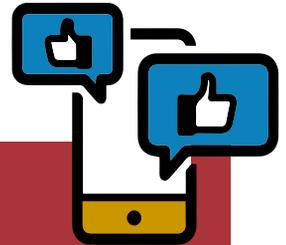
For more than 150 years, on what is now known as Memorial Day, American communities have honored the sacrifices of military personnel who gave their lives in service to their country.

Honoring those who gave everything in order to preserve our freedom is one of our most sacred obligations and serves to remind us of the cost of maintaining our freedom. But Memorial Day, which falls on the last Monday of May, is only one day out of the year. It seems insufficient for the debt we owe to them. So Pascack Valley history teacher Leah Jerome found a way to make honoring fallen heroes and service members a near-daily occurrence for her school community.

In this month's article, "Honoring Our Veterans," Jerome shares how she was inspired to create a living history wall with photographs of currently serving alumni, veterans, and fallen heroes to help her students, as well as staff and community members, understand, appreciate and honor service members.

Jerome was inspired by the alumni service member displays she saw while visiting schools as the 2019-20 Bergen County Teacher of the Year, and she eagerly drew on her colleagues' advice to develop a plan for the wall with her students. Funding for the wall was provided in part through the NJEA Frederick L. Hipp Grant for Excellence in Education, which funds grants for New Jersey educators from \$500 to \$10,000.

Recognizing our debt to service members is just one of the many bonds we share as citizens and educators. Working together, we are creating school communities that build connection and opportunities for every member to feel valued and encouraged to share their skills and talents.



SEAN M. SPILLER

Instagram

@SpillerforNJEA: It was an honor to celebrate two incredible school nurses, Sheila Caldwell and Cynthia Samuel, at the 14th Annual Diva and Don Gala for the Institute of Nurses. These two incredible NJEA members embody the spirit of our union—they are compassionate, courageous, and powerful. Dedicated school nurses like Sheila and Cynthia have kept our schools thriving throughout the COVID-19 pandemic! #WeAreNJEA #SchoolNurses

On April 8, NJEA President Sean M. Spiller shared photos from the 14th Annual Diva and Don Gala for the Institute of Nurses event. Caldwell and Samuel were honored at the annual event, Spiller posted photos of the members accepting their awards, as well as a few selfies with the honorees.

STEVE BEATTY

Facebook

@SteveBeattyNJEA: Membership is the lifeblood of our great organization, and we must be eternally vigilant in meeting potential members where they are. Today, I had the pleasure of going to visit the Stratford Education Association, joining my colleagues from Region 3 and talking to groups of paraprofessionals about joining the NJEA. Engaging on the issues and benefits of membership is something we must always do, especially with our ESP brothers and sisters. For not only do we provide great benefit to them as an organization, but their belonging to the NJEA and engaging around our collective work has and always will be paramount to our success. #LoveOurESPs #TogetherWeareStronger

On April 6, NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty reflected on the importance of membership after having spent the day with the members of the Stratford Education Association and talking with potential NJEA members about the importance of joining the union.

PETAL ROBERTSON

Facebook

@PetalForNJEA: I'm ending my Sunday with a heart still full of love and appreciation for all the women of NJEA. You all are inspiring, caring, and relentless. Not to mention, the best union family I could ever dream of. Let's keep this energy going into the new week. I have to add some love for our wonderful, deserving honorees: Robin Cogan, Sue Maurer, Damita White-Morris, Marijean Andl, Carmen Torres, and Sharon Allen. Special thank you to KBT Interiors, Lisa Veit, Meredith Barnes, Lisa Logan-Leach, T.E. and Fatimah Hayes for bearing with me and helping bring my vision to reality. Sisterhood will forever sustain me. #NJEA #WomensHistoryMonth

On March 27, NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson shared a video highlighting some stand-out moments from the first-ever NJEA Celebration of Women. Along with the video, Robertson shared a heartfelt reflection on the historic event as well as finding time to honor all those women who had been recognized at the event.

OFFICERS ONLINE

KNOW. LEAD. ACT.

MEMBERSHIP CHAIRS: USE POTENTIAL MEMBER REPORTING FORM

The Workplace Democracy Enhancement Act (WDEA), which became state law on May 18, 2018, requires boards of education to send local associations information about their respective members and potential members.

Specifically, it requires public employers to provide—within 10 calendar days of hiring—the organization the following information about a new employee:

- Name
- Job title
- Worksite location
- Home address
- Work telephone number
- Date of hire
- Work email address
- Any personal email address and home and personal cellular telephone numbers on file with the public employer.

Additionally, this information should be supplied to the association for all negotiation unit members every 120 days. Preferably September, January and June.

NJEA requests that each month you have new employees, submit a Potential Member Reporting form, with the appropriate information. This form will be used to help keep your membership and potential membership records up-to-date. This form can be found on njea.org. Slide over to “My NJEA,” click on “Documents” and the select “Forms.”

NONTENURED? KNOW YOUR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

By May 15, all nontenured teachers must be notified of reemployment. If the school board fails to notify nontenured teachers, they are entitled to continued employment for the next year.

In addition, many locally negotiated contracts include similar requirements for educational support professionals (ESP).

If a nontenured teacher wishes to accept employment, they must notify the board in writing on or before June 1. ESP staff members should consult their collective bargaining agreements to determine if they have similar response requirements.

Members who have been notified of their nonrenewal should contact their local president.

DELEGATE ASSEMBLY ELECTS NEA DIRECTORS

Susan McBride of Bergen County was reelected for a second three-year term as an NEA State Director to the NEA Board of Directors at the March 19 meeting of the NJEA Delegate Assembly (D.A.). Stacy Yanko of Sussex County and Christopher Cannella of Essex County were elected to their first terms.

Temika Langston-Hughes of Cumberland County was elected as an NEA Director-alternate.

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

NJEA has nine NEA State Directors who serve three-year terms. Typically, an election is held for three of New Jersey’s seats on the board every March. In addition, Ashanti Rankin of Cumberland County is in his second term as an NEA Director in an ESP-at-large position. At-large positions are elected at the NEA RA by delegates from across the nation. Langston-Myers is also currently serving out an unexpired ESP-at-large term on the NEA Board of Directors to which she was appointed by NEA President Becky Pringle.

Delegates also approved the affiliation of a new local association: the Bloomingdale Paraprofessionals Education Association.

CHANGING SCHOOL DISTRICTS? SALARY GUIDE PLACEMENT IS NEGOTIABLE

Did you know that placement on a salary guide is negotiable for members moving from one school district to another?

According to Statute 18A: 29-9, “Whenever a person shall thereafter accept office, position, or employment as a member in any school district of this state, his initial place on the salary schedule shall be at such point as may be agreed upon by the member and the employing board of education.”

In other words, if you are leaving School District A for School District B, you have the right to negotiate placement on your new salary guide with the board of education. Some locals have contract language to this effect. Contracts may require the board to give full credit to an employee moving from one district to another while other contracts may spell out limitations.

If you are accepting employment in a different school district, you may want to contact the local president there before you agree on salary guide placement.

APPLICATIONS OPEN FOR HUMAN AND CIVIL RIGHTS CADRE

As equity-minded educator unionists, we stand on the shoulders of giants. Following in their footsteps we are made stronger through the knowledge we gain and the training we receive.

NJEA, with roots cultivated by NEA over many years, is launching our new Human and Civil Rights (HCR) Cadre. Formerly known as the Equity Alliance Cadre or Minority Leadership Training Cadre, a long line of cadre trainers has over time built the foundation for this most recent incarnation of the cadre.

The NJEA Office of Human and Civil Rights, Equity and Governance is now accepting applications from NJEA members who have demonstrated a deep commitment to advance the association's movement for racial, social and economic justice. The application deadline is May 31, 2022 at 5 p.m. (Eastern Daylight Time). All candidates will be notified of the selections by June 15, 2022.

Selected candidates will embark a learning and leadership journey to sharpen their skills as highly trained facilitators. The journey will empower those who become part of the HCR Cadre to conduct HCR trainings with members in local and county associations across the state.

All candidates who chose to apply must:

1. Select a specialty pathway (see below).
2. Prepare and submit an application.
3. Confirm their availability for a mandatory retreat.

Candidates must select one of the following specialty pathways:

Healers – Those who select this pathway will embark on a three-year commitment to be trained in restorative justice practices (RJP) with the aspirational goal of supporting local and county affiliates in establishing RJP in their respective schools and communities.

Organizers – Those who select this pathway will be trained in “Understanding Power” by Eric Liu, “Mapping My Role in the Social Change Ecosystem” by Deepa Iyer, and the “Member Action Playbook (MAP)” created by our REAL Team Six equity organizers.

Practitioners – Those who select this pathway will be trained and help co-create professional learning experiences that utilize Dr. Tara Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) framework, which aims to uproot implicit bias and plant seeds of asset-based thinking.

Elected Leaders – Those who select this pathway will be trained in the organizational structure of our union and the history of ethnic-minority leadership in our union. Additionally, we will sharpen participants' skills in equity policy analysis and platform development.

Find the application at njea.org/hcr-cadre-application.

For questions, email Gabriel A. Tanglao at gtanglao@njea.org.

WHERE ARE THE ELECTION RESULTS?

While NJEA elections were held in April for representatives to the NJEA Executive Committee, NJEA Delegate Assembly, and NEA Representative Assembly, as well as for positions as NJEA Delegate Assembly-Alternates, the process concluded after press time for this edition of the *NJEA Review*.

Election results will be posted on njea.org after the Elections Committee certifies the election results. The committee will meet to certify the results on April 28.

CLEARING THE RECORD



In the April 2022 edition of the *NJEA Review*, the Union County Educational Support Professional of the Year was misidentified. While her photograph was correct, the caption should have read, “Union County, Kelly Osborne, Paraeducator, Union Township Education Association.”

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.

FIVE STEPS TO PROTECT YOUR DIGITAL FOOTPRINT

1. **Hide My Email** is a service that lets you keep your personal email address private whether you're creating a new account with an app, signing up for a newsletter online, or sending an email on iOS devices. Android users can utilize Firefox Relay, SimpleLogin and Addymanager to use this feature.
2. When setting up financial accounts **NEVER** answer the security questions honestly. Security questions are neither secure nor reliable enough to be used as a recovery mechanism.
3. **Private Relay** is a tool on iOS devices that hides your IP address and browsing activity in Safari and protects your unencrypted internet traffic.
4. **Explore Duck Duck Go**. This internet search engine emphasizes protecting searchers' privacy and avoiding the filter bubble of personalized search results. DuckDuckGo does not show search results from content farms email.
5. Consider adding an extra layer of protection by adding a **Virtual Private Networking (VPN) Tool**. A VPN, or virtual private network, is a secure tunnel between your device and the internet. VPNs protect you from online snooping, interference, and censorship.

Submitted by Sabina A. Ellis, chair of the NJEA Technology Committee Chair and a data manager in South Orange-Maplewood School District, the Essex County EA Public Relations chair and webmaster, and an NJEA MOC Influencer.

COOL STUFF



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.



SOMERSET PATRIOTS AND NJEA TO HONOR A+ EDUCATORS

The A+ Educator program is designed to recognize the work of teachers and educational support professionals (ESPs) who provide an inclusive learning environment and engaging instruction, encourage lifelong learning, and inspire a passion for education beyond the classroom.

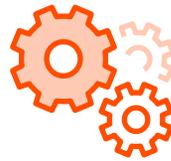
The Patriots and NJEA are seeking nominations through the team's website at milb.com/somerset/fans/contests. In order to be eligible, educators must work at a public school in Somerset, Middlesex, Union, Hunterdon, or Morris counties.

Nominations continue until June 10.

Twenty-five teachers and ESPs will be selected by judges and honored on the Patriots website, social media platforms, at TD Bank Ballpark, and throughout the season. The selected educators will receive four complimentary tickets to enjoy a 2022 Patriots game.

STUTTERING AWARENESS WEEK IS MAY 9-15

To someone who stutters, it is easier done than said. As the Stuttering Foundation notes, this play on words summarizes how the fear of speaking keeps many people from being heard. The foundation offers resources for those who stutter, their parents and their teachers. For more information visit stutteringhelp.org.



STUDENT MAKER SUMMER CAMPS

The Rutgers Center for Mathematics, Science, and Computer Education is offering weeklong Makerspace Camps for middle (grades 6-8) and high school students (grades 9-12). Campers will choose from a variety of problems to solve with the goal of designing and engineering an innovative product or system. Using the engineering design process and makerspace tools such as 3-D printers, laser cutters, and CNC machines, students will create Shark Tank-like pitches.

The high school camp runs Aug. 1-5. The middle school camp runs Aug. 8-12. Both begin at 9 a.m. and conclude at 4 p.m. each day. Participants bring their own lunch.

For more information, including cost and registration, visit cmsce.rutgers.edu/student-maker-summer-camps.



GAME-U SEEKS AFTER-SCHOOL REMOTE TECH INSTRUCTOR

Game-U, an after-school game design, coding, and robotics program, is seeking a part-time remote technology instructor. The technology instructor will teach private lessons within the Microsoft Office Suite including basic computer skills, resume building and internet safety for students enrolled in Game-U's Accelerate Program. The Accelerate Program is designed to teach students of all abilities, including those who have intellectual disabilities. The technology instructor may **not** use school district equipment, school district internet connectivity, or be on school district property while working for Game-U.

Skills needed:

- Experience with Microsoft Office Curriculum
- Teaching experience with lesson plan creation
- Comfortable and effective interacting with and teaching students that have unique abilities

Class hours are generally scheduled between 4 p.m. and 7 p.m. Monday through Friday, with some weekend hours. Candidates may apply for any available days that best meet their needs and availability.

For more information, write to jobs@game-u.com.



RISE UP IN HOPE



CONFERENCES
Hyatt Regency New Brunswick

July 13, 2022

NJEA Conference for Hope and Healing

Join us for a day of **Hope and Healing** sponsored by NJEA in partnership with **Alisha De Lorenzo** and **KYDS** Co-Founders, Rodney Salomon and Mychal Mills. This full day immersion will unite an embodied experience of movement, mindfulness, breathwork, sound healing and transformational self-inquiry with an understanding of the inner work required to create healing-centered and just educational communities.

July 14, 2022

NJEA Radical Imagination Summit for Educators

NJEA's Radical Imagination Summit for Educators (RISE) is back! Join us for a day of exploration that infuses the power of poetry, movement, music and community cultural wealth. In this space, we are invited to stretch our radical imagination around what is possible when we, together, envision and build toward a more just, equitable and liberatory public education system.

RADICAL - affecting the fundamental nature of something; far-reaching
IMAGINATION - the ability of the mind to be creative or resourceful
SUMMIT - top; apex; the highest point; the topmost level attainable
EDUCATORS - K-12 public school teachers and education support professionals

Register here: njea.org/riseinhope

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NJEA Report

NJEA celebrates women in education

By Rodney Lane

On March 26, NJEA held its first ever Celebration of Women Luncheon at the Grand Marquis in Old Bridge. The event was organized by NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson and the NJEA Women in Education Committee. Over 250 members attended the extravaganza hosted by Robertson and NJEA UniServ Field Representative Fatima Hayes.

The gala honored influential women who have helped our state's public schools and our union serve as models of excellence in the nation. Prior to entering the main hall, NJEA members were greeted with a reception that included a live band featuring a female saxophone player and vendors predominantly represented by women-owned businesses and organizations. "Table centerpieces included photos of and quotes by famous women."

The theme of the celebration was "A Woman's Place." Six women were honored for their work in health, leadership, legislation and service.

The event opened with the nationally recognized Nu Theta Omega Step Team. Step dancing involves clapping, stomping and making noise to produce a beat as dancers perform in unison. The performers set the tone and energy for the afternoon.

Lauren Spiller, a teacher and proud Wayne Education Association member, was among several speakers who delivered remarks at the event.

"Today the list of inspiring women who navigate public leadership is endless, especially in this association, this unbelievable association," Spiller said.

The celebration was punctuated with three brief dance breaks that consisted of 30 to 60 seconds of exhilarating music. Members were encouraged to stand and dance near their seats, but many members spontaneously hit the dance floor. The breaks created a contagious vibe of pure joy that permeated the event.

NJREA President Joan Wright, recited "Phenomenal Woman," a poem by Maya Angelou. This poem is an empowering tribute to the strength and confidence of women. The biggest applause during this recitation came when Wright read the classic words, "I'm a woman, phenomenally/Phenomenal woman/That's me."

Rodney Lane is an NJEA Communications consultant.

LEADERSHIP IN SCHOOL HEALTH CARE

Robin Cogan a school nurse in Camden was honored for her leadership in school health care. Cogan has been interviewed and published in nursing and education journals. She has been a leader in public health, especially since the pandemic began in March 2020. She also writes a blog known as "The Relentless School Nurse," which can be found at relentlesschoolnurse.com. Cogan is recognized on both the state and national levels for her work in improving health care policies.

"Robin is someone with a keen sense of communication and creativity," Robertson said. "She knows the value of amplifying a voice."

LEADERSHIP IN LEGISLATION

"Women have consistently been the force that has moved important bills through the New Jersey Legislature," Hayes said as she recognized Damita White-Morris and Susan Maurer for their leadership in supporting pro-public education legislation.

White-Morris is an attendance officer at Quarter Mile Lane School in Bridgeton. A building rep and membership chair for the Bridgeton School Employees Association, she represents Cumberland County on the NJEA Congressional Contact, Membership, and Youth Services committees. She

“

The gala honored influential women who have helped our state's public schools and our union serve as models of excellence in the nation.

holds two bachelor's degrees. Active in her community and a champion for education, White-Morris is the Cumberland County Educational Support Professional (ESP) of the Year and serves on the NEA Resolutions Committee.

"Nothing happens in Cumberland County politically unless Damita is involved," Hayes said.

NJREA member Sue Maurer is one of the most recognizable faces in spaces where policies that have an impact on educators in New Jersey are discussed. She is currently the co-chair of the NJREA Government Relations Committee after a career of leadership in Sayreville Education Association, the Middlesex County Education Association, NJEA and NEA.

"If you have Sue Maurer as a friend, you have a friend forever," Hayes said.

UNION LEADERSHIP

Since its inception, this union —our union— has been led by women," Robertson said as she





1. From left: Fatimah Hayes, Petal Robertson, Susan Maurer, Lisa Veit (chair, NJEA Women in Education Committee) 2. From left: Sean M. Spiller, Petal Robertson, Sharon Allen, Fatimah Hayes, Lisa Veit. 3. From left: Petal Robertson, Robin Cogan, Fatimah Hayes, Lisa Veit. 4. From left: Sean M. Spiller, Petal Robertson, Carmen Torres-Izquierdo, Fatimah Hayes, Lisa Veit. 5. From left: Petal Robertson, Damita White-Morris, Fatimah Hayes, Lisa Veit. 6. From left: Petal Robertson, Marijean Andl, Fatimah Hayes, Lisa Veit.

recognized Marijean Andl for her work as a union leader. “Even without holding the traditional positions of power, women have been the heart, soul and muscle that have moved our goals from ideas to policy changes.”

Andl has been president of the Lenape District Support Staff Association for five years and is the 2021–22 Burlington County ESP of the Year. She has helped raise over \$30,000 for those serving in the military, an effort that was featured in the June 2021 edition of the NJEA Review.

“Marijean is a community icon and loved by so many,” Robertson said. “She is a bus driver, a pioneer and a leader who has helped unite not only her association, but an entire community.”

STAFF LEADERSHIP

“Upon meeting Carmen and Sharon, you will find that they really focus on the needs of our members—listening to them, empathizing

with them, and looking for ways to empower our members,” NJEA President Sean Spiller said as he honored Sharon Allen, a recently retired NJEA UniServ Field Rep in Camden County, and Carmen Torres-Izquierdo, an administrative assistant in the Region 7 UniServ field office in Toms River. Torres-Izquierdo previously worked in the field office in Jersey City.

As a local association leader in the 1970s, Allen played an instrumental role in several strikes in Camden County. She broke barriers in NJEA by becoming an NJEA consultant and UniServ field rep during a time when there were almost no African Americans, men or women, in those positions. Allen’s work in the community is legendary, Spiller noted.

“Sharon is a force to be reckoned with,” Spiller said. “Don’t underestimate her quiet strength, intentional thoughtfulness, and whole-hearted generosity.”

Torres-Izquierdo has been influential in communications with the Latinx community both among members and in the broader community. She has worked to ensure that the association provides workshops and material and is a strong advocate for social justice within the association for staff and members.

“Carmen is a roll up your sleeves kind of leader, and the members in Hudson and now Ocean county know that Carmen will never ask of someone something she hasn’t already done herself,” Spiller said. “She leads by example, and she leads with her heart.”

Following the celebration, many attendees noted that this was among the best NJEA events they had ever attended and that they look forward to next year’s celebration. For more photos from the Celebration of Women, visit [flickr.com/njea/albums](https://www.flickr.com/photos/njea/).

Recruiting future educators

We need you!

By Dr. Jeanne DelColle



The New Jersey Center for Future Educators brought high school students, working educators, NJEA Preservice members, and NJEA staff together for a conference on March 16.

Why did you decide to become an educator? While there is plenty of research to explain why people leave the profession, we need to examine why students decide to become educators in the first place.

Everyone's path to education is different whether it was a seed planted at a young age or a decision to change careers to make more of an impact on the world. No matter the path, most educators got into the profession because they had the confidence to see themselves in the role and the belief that they could make a difference in the lives of young people.

Other than confidence, one of the most influential factors on whether a student considers becoming an educator is when someone significant in their life encourages the student to become a teacher. Even if the student never thought about the possibility of becoming a teacher, having

someone they trust believe in them is enough to make them investigate the possibility. That is where we come in.

The Center for Future Educators (CFE) at The College of New Jersey is a statewide organization funded by NJEA that works to recruit the next generation of educators. Our goal is to work with middle and high schools across the state to get students thinking about entering the profession while they are still in school. We especially want to make sure that our future educators are diverse and representative of the rich cultures and traditions in New Jersey. The CFE provides future educators

with experiences that help students see themselves on college campuses in pursuit of a career in education, but we can't do the job alone.

WHAT CURRENT EDUCATORS CAN DO

There are a few things that you can do to help inspire the next generation of educators.

Grow your own programs

If you work in a middle or high school, start a New Jersey Future Educators Association (NJFEA) chapter. This extracurricular club is a great starting point for growing your own programs within your district and allows students to take on local leadership responsibilities and work in their communities through service projects.

Membership in the NJFEA provides students with access to conferences on college and university campuses, the NJEA Convention, statewide student leadership opportunities, and more. If you work in a high school, make sure your building offers a Tomorrow's Teachers course, an elective for the upper high school grades that serves as an introductory education course and is also a dual credit option for several New Jersey universities. We need dynamic teachers to lead these clubs and courses to inspire the next generation of future educators. Yes, we need you!

Build a team

If you have an NJFEA chapter or Tomorrow's Teachers course, who are your champions and collaborators in the community and in the district?

Dr. Jeanne DelColle is the executive director of Center for Future Educators at The College of New Jersey. Formerly a history teacher at the Burlington County Institute of Technology, DelColle is the 2012 New Jersey State Teacher of the Year and had also been named the New Jersey Council for the Humanities Teacher of the Year, the New Jersey History Teacher of the Year, and an NEA Foundation Global Learning Fellow. She can be reached at delcollj@tcnj.edu.



At the Future Educators Conference on March 16, NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty addresses high school students who are considering a career in education



In a workshop at the Future Educators Conference on March 16, a panel of NJEA Preservice members discusses how to manage stress.

Recruiting students takes a team effort. We need teachers, school counselors and administrators working together to recruit future educators, especially those who have not considered the profession before. The CFE will be hosting a weeklong, overnight education academy this summer for students who would like to explore the possibility of being a future educator.

Tell them why

Great teachers recognize the characteristics needed to be successful and can see those characteristics in others. How many times have others seen things in you that you had not seen in yourself? It is important that when we see characteristics in our students that would make them great educators

we let them know, especially students from underrepresented populations. Is the student good at coaching, mentoring or helping? Does the student have a passion for social activism? Don't just tell a student they could be a great educator, tell them why they would be successful.

Let them see themselves in the role

The CFE provides programming that allows students to explore the profession through experiences that feature diverse educators. The CFE Speaker Series is a virtual opportunity to speak with honored educators every month about their journey and work. NJFEA conferences provide students the opportunity to work with college faculty and staff while also hearing from NJEA Preservice students about what it is like to take the next step toward teacher certification.

Encouraging students to join NJFEA or Tomorrow's Teachers can give students an opportunity to engage with the community in service learning projects and observe education behind the scenes through field placements in district classrooms.

Turn to CFE as a resource

There has never been a more important time for us to think about what we want the legacy of education to be. At a time when education is politicized, and the media shows how hostile people can be toward schools and teachers, many students do not even consider education as a possible profession even though they have the qualities of great teachers. That is why it is important that schools grow their own future educator programs.

There are so many students who want to make a difference in this world, let's encourage them to do it in a classroom. The CFE has many programs and resources to help, including recordings of events to help inspire the next generation of students. You can find more information about our programming on futureeducators.tcnj.edu or email us at cfe@tcnj.edu.

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- Writing instruction
- Transition essentials

WORKSHOPS (OPTIONAL) • 1:45 – 3 P.M.

- Multisensory math remediation **OR**
- Orton-Gillingham reading remediation



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NJEA member works to build school in Africa

By Dan Torsiello

Despite having taught in some very economically disadvantaged school districts in my career, nothing prepared me for what I saw in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) this past summer.

I visited the DRC in hopes of accomplishing the lifelong goal of trekking into the mountains and visiting with the endangered mountain gorilla. My guide, Christian Aganze of Congo Local Guides in Goma, DRC asked if I would also be willing to visit some of Goma's overflowing orphanages. Goma is the capital of North Kivu province of the DRC.

Aganze recommended I make a \$100 donation to help provide food to these children, many of whom live on daily diet of congee, a rice gruel. I agreed, and in an attempt to make a slightly larger impact, began an impromptu fundraising campaign. Despite little time and even less fundraising experience, I was able to raise \$1,400, which was enough to purchase nearly 3,000 pounds of food to be split among three of the Goma's orphanages.

Aganze also arranged for me to visit the rural village of Mushaki. Well within territory that is home to some of the 120 rebel groups currently operating within the DRC, Mushaki is a rural farming and herding village high in the hills.

Part of my time in Mushaki was spent visiting a local school—"school" being used in the most basic sense. A lack of supplies, missing walls, and far fewer seats than students are just some of the challenges facing the school. I decided to try and make a positive impact.

After discussions with Aganze and engineers back in Africa, we drew up plans to build a modern wood and concrete school with six classrooms, two offices, and four toilets. Because of the comparatively inexpensive nature of supplies and labor in the DRC, such a school would cost just over \$8,300 to build. It is this cost, plus an additional \$1,700 to cover any overages in cost

Dan Torsiello is a social studies teacher at Central Regional High School in Bayville. He can be reached at dantorsiello@gmail.com.



Dan Torsiello (right) with students, their teacher (left) and a guide (center) at the current primary school in Mushaki.

are what I am hoping to raise to build this much-needed school. Any funds that are not spent on the construction of the school will be used to purchase school supplies for the students and teachers of Mushaki.

According to UNICEF's education report on the DRC, the nation "has made significant strides toward universal access to primary education over the past few decades. The net attendance rate has increased from 52% in 2001 to 78% in 2018, but 7.6 million children aged 5-17 are still out of school."

I hope to do my small part to help change that statistic, so that, at least in Mushaki, children can get the education they need to gain admission to a secondary school in a larger and safer area within the DRC.

To follow Torsiello's progress in helping build the school, visit thekivuproject.org.

Hainesport EA hosts wellness day for members



Therapy dogs from a local rescue visit Hainesport staff.

Following more than two very challenging school years for everyone in the education community, the Hainesport Education Association (HEA) in Burlington County planned a wellness day for its members. Knowing that educators needed a morale boost and the opportunity to recharge, HEA President Karen Kinter brought the idea for a wellness day to the HEA Executive Committee. They agreed and immediately set to work planning a program.

Set for the district professional development day on Feb. 22, the day began with a delicious breakfast followed by a meditation session directed by fifth grade teacher Adam Goldberg. Therapy dogs from a local rescue came to the school as well as masseuses from a wellness center in Moorestown, New Jersey. Moorestown-based comedian Dena Blizzard brought comic relief to the entire staff. Art teacher Trina Allen directed a watercolor class in the afternoon, and the gym was set up for basketball and volleyball games.

"It felt so good to forget about the stress and just laugh," third grade teachers noted.

The professional development day was deemed a hit and recharged the staff of Hainesport School.

"Morale has been low," said fifth grade teacher Jana Ellis. "We have been going above and beyond to do right by our students during the most difficult time, all while currently working under an expired contract."

Hainesport School hopes to be the leaders in making a wellness professional development day routine part of every New Jersey district's annual calendar.

NJEA Convention, Nov. 10-11, 2022

PROMOTE YOUR WRITING IN

Authors' Alley

Authors' Alley is an area at the NJEA Convention that provides pre-service, active and retired NJEA members a chance to showcase materials they have published that enhance and add value to the teaching profession or can serve as useful educational resources for teachers and parents.

Members interested in exhibiting in Authors' Alley must be willing to offer members advice on how to go about publishing their authored works. Member authors will be responsible to exhibit on both days of the convention – during all show hours – displaying and selling their published works and conversing with members. The cost to participate in Authors' Alley is \$50.

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

Space is limited. For more information call Felicia Davis at 609-310-4260. To reserve your spot, complete and submit the registration form below, along with your check and copies of your published materials by June 30, 2022.

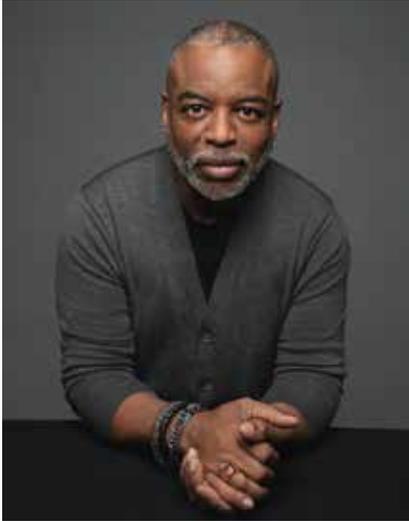


**I AM
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in being a vendor at the 2022 NJEA Convention at the Atlantic City Convention Center, Nov. 10-11. I understand that I must be an active NJEA member, student NJEA, or NJREA member to participate in Authors' Alley, and I agree to participate for the entire convention. Enclosed is a \$50 check payable to NJEA Authors' Alley.

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RETURN TO: Felicia Davis, NJEA-PDII, PO Box 1211, Trenton, NJ 08607-1211



LeVar Burton to keynote 2022 NJEA Convention

Actor and beloved host of “Reading Rainbow,” LeVar Burton will be a keynote speaker at the 2022 NJEA Convention on Nov. 10-11 in Atlantic City.

Burton launched his acting career while still a student at the University of Southern California. Cast in the groundbreaking

role of Kunta Kinte in the landmark television series “Roots,” at 19 he found himself on the cover of Time magazine. A seemingly impossible act to follow, Burton managed to do so in dramatic fashion, achieving further global acclaim as Chief Engineer Geordi La Forge in the iconic “Star Trek: The Next Generation” television series and feature films. But it has been his role as host and executive producer of the beloved PBS children’s series Reading Rainbow that he is most proud of. Airing from 1983 to 2009, it was not only one of the longest-running children’s television shows in history, but also one of the most acclaimed, earning over 200 awards including multiple Emmys and a Peabody. He is also the host and executive producer of the television game show “Trivial Pursuit.”

Always committed to improving children’s education through innovative uses of storytelling, in 2012 Burton launched RRRKidz, a digital educational publishing company, co-founded with business partner Mark Wolfe. Together they hold the global rights to the “Reading Rainbow” brand through a partnership with series creator, WNED/Buffalo. “Reading Rainbow” was reimagined to combine today’s forms of media and technology with the goal of inspiring a new generation of children to love reading.

The all-new Reading Rainbow is a digital reading service filled with over 500 children’s fiction and nonfiction books, newly produced video field trips and new content added every week. With over 16 million books and videos enjoyed since launch, Reading Rainbow is the number one educational app on iTunes and recipient of numerous awards.

Most recently, Burton turned to Kickstarter to bring Reading Rainbow to “Every Child, Everywhere”—especially to classrooms in need. The campaign met its 35-day goal of raising \$1 million in less than 11 hours. It became the most popular Kickstarter campaign ever with over 105,000 backers and a final tally of over \$6.4 million. As a result, in 2015 RRRKidz will introduce Reading Rainbow EDU, complete with engaging supplemental learning content for teachers and students.

In October 2014, Reading Rainbow published Burton’s first children’s book, *The Rhino Who Swallowed a Storm*, a powerful and uplifting story to help children cope with the difficulties of everyday life.

The honored recipient of 12 Emmy Awards, a Grammy and five NAACP Awards, Burton has demonstrated in his career that he can do it all—acting, directing, producing, writing and speaking. He is often invited as a keynote speaker at leading education and technology events, most recently speaking at NASA, ISTE, The National Headstart Association and many more.

And in 2014, with educational groups, business organizations and media clamoring to recognize him for the record-setting Reading Rainbow Kickstarter campaign, Burton was named Geek of the Year in the annual Geekie Awards, was listed as one of *Ebony* magazine’s Power 100, and earned the World Tech Award for Education, awarded by the World Technology Network.

He now enters his fourth decade in the industry, with millions of fans throughout the world, and continues his mission to inspire, entertain and educate.

Stay overnight at the NJEA Convention

Want to reserve a room in Atlantic City for the NJEA Convention at a great rate? Take a look at these discount rates available at Borgata, Caesars, Golden Nugget, Hard Rock, Harrah’s, Resorts and Tropicana. To make reservation, go to njeaconvention.org. To access the room reservation tool, you’ll need to log in as a member. For your PIN, use either the email address you’ve previously given NJEA or the PIN that is found on your membership card. Your password is the last four digits of your Social Security number unless you have changed it.

Shuttle service to the Atlantic City Convention Center is available from the hotels listed here.

Hotel	Wed-Thurs rate	Friday rate	Deadline	Group code
Borgata	\$115	\$115	Oct. 10	GBNJE22
Caesars	\$110	N/A	Oct. 16	SC11FBM
Golden Nugget	\$64	\$129	Oct. 25	ANJEA22
Hard Rock	\$89	\$179	Oct. 10	GNJEA22
Harrah’s	\$79	\$169	Oct. 16	SH11FB2
Resorts	\$67	\$149	Oct. 30	VNJEA22
Tropicana	\$75	\$150	Oct. 16	ST11FB2

Quoted room rates do not reflect taxes and other resort fees.

BookSmiles returns to NJEA Convention

Those of us who teach in high-poverty districts typically have students whose reading levels are far below grade level. I created a nonprofit that can help fix this.

Since 2017, BookSmiles has distributed almost 1 million new and gently used books to kids in need throughout New Jersey and Philadelphia. These are students who lack the money for the commercial book fairs that visit their schools.

How do we keep our Cherry Hill warehouse stocked with books to give away? By diverting them from the big box thrifts and inspiring legions of book-lovers to organize book drives. Sometimes people use our hand-painted, designer collection bins. We roughly level the books, keeping only the top-quality stuff because every child deserves a superior library, not yellowed, torn hand-me-downs. Book ownership among children should not be dictated by ZIP code.

I've started my teaching career in Moorestown, and I'm finishing in Lindenwold—towns on opposite ends of New Jersey's socioeconomic spectrum. Several years ago, I started thinking hard about equity. What could I do as a teacher to get all my students on or above reading level? And it hit me: flood my district with children's books. I started to obsessively collect books in my garage and distribute them to kids and babies. I gave my idea a name: BookSmiles. Then I created a website and applied for nonprofit status.

Presenting at two NJEA Conventions was powerful, helping so much to promote our brand. Teachers and educational support professionals from



Larry Abrahms presenting Booksmiles at the 2019 NJEA Convention.

around the state saw how a nominal donation could give them several hundred dollars' worth of quality books. Nearly 1,000 NJEA members have either visited the BookSmiles Book Bank or distributed our books through our book fairs. Please visit our website, booksmiles.org, to help spread book-wealth.

Challenge Yourself
Challenge Your Students
Change the World



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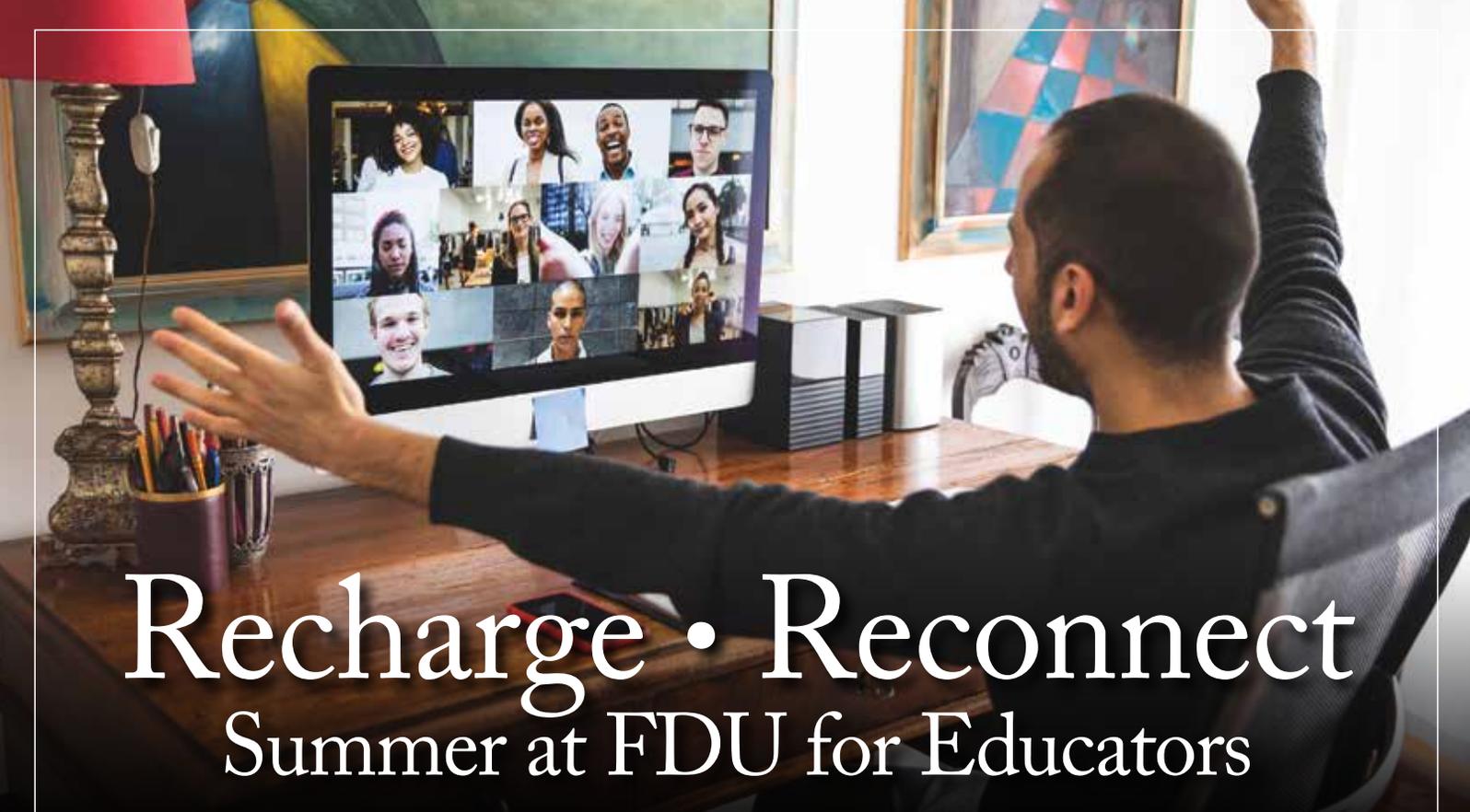
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THE INS AND OUTS OF FILING AN OPRA REQUEST

By Kaitlyn Dunphy, Esq.

An OPRA request does not refer to the popular talk show host, but rather to the Open Public Records Act. The act, adopted in 2002, encourages transparency in government by providing, upon request, public access to records maintained by government agencies.

Anyone can file an OPRA request for records with a public agency. The first step is to determine which government agency may maintain the records the requester is seeking. Requests may be made to legislative or executive agencies, or municipalities or other subdivisions of state government. The request must be made to the custodian of records for that agency, which is a specific person designated by the agency to respond to OPRA requests.

Requests must be made to the records custodian in writing and must mention OPRA. Most agencies have a form available on their websites with instructions on how to submit the request. On those forms, the requester can indicate their preference for how they receive the records. The forms will also list any fees associated with receiving the records. The standard fee is 5 cents per standard size page and 7 cents per legal size page, although further charges may apply if there are special circumstances allowing for a service fee, or copies are provided in another format such as on a CD or flash drive.

While it's not required to use the agency's OPRA request form, it is recommended to avoid delays in processing the request and to ensure all the required information is submitted.

REQUEST MUST BE SPECIFIC

The request must be clear about which records are being requested and cannot be overbroad. For example, a request for all documents and communications related to a general topic may be considered overbroad, but it can be more narrowly tailored by specifying a time frame, communications between certain individuals, and/or a more specific topic.

Once a request is received, the custodian has seven business days to respond, beginning the first day after the request is received. The response time for records directly related to an agency's response to the COVID pandemic are more relaxed.

The custodian's response can be any of the following:

- Granting access to the records
- Denying access, with reasons given.
- Asking for clarification of the request.
- Notifying the requestor of additional service fees, which must be disclosed to the requester prior to being charged.
- Stating that the custodian needs more time to respond to the request.
- If no response is received, that is considered a denial.

EXCEPTIONS TO OPRA

The act contains 27 specifically listed exceptions when an agency does not have to provide records in response to an OPRA request, and there are a handful of additional exemptions carved out by executive order.

Many of the records that are not permitted to be disclosed under OPRA are for privacy and safety reasons. For example, except for very limited information, personnel and pension records are not subject to OPRA. As another example, emergency, security, or surveillance information that would jeopardize the security of a building, the people in the building, or a computer system would not be accessible. Personal tax returns are also not permitted to be disclosed.

Agencies also do not have to create records that do not exist, nor do they have to seek out records that are not already in their possession, in order to respond to OPRA requests.

An agency must give their reasons for denying a request. If an agency provides redacted records, they must state their reasons for redaction. Denials can be challenged in either Superior Court or before the Government Records Council.

OTHER TYPES OF DOCUMENT REQUESTS

OPRA requests are not the only method for obtaining public documents. There is also a common law right of access to certain documents. In the description of an OPRA request, the requester can also assert that they are seeking the documents under this right. Additionally, the judiciary has its own procedure for obtaining court records. Documents may be discoverable in ongoing litigation. Exclusive representatives, such as a local education association, are also able to request information related to negotiations and enforcing collective bargaining agreements under the PERC Act.

There are many strategic considerations to evaluate, such as when or who makes a request, and what legal right the request is made under, when making a request for records under OPRA or through another avenue. Local associations should be sure to consult their UniServ field representatives when making those decisions. 📧

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





WHAT DO SUPERHEROES LIKE TO READ?

**By
Kathryn
Coulibaly**

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.

If any high school in New Jersey looks like the lair of superheroes, it's Phillipsburg High School. Perched on a hill high above the Delaware River, it commands a view of the surrounding New Jersey and Pennsylvania countryside for miles. And it is here that Faith Roncoroni, 2021-22 Warren County Teacher of the Year, uses what was once considered an unconventional medium to challenge perspectives, engage her students and expand whose stories get told in a typical English classroom.

Roncoroni's teacher origin story begins with her mother. Watching her, Roncoroni felt the excitement of bulletin boards and lesson plans and putting together her classroom every August. Roncoroni also understood from an early age that teaching wasn't just about educating students; she saw her mother working with families and outside agencies. Her mother had begun her career as a Title I/basic skills teacher, then had her own classroom, and eventually worked in administration, giving Roncoroni a comprehensive view of education.

Another childhood influence plays a crucial role in Roncoroni's transformation to educator. Growing up, Roncoroni's family shared a love of reading comic books. In fact, that's how her brother learned to read. They would visit comic book shops as a family and reading them was a community experience. With a massive family library to enjoy, she had access to some classics.

CHALLENGING THE CANON

Comic books were not treated as a respected art form at that time, and certainly weren't part of her high school curriculum. That changed when she got to Lehigh University.

"My first English professor, Seth Moglan, was a big inspiration," Roncoroni recalled. "He was interested in analyzing texts and challenging the accepted canon. He was my first teacher who had us reading comics in our mainstream classroom, and I had never experienced that before."

Other professors picked up what Moglan started—Professor Edward Whitley, who introduced Roncoroni to Indigenous literature, is someone she still shares comics with. "Professor Elizabeth Dolan let me read comics that address comics. I was even lucky enough to take an independent study with her and create my own illness comic."

This project helped Roncoroni process her grandmother's Alzheimer's diagnosis and Roncoroni's experiences as a caregiver through creative writing.

Even her anti-racist grad work with Dr. Jiménez explored comics like Gene Yang's "American Born Chinese" and Saladin Ahmed's "Miles Morales: Straight Out of Brooklyn."

"All of these experiences led me to challenge the canon and what we had been led to believe was literature," Roncoroni said. "I want my students to see how they can use literature to affirm



Faith Roncoroni in costume with a young Captain Marvel.

themselves and others. Too often, these terms were used to keep people out and limit whose voices were valued."

Roncoroni's study continues, and she works to identify her own bias and prejudice so that she can correct it before it affects her students.

"It's important that I'm aware of how I'm phrasing things, what kinds of assignments I'm giving students, what texts I'm teaching and what assumptions I may be making," Roncoroni said.

Roncoroni teaches several levels of English as well as two different electives on comics.

"I love coming into class and talking about visual storytelling and being able to bring in elements from stereotypical literature like analyzing word choice, but the structures are really different," Roncoroni said. "And what makes it really cool is that comics aren't uncool anymore. Geek culture is now cool, and Marvel and DC made that happen with movies and TV shows."

Roncoroni is excited to introduce her students to other storylines that may be unfamiliar to them. She loves teaching comics with stories that challenge the status quo, incorporate diverse characters, and focus on more relevant story lines.

"Comics have been addressing issues in history

My first English professor was interested in analyzing texts and challenging the accepted canon.

that a lot of educators have been uncomfortable teaching or have not felt well-versed in addressing, Roncoroni said. "But comics have brought different events and injustices to light. I think that's powerful and a big part of why people have turned to this medium."

A ROOM BRIMMING WITH STORIES AND ENTHUSIASM

Roncoroni's classroom is full of bookshelves brimming with comic books, graphic novels, and manga, a comic form that originates in Japan. Vibrant artwork covers the walls. Students are



The 2018 Phillipsburg Comic Con brought artists, creators and students together in the love of storytelling.



Phillipsburg student Tierra works on a jam comic in Roncoroni's class.

encouraged to borrow and discuss books that interest them with Roncoroni who has seemingly read everything. Her enthusiasm for the subject could not be more obvious, right down to the comic-painted boots she wears, a gift from a former student.

One project the students particularly enjoy is a collaborative comic strip. One student begins a sequence with a drawing and a text. When time is called, it is passed to another student who adds their contribution, furthering the story. As it makes its way around the classroom, the story takes twists and turns the originator of the story had no way of predicting. Once time is called on the story, Roncoroni and the students gather to see the finished product and the amazing results, a combination of incredible artwork and innovative storytelling. It's easy to see how engaged students are as they grab books from the shelves, read during down time and participate in the projects.

Roncoroni also uses video games to help students make connections and appreciate the timeless area of human storytelling.

"We analyze video games and look at how shots are framed, and we compare them to the different references [i.e., the comic book story lines that inspired the video games], and we look at how history has played a role in why the shot was framed that way," Roncoroni said. "I like getting my students to think outside the stereotypical 'great' authors and move beyond what they've been told



is 'literature' to really connect with texts. Whether you like reading poetry or short stories or novels, everyone likes some form of literature. You don't need words for it to be literature, which is really awesome and opens the door for so many more people to connect with different forms."

INTERACTING WITH COMIC CREATORS

Roncoroni's enthusiasm has led her to connect her students with comic creators such as Greg Anderson Elysee, author of the comic book series "Is'nana the Were-Spider," based on the West African legend of Anansi the Spider.

"I love introducing my students to this series because it really challenges the anti-Blackness in society and is extremely empowering for my students," Roncoroni said. "Like a lot of comic writers and artists, he has a strong connection to education. Many of these creators are teachers, have taught, or have educators in their families, so they are very receptive when teachers reach out to them. I've had comic creators speak to my students via Skype or Google Meets."

When the COVID pandemic prevented in-person interaction with creators, Roncoroni was able to arrange for virtual meet-ups, which meant a lot to her students.

"I had a couple of creators talking with my students during COVID, which was exciting for us," Roncoroni said. "The pandemic was really tough on students; it was incredible to have authors connect with my students like that."

Students had gotten used to interacting with creators thanks to a huge project Roncoroni had been running since 2015. As the staff liaison for the school's Anime Club, Roncoroni has helped run an extremely popular local Comic Con.

"My students can't afford to buy tickets to Comic Con in New York City, and neither can most of the people who live in this area," Roncoroni said. "So they work for an entire school year, and all summer long, to bring a Comic Con to our community. They're emailing creators, they're sending out monthly cards to encourage participation, they're working with local comic book shops to get books and local restaurants to provide food. It's inspiring to see how hard they work. In fact, they're working so hard on the event, they don't really get to enjoy it! But they're making a positive change in the community and making sure that people have access to something special that makes people feel represented."

STUDENTS AS SUPERHEROES

That's not the only project Roncoroni's students have taken on to make sure that underrepresented people have their voices heard.

"My students have gone to the DASACC, which is the local domestic violence agency in Warren County. There they work with the head of the county and state agencies to make sure documents are translated so they are accessible to Spanish-speaking communities," Roncoroni said. "They have sat down with administration to make sure that tampon and pad dispensers are distributed throughout the school with free products. They've met with school nurses to make sure that the product that is ordered works for the students who will use them. My students are absolutely phenomenal. If anyone knows the high school students who are coming up right now, you cannot help but be blown away by how caring and aware they are."

It seems clear that these students are writing their own superhero origin stories, and that Faith Roncoroni's influence is playing an important part. 🏡



Phillipsburg student Alyssa in front of one of the many bookshelves full of comics and graphic novels in Roncoroni's classroom.

You don't need a Bat Signal to connect with Faith

Roncoroni is eager to support other educators interested in incorporating comic books into their classroom or starting their own Comic Cons in their districts. She may be reached at roncoroni.faihd@pburgsd.net.

Students speak out on comics in the classroom

"My dad collects comic books, and I got into it about 10 years ago. I like the different styles of art. I really didn't like reading before, but I've read about 50 comic books now."

– Toni, 11th grade

"Using comic books makes me more engaged in English class. Ms. Roncoroni is my favorite teacher. More people should be into comics, even if you don't like reading."

– Alyssa, 11th grade

"Comics are fun and I'm much more into fantasy than real life. I think comic books and graphic novels are good ways to study literature and make it fun."

– Blaze, 12th grade

"Manga and comics go hand-in-hand. The types of characters in Japanese manga are extremely varied. The characters are really interesting, and you get much more intense moral conflict."

– Winston, 11th grade

EVOLUTION OF A TEACHER

How I was transformed from an effective educator to a student-centered and transformational educator

by *Dennis Dagounis*

For the past 21 years, I have been teaching high school science, from environmental and earth science to college prep, honors, and Advanced Placement biology.

During my first 15 years as an educator, I taught science based on how I was taught when I was a student: students read the chapter, I would review and provide additional information through a lecture and PowerPoint, students took a quiz, we reviewed the end of chapter questions, and students took a multiple-choice test—rinse and repeat, unit after unit. A few times per month, I would provide the students with a recipe-style lab that, if followed step-by-step, resulted in all students getting the same results and answers.

If you observed my classroom during this time, you would have found students sitting quietly in uniform rows writing information down as quickly as possible while I clicked away from the corner of the classroom. I had a difficult time seeing that this way of teaching was not reaching all of my students or challenging them to think critically, discover new ideas, experience wonder and apply information to novel situations.

Furthermore, I was 15 years into my teaching career, and I was starting to get bored. I needed a change. Doing the same thing year after year was boring—boring for me and boring for my students. Sure, I tried to insert some interesting

lessons, articles, current events and pictures from various trips I would take but, in the end, it was the same concept and way of approaching teaching and learning.

A SHIFT IN STANDARDS AND PERSPECTIVE

My wife had just taken a new job as a districtwide STEM supervisor. She took me through the curricular design and the pedagogical shifts she was initiating with her teachers. She was using engineering design and design thinking processes to drive teaching and learning with a focus on problem solving and critical thinking.

I began to draw parallels with what she was putting into practice in her district and the shifts that I was seeing in the Next Generation Science Standards. Our daily conversations helped me to see how this way of teaching and learning aligned with the newly revised standards I was supposed to be implementing. Student-centered learning experiences were central to the implementation. She also challenged me to try to implement the engineering design and design thinking processes into my classes. More importantly, this change would allow for my students to engage more deeply in the learning process. If I needed a change, I'm sure my students needed a change as well!

So about six years ago, I threw away the PowerPoints and multiple-choice tests. Through trial and error, I figured out how to teach for knowledge retention and application and how to truly engage students. I was working to provide my students with an opportunity to demonstrate their strengths and develop life-long skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, questioning

and collaborative discussions. I removed myself as the “lord at the board” or “sage on the stage.” I created an environment where students took charge of their learning, and I became simply the facilitator of their learning process.

It wasn't easy, and it took a long time to really flesh out what works and how to make this new approach possible. I began with the engineering design process using claim/evidence/reasoning (CER) in lieu of the scientific method.

NO POWERPOINTS, NO BOOKS, AND NO MULTIPLE-CHOICE TESTS

At the beginning of the school year, I make three promises to the students: there will be no PowerPoints, no books, and no multiple-choice tests. I explain to them that I want them to discover the information they will be learning during the year through prompts, discussions and collaboration. I then introduce the students to my process of teaching and learning with a simple question for the students—and a simple way for me to test out this new way of approaching teaching and learning: What is your definition of “life?”

This is a foundational topic in biology. In the past, I would provide the students with the book definition and characteristics of life. But why not challenge the students to come up with their own definition of life? Without the use of the book or the internet, the students discuss, collaborate and ultimately create a class definition of life and then apply this definition to various “creatures” or items in the classroom.

What I find every year now is that the students are engaged in the lesson. They are making their own adjustments to their definition, making sure

Dennis Dagounis is the 2021-22 Union County Teacher of the Year. He is a science teacher at Roselle Park High School. You can follow him on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram using @21ctoysdagounis. He can be reached at ddagounis@rpsd.org.

it is applicable based on what they notice. They are actively participating and debating with one another.

As I began to integrate more and more of these types of learning experiences into the classroom, I saw how the students were transforming into active members of our learning environment. I realized that we educators must design learning experiences that are student-centered and exploratory in nature. This helps students to realize that there isn't always a right or wrong answer. There are typically multiple ways to approach and solve authentic and real-world situations and scenarios.

Our projects and lessons should mimic real life and provide students with an opportunity to think critically and solve problems. Our classroom and teaching style should help students to understand that there are myriad correct answers. Our approach should lead students to see that when any of us "fail" we actually succeed because we learn from our mistakes.

Unique and authentic assignments enable students to work collaboratively to investigate concepts, apply problem-solving techniques and use CER to demonstrate their thought processes.

I no longer front-load information before providing a collaborative learning experience, but rather charge my students with researching information and analyzing data in teams or pairs to solve a problem or make sense of a scenario. They are also provided with a choice of how to demonstrate their learning. For their projects they have the option to write a paper, create a video, develop a computer program or choose their own means to demonstrate their understanding of the topic.

I find when students are allowed to interact with the content in ways that appeal to their interests and abilities, they are able to develop and demonstrate a stronger grasp of the concepts. Some students love writing, others making videos, and some love sharing their knowledge through presentations and discussions. These types of learning experiences take the form of project-based learning and choice boards that facilitate student choice. They empower students to apply content in real-world situations, seeing how the content is applicable to their daily lives. This motivates students to apply themselves.

STUDENTS CHOOSE THEIR OWN METHOD TO DEMONSTRATE LEARNING

One of our units in environmental science focuses on constructive and destructive factors and how they play a role in the creation of rock



Roselle Park High School teacher Dennis Dagounis observes as students make their own discoveries in the science lab.

structures such as Delicate Arch at Arches National Park in Utah. The culminating assignment requires students to choose any method they prefer to develop a model of these forces. They present the content to the class through that preferred model in order to engage in a discussion on how these forces work and the impact they have.

The creativity of the students always amazes me: some build 3-D models; others create books, draw pictures, or use computer programs such as Scratch to demonstrate their knowledge. One of my special education students asked if he could use Minecraft to build his model. Personally, I had no idea if this would work but he was confident he could create a model that would demonstrate all of the aspects required in the rubric. His model, knowledge and understanding were incredible. I was amazed to see how he was able to make the connections and prove to himself he was capable of doing this project, even though he had initially struggled with the content.

After nine or more years of traditional test and quiz experiences, students tend to struggle a bit with this assessment method. They are used to "one right answer" assessments and are always looking to me, the teacher, to tell them whether they did it correctly. When I ask them to explain their thought processes to me, they are baffled and confused. But once they get used to the expectations, they love explaining their claims, evidence and reasoning, and engaging in thought provoking discussions and debates with their classmates. They realize they can work through challenging situations, figure things out, challenge their assumptions (or me as the teacher!), develop problem solving skills, and communicate clearly.

EMPOWERING STUDENTS

As educators, we have the ability to make a difference in our students' lives. We can empower them with lifelong skills that can be applied across multiple disciplines and transcend formal education. Even when I was still an undergraduate, I knew I wanted to help students discover a love and interest in the world around them. I wanted to foster wonder and inquiry in my students and the confidence to figure out how and why things work. But it took me years to develop my craft and design learning experiences that enable students to pursue their passion and demonstrate their strengths.

Over the past three years, I believe I have really started to achieve my goal of student-centered learning. A former student once wrote in an end-of-year exit survey, "While there were times we struggled in Mr. Dagounis's class, the students always grasped the concept by the end of the project. It would seem like we couldn't do it, but we always did. Once I realized I had the ability to complete these seemingly impossible projects, I knew I could do anything!"

So I challenge you, whether you are a novice teacher or one who has been teaching for 10, 15, or more than 20 years, to ditch the PowerPoints and lectures. Provide your students with thought provoking and authentic prompts that allow them to discuss, debate, wonder and construct their own understanding of the topic at hand. At the end of the day, we should want our students to be authentic, creative and critical thinkers, not passive recipients of knowledge. Let them wonder and question. Let them create. You will be amazed at what they can accomplish! 🌟



STUDENT TEACHING in a pandemic

Two perspectives

By *Dionna Gonnella and
Kimberly Cote*

Student teacher **Dionna Gonnella**



It's hard to even put into words or explain what went on during my student teaching experience while we were in a pandemic. The rollercoaster of events and changes with virtual learning and in-person learning created stress among teachers around the world. This was a terrifying and difficult time, but it was also the most important time in my education: my student teaching experience.

I was filled with anxiety through all of this, not knowing what would happen or how the next day would pan out. All of my college classes were suddenly virtual, and I was not able to get the face-to-face lectures I needed. College assignments were becoming harder and harder. I was working two jobs on top of my student teaching until it started becoming mentally and physically exhausting, but I had to work because student teachers don't get paid.

I watched family members, friends, and all those around the world lose their jobs, lose loved ones, struggle to pay bills, and do everything in their power to make ends meet. It was hard to adapt right away and come to terms with what was happening. Many thoughts filled my head every day:

- Will I still be able to student teach this year?
- Will I be able to fit in all of my student teaching hours?
- Will a family member get COVID?
- Will I get COVID?
- How will I learn to teach virtually when I am just starting out?
- Will I be able to complete my edTPA requirement?

Most importantly, will I be good enough for my students to get the education they deserve through remote teaching?

There were so many questions and thoughts constantly running through my head, I could have run a marathon. But the one thing that kept me pushing, the one thing that made everything worth it, was my class.

From the moment I walked in on my first day of student teaching, my class welcomed me with open arms. The gratitude I have toward those students and to their teacher and my mentor, Kimberly Cote, stands above all else. They were welcoming and supportive to me through the most difficult times. It was all I needed to know I could do this.

A curve ball with edTPA

The process required to complete the edTPA was exhausting. I had to cut my hours at my other jobs and focus on the state requirement that determines if I am suitable to become a teacher. It was hours and hours of seemingly endless work, and a deadline that was quickly approaching. Two weeks before I was going to implement my edTPA in the classroom, my school shut down. We went virtual because the COVID cases started to rise dramatically in our district.

Hearing this news, I was ready to give up. I was at a loss for words and unsure of the direction I should go. I had planned my entire edTPA as three in-person lessons; now I had to recreate them as virtual lessons just in case we didn't go back in person in time. I was in disbelief, but I was able to do it because I had a great support system at home and in my classroom. My family, friends, students, and mentor teacher were all rooting for me.

Kimberly Cote is a fourth-grade teacher at Joseph T. Donohue School in Barnegat, where Dionna Gonnella is currently serving in a long-term substitute position. While she was a student teacher, Gonnella was mentored by Cote.

I figured it out and altered my plans in case we were virtual. Fortunately, by the time I had to implement my edTPA lesson plans, we were back to in-person learning and I passed!

My role model

Throughout this experience Kim, my mentor teacher, was my role model. She was learning how to adapt to virtual learning, taking classes toward her learning disability teacher consultant certification to supplement her existing master's degree, and dealing with her own problems. But she always put me first to make sure I got to where I needed to be. She pushed me and made sure I had the student teaching experience I deserved.

Kim went above and beyond during some of her toughest times as an educator. She helped shape me into the educator I am today and gave me the confidence to take over her classroom when she had to go on leave the last month of school. Kim believed in me more than I believed in myself, at times.

I praise all of the teachers around the world who had to adapt to these changes, become more flexible, and tech savvy in such a short time. They all deserve a trophy. Kim had to do all of this on top of teaching me how to be a teacher—let that sink in.

The big hearts and bright minds of my students

My students, every single one of them, gave me memories to hold onto forever. They were my first class, and they were the best thing to happen to me during the pandemic. They made everything so much brighter in such a dark time. We shared many hugs, laughs, and lots of tears as the year went on and my student teaching experience came to an end. They were my rock during this crazy time trying to navigate virtual learning and becoming a teacher. They helped shape me into the teacher I am today because of their big hearts and bright minds.

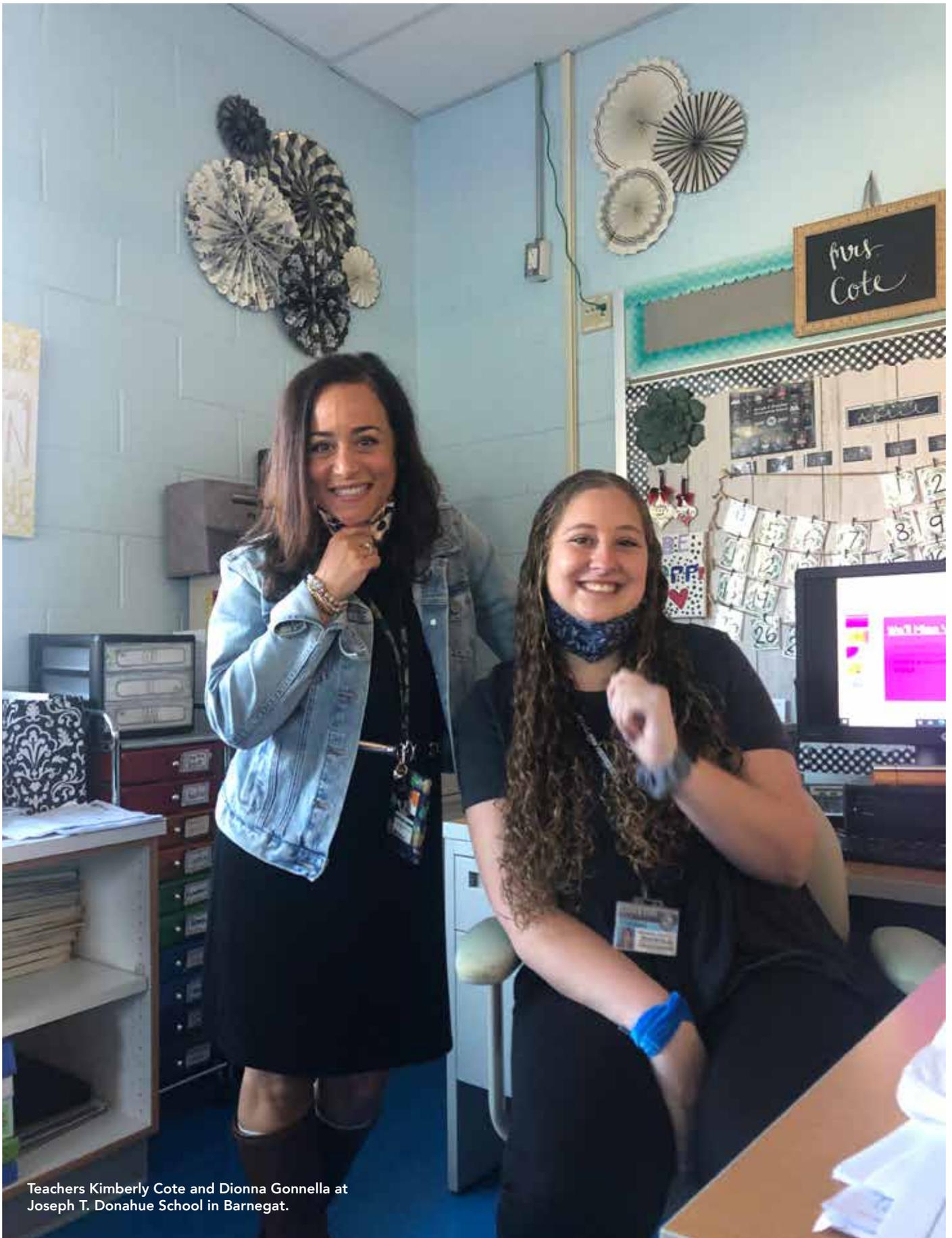
All of the challenges my students sent my way helped me understand them more. From them I learned how to deal with the many situations that could arise virtually or in person. However, I would deal with all of the challenges in the world for that one lightbulb moment when everything clicks, and my students become proud and happy with themselves, gaining the confidence they deserve.

This is what teaching is all about. Children are born with their whole lives ahead of them and being able to provide them with the education they need to be successful and thrive in this world means everything to me.

“ *Kim went above and beyond during some of her toughest times as an educator.* ”



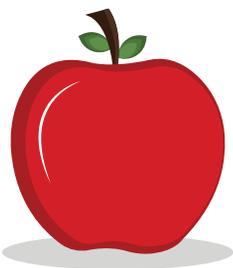
Dionna Gonnella working with a reading group at Joseph T. Donahue School in Barnegat.



Teachers Kimberly Cote and Dionna Gonnella at Joseph T. Donahue School in Barnegat.

Mentor teacher

Kimberly Cote



In August 2020, the world was in COVID upheaval, and I was sweating at the thought of going back to school. The districts around Galloway Township, where I live, were pushing the start of school off for a few weeks because they needed to set up social distancing within the classrooms. I was worried about what to do with my own children when I had to return to work.

The curriculum director's secretary in Barnegat, where I work, called to ask if I would host a student teacher from Stockton. I had to laugh. I thought, "How in the world can we invite college students into the classroom when we aren't sure how to make school safe for all students?" Furthermore, what college could fathom putting their students in a multitude of public schools for student teaching experiences?

I laughed and agreed to welcome a student teacher to my classroom thinking things were wild, and I might as well embrace the ride. In the student teacher's shoes, I would have deferred my student teaching if I had to be inside of an elementary school during a pandemic!

I prepared myself in advance to forgive this student teacher immediately if teaching during a pandemic was more than they had signed up for. Especially because teaching during a pandemic might be more than I was ready to sign up for.

An educational avalanche

September through January, Dionna Gonnella completed her 100 observation hours. Boy, did she ever observe! She watched as I managed three groups of students both in person and virtually.

The schedule alone was mind blowing. I had a Monday and Wednesday in-person group and a different Tuesday and Thursday in-person group. Those students had to go home each day prepared to learn virtually the following day. In class, I was live streaming every subject, every day. I was teaching in living rooms, kitchens, bedrooms, forts, garages, Granny's house, Dad's work truck, Mom's office, the sitter's playroom and the bathroom.

All the while, Dionna attempted to help me grow a few extra arms to keep the pace with our technology. We were screenshotting assignments, linking YouTube videos and creating Google slides. We started to get really fancy when we created Google quizzes with videos. Dionna was observing while keeping me from drowning in an educational avalanche.

Flying solo

By January, Dionna was ready to take center stage and fly solo for one subject at a time. I was starting to think COVID didn't scare her as much as it scared me. But maybe she just really loved our kiddos as much as I did. They were an amazing group, by then arranged in two groups instead of three. Our district decided to have students come to school in person four days a week by then. Many students were switching back and forth between virtual and in person. Some were quarantining because of exposure to a person with COVID or because they tested positive themselves. Things were still very scary. Then, we closed the building to students for two weeks, but teachers and other staff were still reporting to school.

I figured Dionna would take this opportunity to stay home, safe and healthy. No. Dionna kept showing up to school to teach as much as she possibly could. We were at a major turning point in the student teaching experience. It was time to gradually transition Dionna to teaching more subjects until she was "on her own." I was excited for her because I felt that she had invested the time and energy to learn about our students as a whole and as individuals. Dionna was ready, but COVID kept throwing us curve balls.

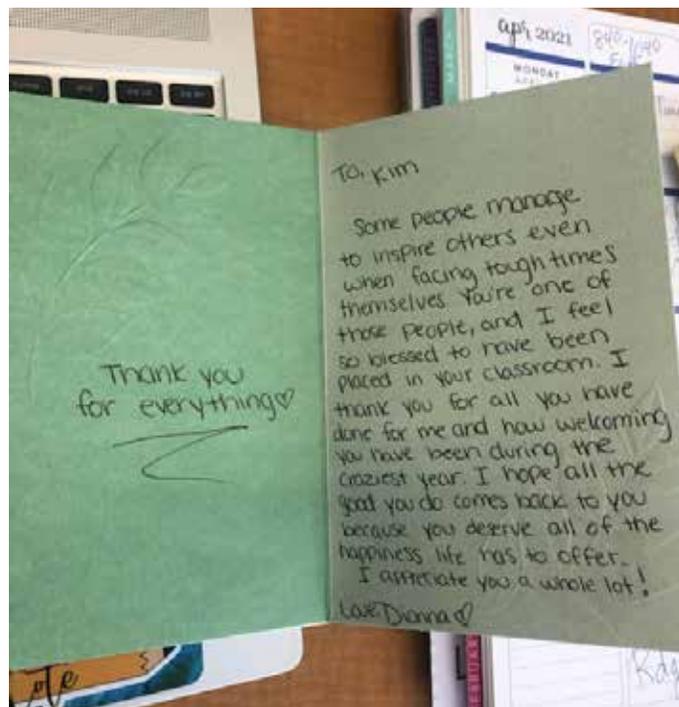
Dionna was teaching with me virtually for two weeks. I was continuing to teach language arts and she was teaching math and science. Dionna was eager and seemed to be absorbing things as fast as possible. She was interested in teaching literature circles and learning to differentiate lessons. I could not believe that, regardless of being terrified of catching or spreading COVID, Dionna kept her focus on learning as much as she possibly could.

Pushing through my own fear

Working with Dionna was a great experience. She is smart and was not afraid to work hard during a pandemic. There were moments I found myself pushing through my own fear because Dionna was showing up to learn, and she was counting on me. She motivated me during the worst of times in my very own classroom. This was an inspiring experience and one I will continue to cherish when I look back on my career.

Dionna continued to work with our classroom when she was finished with her student teaching experience. She became my long-term substitute while I recovered from surgery in May. This was a unique situation because I really needed surgery and Dionna was the perfect person to cover my class for the last few weeks of school. I was grateful to her and we spoke daily to address different issues that arose.

I was blessed to have Dionna share my classroom with me during the worst time to be a teacher. She was and continues to be a bright spot in my life, and I plan on staying close by as she follows her own teaching path. 🙏



A note of thanks from Dionna Gonnella to Kimberly Cote at the conclusion of Gonnella's student teaching year.

HONORING OUR VETERANS

Recognizing service members at Pascack Valley Regional High School

By Kathryn Coulibaly

As the 2019-20 Bergen County Teacher of the Year, Leah Jerome, a history teacher at Pascack Valley High School in Hillsdale, visited schools throughout Bergen County. Inspired by the living history displays of alumni currently serving in the military, or who had previously served, Jerome began to brainstorm ways to honor service members and veterans while connecting students to the impact of that service.

“Many schools that I visited did an amazing job honoring their veterans,” Jerome said. “In particular, New Milford High School and Hackensack High School had beautiful displays for their service members and veterans. I reached out to the educators responsible for guidance and advice.”

Working with the Pascack Valley High School History Club, which began in fall 2020, Jerome consulted with the students to develop a list of active duty service members in time for that year’s Veterans Day activities.

“They collected the photos and names of active duty personnel and created a display,” Jerome said. “It was a wonderful start, but in our minds, we felt it wasn’t complete. We wanted a permanent display, and we wanted to expand it to veterans and fallen service members.”

STUDENT COMMITMENT THE SECRET TO SUCCESS

As the scope of the project increased, Jerome knew she would need buy-in from the district and a budget. But the real secret of her success was the commitment and determination of her students.

“This project really relies on the students,” Jerome said. “They live in the community, they have connections, and they know who to ask to get

the information we needed. No one had a complete list of alumni who served in the military. Through the support and leadership of several students who took this project and made it their own, we were able to take a cohesive, well-designed plan to the administration which worked with us to designate a prominent place in the building with lots of traffic so people will see it”

Jerome and the students worked with the school director of facilities, Robert Donahue, to create an architectural layout. He assisted with the logistics and helped to develop the scale and dimensions of the photo wall while Jerome and the students worked to hang the photos. Other staff pitched in to help, including the custodial staff who painted the wall.

HIPP GRANT HELPS FUND SERVICE MEMBERS WALL

The Pascack Valley High School Parent Faculty Organization provided some funding. To help fund the rest of the project, Jerome applied for

an NJEA Frederick L. Hipp for Excellence in Education Foundation grant. Hipp grants are awarded annually to innovative projects that address a need in the community and can range from \$550 to \$10,000. Jerome’s \$2,500 grant request was selected, and it enabled Jerome’s students to create the project they envisioned and honor the service members the way they wanted.

Jerome’s grant was designated as the Jack Bertolino Grant for its focus on social studies and civics. Bertolino was a beloved NJEA director, staff member and teacher who passed away in 2019. He also served in the military in the 1950s, making this grant even more meaningful to those who knew him.

“People who support and encourage you are part of the success of educator projects” Jerome said. “I definitely got that through the people who administer the Hipp grant. I would strongly urge anyone with an idea for a project to learn more about the Hipp grant program and apply.”



Part of the wall that honors active duty alumni of Pascack Valley High School.

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.



A wall honoring Pascack Valley High School alumni who have made the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

HONORING ALL ALUMNI WHO SERVED

Once the funding was secured, the greatest challenge in building the project was developing accurate lists. No one wanted to leave anyone off, but there was no comprehensive list of alumni who had served in the military. Some graduates may have entered the military upon graduation, but others may have enlisted years after graduation. It took almost a year of reaching out to the community, teachers, and alumni to make sure the list was accurate. The next step was adding pictures, which was another major project and one the History Club excelled at pursuing.

“When we learn of a new name, we add their picture as soon as we can,” Jerome said. “We started with 30 and now we are closer to 50.”

The display includes active service members,

veterans and fallen heroes. It reads left to right and the heading states: Dedicated to Pascack Valley alumni. A TV screen has been added that scrolls the names of veterans.

The History Club is also working on a website so those outside the school building are able to see which names are included and to help identify who might be missing from the list.

Jerome is eager to continue to expand the project. In addition to updating the wall as new alumni enter the service or they identify other service members, she would like to develop this into an oral history project.

“The goal is to honor our veterans and their experiences, while also humanizing history for our students,” Jerome said. “The ability to connect students to history gives them something they can never get out of a textbook.”

Apply for an NJEA Hipp Grant

Grants from the NJEA Frederick L. Hipp for Excellence in Education Foundation help educators bring creative ideas to life. The only foundation of its kind in New Jersey, the Hipp Foundation supports initiatives to promote great ideas—whether they come from teachers, secretaries, custodians, paraprofessionals, bus drivers, cafeteria staff, or any other member of the school community.

More than \$2.3 million in grants for innovative educational projects that represent a bold, fresh approach by public school employees has already been awarded. Apply for a Hipp grant and bring your innovative ideas to life. The annual deadline is March 1. Grants range from \$500 to \$10,000.

Learn more at njea.org/hipp.

MEMORIAL DAY PROGRAM REMEMBERS FALLEN HEROES

Jerome and the students also organize a Memorial Day program to honor fallen service members.

“We hold a memorial service and read something about each fallen hero in the courtyard before school,” Jerome said. “It’s important for all of us to stop and think about their sacrifice.”

Jerome gives the students much of the credit for the success of this project.

“The students wanted to take ownership and now, collectively, this is a legacy everyone in this district can share,” Jerome said. “Everyone who walks past this wall or visits the website can see what we have built together to honor our service members and that is a point of pride for all of us.”

As a history teacher, Jerome studies the military and understands the historical context. She said it is a unifying opportunity for students and staff from every background, a place where everyone can step back and say thank you to active service members, veterans and fallen heroes.

“This wall will be here long after I am gone,” Jerome said. “This project is a legacy of the History Club of which I am proud. We hope it inspires our school community and shows our gratitude to our alumni who chose the path of service.”

NJEA Patriots Alliance

In 2017, NJEA created the Patriots Alliance, a coalition of NJEA members who served in the armed forces and are now working in public education.

The alliance now numbers more than 200 members. It helps to inform veterans of their rights and benefits under the law and advocate for their specific interests. In addition, members of the NJEA Patriots Alliance are available to speak at schools and provide valuable insight into careers in the military.

Learn more about the NJEA Patriots Alliance at njea.org/patriots.

The endless WAR

By Keith Massey

I was an Arabic linguist at the National Security Agency (NSA) before I became a Latin teacher at a public high school in New Jersey. I have a lifetime obligation to submit anything I publish to the NSA for pre-publication approval, lest I even inadvertently divulge classified information. This article has received such approval. The fact that I was in Iraq in 2004 is not classified. Where exactly I was in that country and what I was doing there are still classified, but for my efforts I was awarded the Global War on Terrorism Civilian Service Medal.

As we are now moving toward the end of the current school year, I want to reflect on last year. Once upon a time, I went to war. And last year, we all did.

IN THIS THING...

When 9/11 happened, I felt a moral obligation to get involved. With a Ph.D. in Biblical Hebrew and a minor in Arabic, I sent my resume online two days after the tragedy. I wanted to be in this thing.

The process of joining the NSA was lengthy. A month after first contacting the agency, I was flown from my native Wisconsin to Maryland for language testing. I can vividly recall Wisconsin National Guardsmen, dressed in camouflage, providing airport security in the wake of the tragedy. It certainly did feel like a war was on. But I wasn't yet really in it.

I passed the NSA's language tests and then a polygraph. The logistics of bringing in a wave of new employees were still being sorted out. It turns out that such things took months, not weeks. I did not start work there until June of 2002.

Just a few months after I started, I was sent for Iraqi Arabic dialect training in preparation for the coming war. Now assigned to the Iraq mission, my full-time job was to help our forces with the best possible intelligence. A year later, I was approached with an offer. The man who had been my mentor from day one said out loud the words, "Would you be willing to go to Iraq?" I mean, isn't this what I actually signed up for? I wanted to be "in this thing." I agreed.

I was sent to a CIA training facility to be certified on the Glock 9mm handgun and M-4 assault rifle. I had never shot more than a BB gun in my life before that training, but I dutifully obeyed my instructors and emerged at the end good to go.

In the middle of all this, I met the woman who would become my wife. I had told her vaguely that I worked for the Department of Defense. But as I was getting ready to ship out, I told her I worked for the NSA and that I was going to Iraq. This is where she might have bailed on the relationship. I am grateful she did not.

I found myself on a plane preparing to land in Baghdad. The pilot was performing what is known as a corkscrew landing—a tight rotation

downward from a high altitude, turning the plane just at the last moment to land on the runway. This minimizes the ability of an insurgent to hit us with a ground-to-air missile. So I was now actually in Iraq. I was in harm's way. I was a boy of dairy farmer stock from Wisconsin who was now in a war zone. Was this really happening?

IN THIS THING AGAIN...

Was this really happening? That was my thought in the spring of 2020 as we were entering strict quarantine. We were suddenly teaching all classes virtually, making it up as we went along. We teachers and educational support professionals were viewed as heroes back then for pivoting as we did to continue educating under those circumstances.

We managed our way to the end of that school year. In the following summer, case numbers in many places dropped to such a point that we dared to hope this thing might be coming to an end. With numbers low, districts planned for a reopening of school with a hybrid model. Families could choose for their children to be in the building or to remain virtual. Very few teachers had circumstances that gave them permission to teach virtually. Which meant the rest of us were ordered to teach in our buildings.

IN HARM'S WAY...

A new school year began in September of 2020. It is important to remember that vaccines were still not available. On that first day, I had between five and 12 students actually in the room with me, the rest were virtual. In my district, students could opt to go virtual at any time. With the vast

Keith Massey teaches Latin at Leonia High School in Bergen County. He previously worked for the National Security Agency (NSA) as an Arab linguist, serving in Iraq. He maintains a website at keithmassey.net.

majority of our students virtual, we clearly needed to plan the lessons around them, not around the students actually in the room with us.

In those months before we received the vaccine, we were teaching in unavoidable proximity to students and fellow staff. We were in harm's way. I began to feel the same sense of dread and danger as when I had been in Iraq.

Fall turned into winter, and then winter turned into a spring at which time the vaccine was finally available. I got it the very first second I could.

In the spring of 2021, I was now down to one or two in-school students in each of my five classes. One day I said to one of them, the only one in the room, "The lesson, as you know, is prerecorded content. I guess the only value added that I give you is when I say 'Good morning' to you in person." The student replied, "That's the reason I come in the building."

I cried then, and I cry again as I remember that moment. In the middle of that nightmare, with whatever danger from the virus we were experiencing, that student needed people. We must never forget as teachers that alongside whatever subject we teach—the most important lesson we give is so often just to be a kind presence.

Let me now elaborate on why I feel, in retrospect, that last year was the second time I went to war.

THE LOW-GRADE FEAR OF ATTACK

When I arrived in Iraq, it was still a war. My biggest worry was the possibility of a mortar attack by insurgents. While I was there, two mortar attacks were directed at our base. In both cases, they landed outside the 20-foot concrete walls surrounding us. But we were the target. The low-grade anxiety of life-threatening danger was just a part of the day there. I can remember lying down in my bed to sleep and wondering if I would be killed by an attack in the night.

Last year felt much the same to me as I went about my job teaching. We were in harm's way. I have vivid memories of being very afraid and very careful when we began the school year. I can remember trying to avoid any proximity to people, even while wearing a mask. The lingering threat was there, just as it had been in Iraq.

In the strict quarantine, we could control our potential exposure. When we went back in our buildings to teach in September of 2020, we could not. We were in a constant state of potential infection. There was a low-grade feeling of danger for our lives. We were in harm's way.

THE CAMARADERIE OF IT ALL

When you have been to war with someone, you share an experience that creates a very special and indelible bond. This is the sentiment Shakespeare expresses in "Henry V," in the speech on St. Crispin's Day, "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers." That low-grade fear of attack, when shared with someone, makes you comrades in arms.

I would serve in other deployments with people who had also served in war zones. On one occasion, I was one of three agents in a social setting abroad. Two of us were sharing war stories, while a third had never done such a deployment. He expressed envy that he wasn't really part of the

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The lesson, as you know, is prerecorded content. I guess the only value added that I give you is when I say 'Good morning' to you in person." The student replied, "That's the reason I come in the building.

conversation. I remember the two of us who had been there, we locked eyes in a combination of pride and pain. We knew we were proud of our service, but we also both knew what the experience took out of us.

I felt this again last year. This experience certainly extends to the fellow faculty and staff we shared danger with. It also extends to those students who were hybrid with us last year. I noticed one day that a sophomore boy who was hybrid start to finish had begun the year shorter than me, but one day he walked in the room and I saw that he had overtaken me. When I mentioned this to him, he told me that a few other boys in our class, all virtual, but whom he saw in person on a regular basis, were now similarly tall. But, you see, that was just information. With him this was experiential.

THE LACK OF CLOSURE OF AN ENDLESS YEAR

My wife and I got married in December of 2004 after my return. I would work at the NSA for two more years, before leaving to become a Latin teacher. I am very proud of my service there, but I also believe I have done even greater good for the universe as a high school teacher.

I had left Iraq, but I learned with deep sadness that a place where I ate a meal while waiting for my flight out was attacked a few months after my departure, killing numerous U.S. and Iraqi soldiers, as well as cafeteria workers. The base where I spent my time was abandoned a few months after my departure when an attack finally did land inside the walls, severely injuring some personnel. I was not there, but in a certain way I have never left the place. You can physically leave the war, but a part of you is always stuck there.

In the same way, last year never really ended in our minds. The ordinary rites of passage that tell us a school year was over were either absent or at least different enough that true closure didn't occur. Last year for me simply evolved into a new year, still wearing masks and with a lot more students in the room. The last school year didn't really seem to end for the simple fact that the pandemic didn't end.

THE CRUCIAL ROLE WE PLAY

We went through a significant trauma last year. So often as teachers and support staff, the last year quickly becomes a distant memory as we press into the current one. We are finishing the current year, but we still need to process last year with thoughtfulness. Somehow, some way, we need to incorporate last year into our being as we move forward. We need to do that because our students also experienced their own personal traumas in that year. And we need to be in solidarity with them as we acknowledge that they also are processing the worst year of their much younger lives.

And, as I have said all that, I wonder if this current year has not been, in some ways, even worse than the last. This means that we would only all the more need to process what last year was, in order to begin to survive what we are going through now.

We have spent time in harm's way. We lost people along the way. We are not yet completely out of danger. As we are all trying to rebuild this world, let us remember what a crucial role we as a school community have in it. We band of brothers, sisters and friends. 🏠



HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEES

Keeping on keeping on despite pandemic times

By Dorothy Wigmore

Mold in the ceiling? Expected to use toxic chemicals, especially without training or protective gear? Dealing with poor ventilation and air quality? Mercury in gym floors?

Who you gonna call? For NJEA members, the best bet is their union health and safety committee, especially if its members are trained and able to help co-workers tackle hazards.

“I build our health and safety committees around being as strong and recognized as the grievance committees,” says Mike Rollins, Organizational Development field representative and NJEA’s state health and safety contact. “A grievance committee in your local association, that’s for policing the contract. The health and safety committee is for policing health and safety and requirements the district must follow.”

Like other issues that need “policing,” it helps to

cover health and safety in the contract.

“More and more locals want to have those committees and language in their contracts,” says Doug Dale, an NJEA consultant and chair of the Monmouth County Education Association Health and Safety Committee. “Not only do the committees engage members, but they also give members an understanding of how they can control what’s happening in the classroom or the building, or how to improve it. Members are starting to understand more and more that they need health and safety language in their contracts, so they can enforce it more. It gives them a timeline for that too.”

With or without contract language, health and safety committee work can be stressful in “normal” times. Dealing with the pandemic—at work and elsewhere—has stressed and burned out many

union activists.

Despite pandemic-related burnout, health and safety committees are “the energy part of the district,” Rollins says. Change has come from their knowledge and activism, as the Review has documented.

Workplace safety and health doesn’t fall from the sky. It comes with a systems and prevention framework, rather than blaming individuals. It happens with thinking about health and safety as an organizing tool to build power. And it comes with training and support.

WHAT CAN STRESSED OR BURNED OUT COMMITTEES DO?

As the school year winds down, it’s a good time to lay the groundwork for next fall—what do committee members need to learn about, practice,

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**To help others,
committee
members need
to look after
themselves too.**

and do to take care of themselves and others?

NJEA has lots of training events and materials for committees—from specific topics to opportunities to learn from others. There are quarterly statewide meetings and overnight events at the state and county levels. UniServ representatives and Rollins can help deal with reluctant administrations and “What should we do?” questions. The New Jersey Work Environment Council (WEC) also has materials, offers different types of committee training (e.g., hazard mapping), and provides technical support for local association health and safety committees.

To help others, committee members need to look after themselves too. In these still-pandemic times, “it’s important to consider where people are at now,” says Cecelia Gilligan Leto, WEC’s project director who provides many of the organization’s health and safety workshops.

Committees can do that with a check-in about how individual members are dealing (or have dealt) with the pandemic, what it’s affected in their lives, and how much energy they have for doing things. Talk about what that means for how the committee is doing. A follow-up the conversation with someone from the local association executive committee should take place, talking frankly about what health and safety committee members need to keep going.

Both conversations build trust and reduce stress by increasing support for members from within the committee, other members, the local association and larger union.

One result should be reviewing priorities and timelines: what really needs to, or can, be done before the school year ends, what could be tackled over the summer and before classes resume, and what needs outside help, especially given people’s energy levels.

A helpful and fun framework to do this involves brainstorming three main questions:

- Where are we now (in terms of ourselves, our tasks/plans, how are we doing as a committee)?
- Where do we want to be (by a certain date and/or in general)?
- How do we get there?

Participants use markers to draw or write their answers on large flip charts taped to a wall, although smaller pages at a table work well for a few people. They can do it with or without a facilitator.

The “How” part should cover the self-care for committee members’ needs (e.g., asking for help, setting time limits, saying “I can’t now”). Other things to consider include:

- Do we need to change how we organize ourselves, run our meetings (e.g., rules about “step up, step back,” making decisions)?
- How do we deal with people’s needs, limitations, and disagreements?
- How should we deal with what’s now on our plate?
- What about a survey to find out what hazards/issues members really care about? (See resources.)
- Can we get a quick and important victory to activate the committee and our co-workers? How do we celebrate and brag about it with members?
- How do we share the load, ask for help with a specific task, or recruit new members?
- What is/are the best way(s) to communicate regularly with members and the local’s executive committee.
- Who can find out what other locals have done?
- How do we have some fun? (It’s important) 🎉

Resources

Beautiful Trouble

Narrative Power Analysis, and other tools
beautifultrouble.org

Wigmorising

Committee process toolbox (from the “Seeing the workplace with new eyes” guide for health and safety committees)
bit.ly/wigmorising-hscomm

Healthy Work Campaign

healthywork.org

Hospital Employees Union

The workplace anti-stress guide
bit.ly/heu-stress

NJEA

Health and Safety Manual
njea.org/download/1784

NJEA Review

“Health and safety committees. Knowledge + Action = Change”
September 2020
njea.org/hscomm-kac

New Jersey Work Environment Council

njwec.org

International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees

Surveys as organizing tools
bit.ly/iatse-surveys

*Dorothy Wigmore is a long-time health and safety specialist and WEC consultant. She has worked in Canada, the U.S. and Mozambique, focusing on prevention and worker participation to solve job-related hazards. These days, she is writing *Transmission Truth? a book about workers’ experiences in the pandemic.**



From 'Priority' to 'ACCESS'

Organizing for the schools our students and educators deserve

By Amanda Adams

The COVID-19 pandemic was an eye-opening experience. I became acutely aware of how valuable my health is, how important my family, friends and colleagues are, and, among other things, how important teachers are to public education.

COVID-19 highlighted persistent health and wealth gaps in the U.S., and New Jersey was no exception. During the last two years we saw how the virus particularly impacted poor communities of color across the country. As we prepared to go back to school last fall, the conversation shifted from student and family well-being to school safety and missed learning opportunities. I challenged myself to consider how my work could heighten its focus on the most marginalized educators, students and families in this state.

For the last seven years, I was the coordinator of the NJEA Priority Schools Initiative. That initiative provided professional development to schools through collaborative leadership, data analysis and goal setting. Once administrators and staff created an implementation team composed of a diverse representation of teachers, NJEA Priority Schools consultants helped the school meet its achievement goals.

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

The program was especially effective in developing professional learning opportunities, creating student programs, and fostering collaboration and shared leadership. It was most successful when there was buy-in at all district levels.

In Linden, for example, we were invited by the local president to work in three school buildings, assisting the school leadership teams with looking at data, defining professional learning goals and working toward those goals through strong professional learning communities.

When the literacy coach from one of the three schools saw results in escalating student achievement scores, she brought our model to the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction. Before long there was a districtwide model in all of Linden's elementary schools fashioned after the NJEA Priority Schools Initiative. One of their schools, School #5, received the high honor of becoming a National Blue Ribbon School in 2020. But this is an unusual case—the Priority Schools Initiative did not usually sustain itself once the consultants left the school or the district leadership changed.

THE NJEA ACCESS MODEL

Over the last two years, many articles were published describing how well schools known as “community schools” supported students and their families during the pandemic. These schools

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Organizing is hard work, but there has been no time in recent history when it has been more necessary to improve working conditions for educators and learning conditions for students.”

had systems in place to meet all the unique needs of their communities prior to the pandemic. The National Education Association already recognizes community schools as “a strategy to advocate for racial justice in education and remove obstacles that stand in the way of some students.” Public schools in New Jersey needed to move toward a model that would support all of our students, especially those most deeply affected by the pandemic.

The Priority Schools Initiative was transformed into the NJEA ACCESS Model, an acronym for A Community Collective for Equitable and Sustainable Schools. ACCESS is an opportunity for local associations to partner with full-time and part-time NJEA staff to organize around creating

and supporting community schools. ACCESS works with local associations to identify leaders and support them, to create community coalitions, to develop strategic campaigns toward community schools, to work in schools to improve the learning environment for students and promote teacher leadership, and to engage the entire school community around healing and wellness.

COMPREHENSIVE, INTEGRATED GOALS

The original goals of the Priority Schools Initiative have been transformed into three comprehensive and integrated goals.

Collective power

The ACCESS Model will harness the collective power of educators, families, students, and the community to improve the learning outcomes for students by supporting local education associations to bargain for the common good. Bargaining for the common good may include developing high-quality professional learning, offering ethnic studies, training for culturally responsive teaching, integrating healing-centered and restorative practices, providing integrated student supports, and expanding learning time and opportunities.

Collaborative relationships

The ACCESS Model will create an environment that cultivates teacher leaders by fostering strong labor-management relationships. At the school building level, labor-management collaboration cultivates teacher leadership expansion, inclusive and collaborative leadership practices, empowered teachers, a community of professional learners, the personal growth of teachers, and an awareness of teachers as integral community resources.

Healing, equity and access

The ACCESS Model will foster an environment that supports the building of a thriving community by addressing healing, equity and access in education. ACCESS engages families and communities through the inclusive leadership of parents and other community members. ACCESS fosters results-oriented decision-making, shared learning, and reflective practices around healing, equity and access. The model partners with community support services that acknowledge and address the impact of trauma.

LOCAL ASSOCIATIONS AND ACCESS

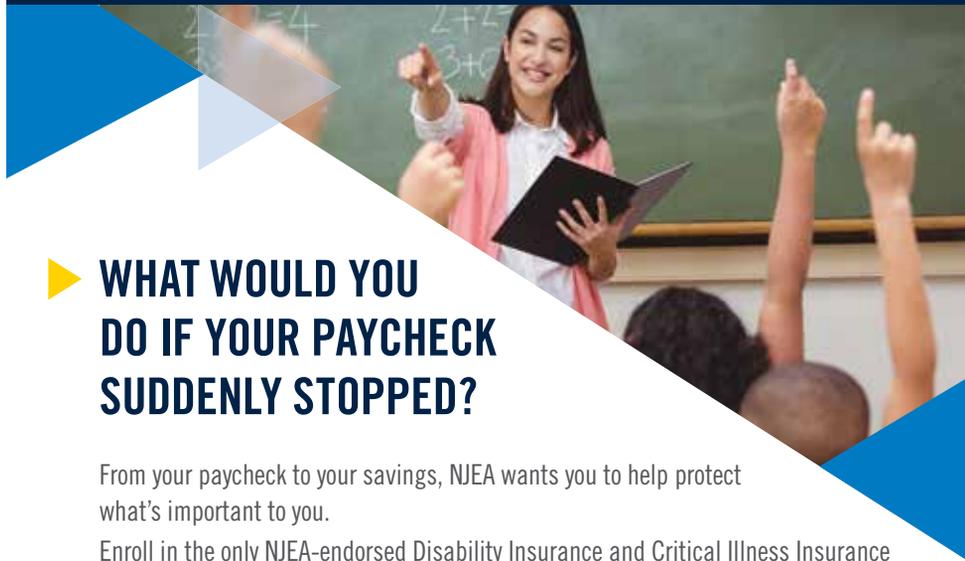
Over the last year, the Camden, Trenton, New Brunswick and Union Township education associations have all embarked on this journey

toward social justice in public education. The local associations’ leaders and ACCESS Model consultants have been trained through the NEA Strategic Institute for Community Schools to begin working to identify and support local leadership, create community coalitions, and develop strategic campaigns toward the spread of community schools. This work aims to build a strong education justice coalition that empowers advocates achieve the ACCESS Model goals.

This year has been one of new beginnings, including a new way of thinking about collective action and school improvement. Organizing is hard work, but there has been no time in recent history when it has been more necessary to improve working conditions for educators and learning conditions for students. And there appears to be no other way to shift the giant system that is public education.

We can look to recent examples of successful organizing efforts in Minneapolis, Chicago, Austin, Los Angeles, Cincinnati, Milwaukee and others. Those local associations have stepped up to the challenge. It’s New Jersey’s turn to organize strategic campaigns focused on creating the schools that all our students deserve—schools that are designed for the humanity of those that walk through their hallways. 🏡

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Wildwood addresses student and community needs through CTE

By Michael Crane

While vocational schools offer a great number of advantages for many communities, in-house career and technical education (CTE) has been reborn and developed in Wildwood to accommodate those students who need career pathways other than traditional college settings. The ever-increasing needs of our community in CTE are at the forefront of our school's mission, to serve the entire population's needs within the doors of our own school.

As the morning announcements begin at 7:40 a.m. in this small island town, students are still feeling a little foggy and waking up as they chat about their game last night or the dance scheduled for next week. Wildwood High School first opened its doors in 1916. Many generations of families have been raised here and remained here. They worked here and stayed in Wildwood when they retired—pride and dedication have been passed from generation to generation.

Nearly 70% of the 243 students at Wildwood High School are economically disadvantaged. Sixty-two percent are students of color with 52% identifying

at Hispanic or Latinx. These same students typically have considerable language and economic barriers and educational gaps. They often lack the opportunities afforded to students in larger communities.

Wildwood is a tourist community whose population increases exponentially each summer. The job opportunities increase exponentially as well. The town employs many police officers, construction workers, restaurant workers, graphic designers and educational staff. In response to the jobs created by tourism, Wildwood High School continually adds to and shapes its electives and career-focused courses to meet community needs.

In light of Wildwood's challenges and opportunities, the school community collaborated to answer this question: "How can we further provide our student population with the experience and diverse career pathways they need within our school walls?"

Michael Crane is a carpentry teacher at Wildwood High School. He represents Cape May County on the NJEA Vocational, Career and Technical Education Committee.



Students in the construction program at Wildwood High School.

The answer is programs at Wildwood High School that have evolved to provide CTE training. These programs enable students to walk out of Wildwood High School ready to enter multiple areas of the workforce with entry-level training and post-secondary technical preparedness.

CONSTRUCTION

Wildwood High School is currently offering a three-year Construction Technology Academy, which provides graduating students with the skills to enter the workforce at an apprenticeship level. Students are also prepared for post-secondary educational pathways within the construction fields. Students complete finishing processes for flooring, cabinet and trim installation, electrical, HVAC, and plumbing. Students spend the second half of their senior year as an intern in one or more of the construction fields gaining valuable hands-on experience. In this program students complete NOCTI pathway-construction certification processes.

CULINARY

Wildwood High School also offers a four-year CTE program, complete with an articulation agreement with Atlantic Cape Community College that offers students five college credits upon completion of the program. The program consists of four levels: Introduction to Culinary, Culinary 1, Culinary 2, and Culinary 3. Upon completion of the program, students can also earn certification in ServSafe and TIPS (training for intervention procedures). They gain valuable experience in working at the student-run restaurant, The Warrior Cafe. They are trained for both “front of the house” and “back of the house” restaurant career positions.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

The Criminal Justice Academy offers students working knowledge in the areas of criminal justice, terrorism, history as it applies to the law enforcement fields, forensics, and criminal investigations. These programs of study provide the training and skills needed to enter law enforcement positions.

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Graphic design classes explore the fundamentals of research, idea development, composition, typography and the organization of information. Students learn to skillfully communicate using visual language, solve problems, create visually pleasing designs, develop meaningful concepts, and create strategies and concept-driven design solutions. Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop are taught so students can achieve mastery of image layout and creation, manipulation/retouching of photographs, and a skilled use of typography, all of which are relevant in today's graphic design industry.

Career options are explored in the fields of marketing, advertising, and graphic design. Students work as a team in a studio setting to promote the services and talent of the studio designers. They meet weekly to discuss work flow, job responsibilities, scheduling and job/project status. The students are connected with members of the community by working closely with internal and external clientele.

EDUCATION

The Education Academy at Wildwood High School offers dual credit programs allowing students to achieve college credit at the same time they are learning the fundamentals of a career in education. The Teacher Cadet curriculum is one adopted by Wildwood to assist with the Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement. 🎓

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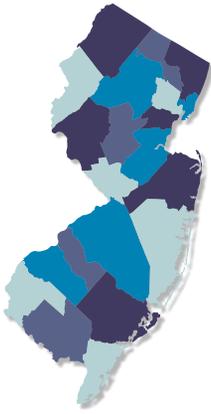
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Workshops and conferences

highlights

Holocaust education and crop protection

VIRTUAL TWO-DAY SEMINAR ON THE HISTORY OF THE HOLOCAUST

A free online seminar about the history of the Holocaust will be held June 27-28 from 9 to 11 a.m. and 1:30 to 3 p.m. each day. This annual professional development seminar for educators is presented under the auspices of the Herbert and Leonard Littman Families Holocaust Resource Center (HRC) and the Allen and Joan Bildner Center for the Study of Jewish Life at Rutgers University.

The seminar is open to middle and high school educators, and it includes educational materials and professional development credits. An application is required to attend. Applicants should have at least one year of teaching experience and at least one year of involvement with Holocaust/genocide education or currently be pursuing a master of education degree. Advance registration is due by June 19.

For more details, visit bit.ly/bildner-he or email Sarah Portilla at sarah.portilla@rutgers.edu.

LANTERNFLY DESIGN CHALLENGE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Rutgers Center for Math, Science and Computer Education has created a Lanternfly Eradication Unit. Using a problem-based learning model and the engineering design process, K-12 teachers take part in a lanternfly eradication design challenge. The professional development will address both New Jersey Design Thinking standards and Next Generation Science Standards.

Participants will leave with lesson plans for the lanternfly design challenge for their respective grade levels. Participants will be provided with materials and tools to have the opportunity to build their own lanternfly eradication prototype.

Programs are scheduled with in-person and virtual options. Knowing that fewer than 30 lanternflies can kill a grape vine, wineries in the state are hosting the professional development (PD) programs to help stop damage to the state's grape crop.

The dates and locations are:

- May 12 – Live PD at Beneduce Vineyard, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.
- June 7 and 8 – Two-part virtual PD from 4 – 6 p.m.
- June 9 – Tomasello Winery, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.
- July 19 and 20 – Two-part virtual PD from 4 – 6 p.m.
- July 21 – Live PD at Rutgers, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

For more information and to register, visit cmsce.rutgers.edu/workshops.

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THE BECHDEL-WALLACE TEST

NJ's LGBT inclusion mandate, and your school curricula

By Amy Moran, Ph.D. and Kate Okeson

WHO'S WRITING CURRICULA THIS SUMMER?

As local school districts begin to identify which grade levels, content areas and courses need to have their curricula updated, teachers are often invited in an extra-work-for-extra-pay capacity to write new curricular documents. At "Rainbow Connection," we invite you to consider reasons and ways to advance the LGBTQIA+ curriculum mandate in your districts at the local level using a simple three-step test. But first, some context...

WHAT'S THE BECHDEL-WALLACE TEST?

Lesbian cartoonist, graphic memoirist, MacArthur "Genius" Grant winner and Vermont cartoonist laureate Alison Bechdel was first known by us for her must-read comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For*. The serial comic strip began in 1983 and was featured in gay and lesbian newspapers before eventually being published into 11 collections and now *The Essential DTWOF*, which we can't recommend highly enough.

As early as 1985, Bechdel featured a comic strip born from a conversation with her friend Liz Wallace that described the difficulty moviegoers have in finding films that don't marginalize women characters. From it, the Bechdel-Wallace Test was born, with these three simple criteria:

1. The film must have two or more female characters.
2. Who talk to each other.
3. About something other than a man.

If you can believe it, the *only* film found in theaters that passed that test at the time was the movie "Alien."

Over time, the three-criteria model for inclusion of women in film expanded to analysis of women who write, direct, produce or are crew members of films. The explicit purpose of this expansion was to draw attention to the inherent manifestations of sexism in the film industry. [See QR code for resource links.] In 2015, only 58% of Hollywood films passed all three criteria. In 2020, only six of the 10 biggest Oscar winners did.

While Hollywood's need to eradicate implicit biases against women in film continues, the Bechdel-Wallace gives us much to consider as teachers. In the *Pop Culture Classroom* blog, Molly Tanzer writes that the Bechdel-Wallace Test:

1. Promotes critical thinking about media.
2. Illuminates the concept of unconscious bias.
3. Can lead to discussions of quality representation.
4. Fosters discussion about representations beyond simply "women."

WHAT'S THE VITO RUSSO TEST?

Many other tests have modeled themselves after the Bechdel-Wallace Test to similarly examine media for exclusion of voices, experiences and contributions by historically marginalized people. GLAAD (founded in



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1985 as The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) has worked to influence media toward positive social change. Borrowing from Bechdel and Wallace, GLAAD co-founder, celebrated film historian and author of *The Celluloid Closet* Vito Russo developed criteria to guide filmmakers to create more multidimensional characters and provide a metric for wide-scale representation.

Let us know how it's going! Share your journey with writing authentic curricula at [RainbowConnectionNJEA@gmail.com!](mailto:RainbowConnectionNJEA@gmail.com)

To pass the Vito Russo Test, these requirements must be in place (from GLAAD's website):

- The film contains a character that is identifiably lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender.
- That character must not be solely or predominantly defined by their sexual orientation or gender identity, i.e., they are made up of the same sort of unique character traits commonly used to differentiate straight characters from one another.
- The LGBTQ character must be tied into the plot in such a way that their removal would have a significant effect. Meaning they are not there to simply provide colorful commentary, paint urban authenticity, or (perhaps most commonly) set up a punchline. The character should “matter.”

TESTING OUR OWN WORK FOR LGBTQIA+ INCLUSIVITY

But what about making the curricula we write this summer explicitly inclusive of the experiences and contributions of LGBTQIA+ people? Using the Bechdel-Wallace Test for inclusion of women and the adaptive Vito Russo Test for including queer people and issues in film, let's look at how we might borrow from both to test our own curriculum-writing work for LGBTQIA+ inclusivity. In doing so, let's ask:

- How could we assess what we're teaching for authentic LGBTQIA+ representation?
- How do we make room for critical conversations around gaps and lacks?
- And what's the harm in not doing it?

THE MORAN-OKESON TEST FOR LGBTQ+ INCLUSION IN CURRICULA

As we consider how to write curricula this summer that honors queer members of school communities, works to support and expand safer school cultures, and upholds the spirit of our state's LGBT inclusion mandate, we need to represent LGBTQIA+ people and issues in a rich, three-dimensional way. This means that whether the queer person or issue being featured is a character in literature, an author, a historical figure, a professional contributor to a field of study or a specific event, it's important that they're not solely included because it checks off a box. Instead, while queer sexual orientation or gender identity is the reason that the individual or work is being studied, the work or person's contribution is all the more critical because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Furthermore, because all teachers create contact points for their students, it is never about perfect implementation or totality of knowledge. It instead becomes about a regular and normalizing approach to language that includes empathy for others and ways of seeing folx and the world. This way of seeing is enriched by those who have historically been silenced and examining those silences. This elicits wonderful questions that aid our young scholars in taking about who has been missing in their “histories” and learning how to apply critical questioning skills in those instances.

So as many of us embark on the curriculum writing journey this summer for our districts, and even more of us work individually and with our colleagues toward queer inclusion in our classrooms, we offer this reinterpretation of the Bechdel-Wallace Test for curriculum writing for grades K-12, including classroom resources, texts, and individual lessons.

Some thoughts on tokenism

Writer and magazine co-founder Andi Zeisler notes that there's a risk in creating works with inclusion slapped on, essentially “gaming” the test by adding just enough elements to pass but continuing to offer only formulaic representation. Here, we're concerned that simply mentioning an LGBTQIA+ person without the critical complexity warranted for developmentally appropriate pedagogy is an attempt at passing the test without authentically affirming our LGBTQIA+ students. Such uncritical inclusion also fails to expansively inform our cis/straight students about the contributions of LGBTQIA+ people to our diverse and vibrant society.

When we identify and prevent tokenism—differentiating it from “heroes and holidays,” which can be an intentional approach—we help to prevent the fatigue of people who are typically marginalized. Too often women, LGBTQIA+, and People of Color are put into situations where they are expected to speak for everyone who shares their identities. Avoiding tokenism puts the onus on those working toward authentic representation, such as educators and curriculum writers.

Furthermore, being “exceptionalized” and being asked to perform work for all people who share a single trait/feature of identity is also something to avoid. Perhaps this is a way to talk about Pride marches, celebrations, the difference between them, and how we “other” the community at times and only “accept” them when they “perform” for us as queer people.



Scan this QR code for more information about the “tests.”

*The Moran-Okeson (*MO) Test:*

1. LGBTQIA+ people and contributions (and/or issues) are explicitly included in course curricula.
2. LGBTQIA+ people and/or contributions are studied at least once per school year in each grade, content area, and class.
3. LGBTQIA+ people are represented in a way that's accurate, affirming, compassionate and three-dimensional.

This kind of LGBTQIA+ inclusion, among other representative curricular mandates, should also spur districts into providing professional development that allows educators to explore and share resources that create a depth of knowledge and practice. Such professional development affirms the approaches we need when preparing intentional lessons. It also enables educators to pivot and address challenges to inclusive work.

*The abbreviation of Moran-Okeson (MO) serves as a tip of the hat to the main character ‘Mo’ in Bechdel's *DTWOF*. 🍷

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NJEA Technology Committee launches TechTalks

By the NJEA Technology Committee

As members of the NJEA Technology, we are excited to launch NJEA TechTalks. The channel will introduce members to current and new applications in the classroom at various grade levels and subjects, as well as across all school support areas (i.e., offices, buildings and grounds, security, etc.).

The NJEA Technology Committee will use short video clips, solicited from NJEA Technology Committee members and other invited members, to share the variety of technology platforms used in classrooms and other places in the school setting.

This new content may be posted on various digital platforms, including the NJEA YouTube channel under “TechTalks.” Just go to [YouTube.com/njeaweb](https://www.youtube.com/njeaweb). It is our goal to engage certificated and support staff members to understand how beneficial technology is in our profession.

The NJEA Technology Committee

Sabina A. Ellis, chair, Essex County
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 Dali J. Kilpatrick, Camden County
 Julie E. Stratton, Cape May County
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 Melissa Krupp, Ocean County
 Lori E. Lalama, Passaic County
 Bethany Hannah, Salem County
 Camille T. Ragin, Somerset County
 Edith Farrell, Union County

VIDEOS AND PRESENTERS

Our first two videos will feature WeVideo and Google Jamboard. Committee members and Frenchtown Education Association President Pete Moran will present Google Jamboard.

Committee member Lori Lalama will present WeVideo. She is a computer teacher at Christopher Columbus Middle School in Clifton and is president of the Clifton Education Association. She enjoys taking the New Jersey Student Learning Standards and designing her own engaging projects that utilize real-world applications. These projects can be used at any level, incorporating cross-curricular connections, while ensuring that content is grade specific.

WeVideo ([wevideo.com](https://www.wavevideo.com)) is an online, cloud-based video recording and editing platform that allows users to share videos anywhere at any time. One of Lalama’s favorite video projects having her students develop a video advertisement for their theme parks. The students are the CEOs of their theme parks, and they must brainstorm to develop a plan. The project requires them “outside the box,” to make their park one of the 10 best in the world. They must incorporate pictures (jpeg and gifs), captions, transitions, backgrounds and fun music. They can record themselves to create voice overs.

When the project is completed, students know how to share it across any device, through social media, in email, and embed it into different applications. WeVideo is easy to use in any class to develop collaborative, engaging and exciting projects. Who knows? You might have the next Steven Spielberg or Spike Lee in your class.

Committee member Peter Moran will present Google Jamboard. A Technology teacher for 20 years and a classroom teacher for five years, Moran

is the president of the Frenchtown Education Association and a fourth-grade teacher. He is a Google Certified Innovator and has been a presenter at the International Society for Technology in Education and NJEA conventions. He is passionate about infusing technology into curricula that works seamlessly for educators and students.

There has been a tectonic shift in education over the past two years, which could not have been possible without the assistance of technology. The combination of Google Classroom and Jamboard can make remote and in-person learning easier for teachers and students. Moran uses the product almost daily with his students, and with the combination of Google Classroom and Jamboard, both teachers and students can create and complete assignments that can be shared and reviewed on their laptops.

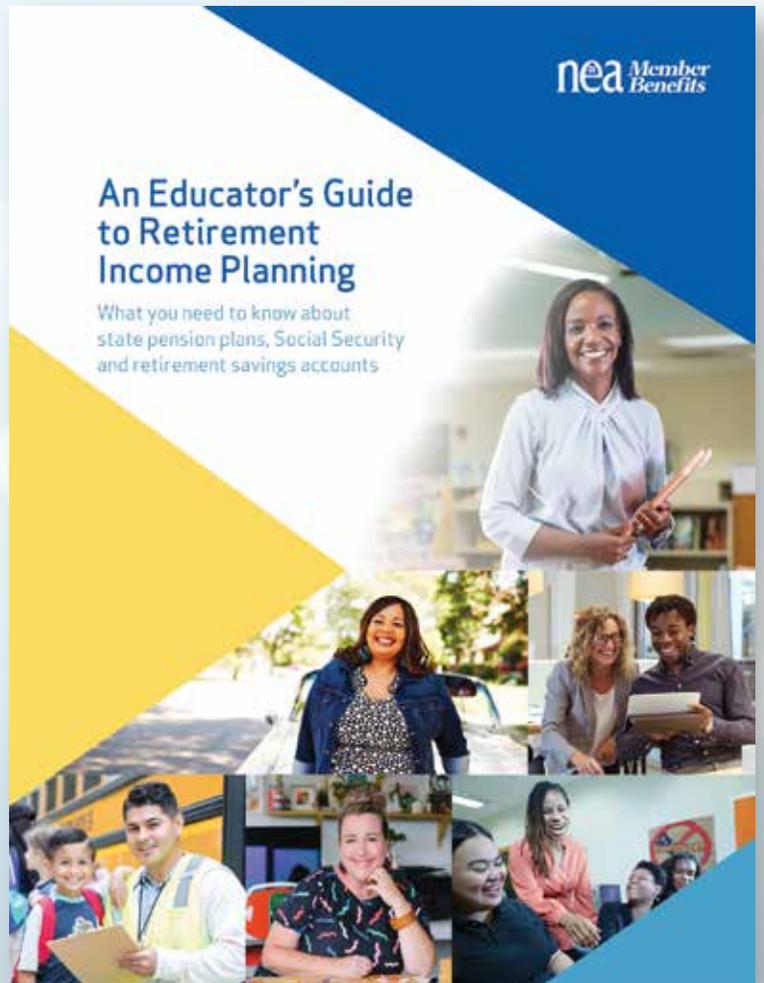
The TechTalks video will show how to make it work on multiple devices such as iPads, Chromebooks or PCs. In addition, the video will show you how to have students work individually or collaboratively. We hope this will take some stress out of our new and highly stressful times.

The videos will highlight how to get started creating your own tech-based tools, and how to take advantage of all the wonderful features that can increase productivity and enhance the classroom and school-based experience. 🚀



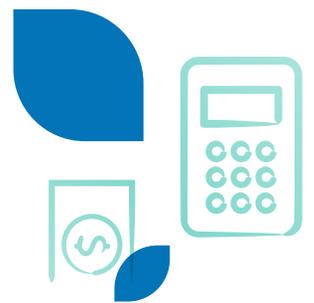
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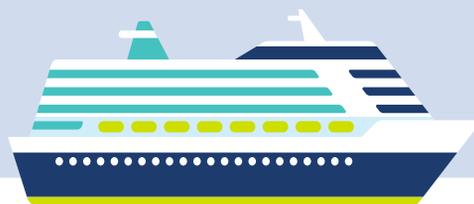
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The New Jersey Retirees' Education Association (NJREA) is one of our nation's largest and most effective organizations of retired educators, education support professionals, and community college staff and professors. It's also the place to be for an array of social, professional and philanthropic activities. NJREA provides retired educators with productive and enjoyable ways of staying connected to colleagues and public education without having to go to work every day.

From keeping legislators on notice when we fight to protect our pensions and benefits to attending luncheons and other events, NJREA members get together regularly to enjoy each other's company and advocate for the great public schools we've worked so hard to build. In addition to statewide luncheons and the NJREA and NJEA conventions in Atlantic City, county retiree education associations (CREAs) also hold regular social and informational meetings.

As a retired school employee, membership in NJREA, NJEA, and NEA-Retired enables you to continue your membership benefits and participation in the same consumer-oriented benefits that current NJEA members enjoy. So don't delay; you can join even before you retire! To become a unified member of NJREA, NJEA, NEA-R, and your CREA, you will find our application form at njea.org/njrea.



NJREA is one of our nation's largest and most effective organizations of retired educators

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A gift of NJREA membership is a perfect way to honor this year's retirees for their service. Many of us can speak from experience: retirees don't really need a plaque, bowl or clock; they need to stay informed, involved and protected. NJREA membership provides this for them.

To ensure the members you've worked so hard to represent remain protected, consider gifting them with their first year of membership in NJREA. This membership, which costs about \$100 for professionals and \$60 for ESP, is all-inclusive and automatically enrolls retirees in the national, state and county retired education associations.

If you wish to take advantage of this gift opportunity to present to your retirees in June, contact NJEA's Membership division at membership@njea.org, and send in the names of retiring employees. In turn, you will be sent invoices for payment.

Around the counties

Because of COVID-19 concerns and restrictions, all meetings/events are subject to change. For questions, call your county REA. For trip details, check the county newsletter.

MONMOUTH COUNTY REA

June 14 June meeting/luncheon at Spring Lake Manor. Cost is \$34. To attend, call Sue Shrott by June 3 at 732-995-7754.

MORRIS COUNTY REA

May 15: Scholarship fundraiser at the Birchwood Manor in Whippany. Program will be a Tricky Tray. Cost is \$42. To attend, call Cheryl Doltz at 973-818-1358 by May 1.

June 8: Scholarship awards meeting/luncheon at the Birchwood Manor in Whippany. Program will be scholarship awards. Cost is \$35 for members, \$44 for guests. To attend, call John Beekman at 973-514-1080 by June 1.

PASSAIC COUNTY REA

June 1: Meeting/luncheon at The Brownstone in Paterson. Meeting will include officer elections. Cost is \$35. To attend, call Kitty Sausa at 201-445-7577 by May 27.

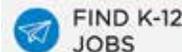
SUSSEX COUNTY REA

June 6: Summer meeting/luncheon will be a scholarship event. Location TBD—pending COVID-19 status. More information will follow.

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STAFF NEWS

HIRES AND PROMOTIONS



NJEA congratulates **CARRIE HERBERT** on her promotion on March 1 to executive assistant to the executive director. Herbert first joined NJEA staff on Jan. 2, 2018, as an administrative assistant in the NJEA Office of Legal Services, where she also worked extensively with the Affiliations, Professional Rights and Responsibilities, and Elections committees. Prior to joining NJEA staff, Herbert was employed for 20 years as a legal assistant at the Zazzali firm. Through her work there, Herbert has obtained and brought a unique and varied set of skills and experience to the Executive Office. She has extensive experience working on various NJEA corporate matters, including contracts, opinions, legislation, research, and the maintenance of complex legal files. She has particular expertise in the area of school/labor and employment law and the NJEA legal services program. Herbert lives in Yardley, Pennsylvania with her husband, Mark.



NJEA welcomes **KIMEISHA BOYD** who joined NJEA staff on March 1 as a secretary in the Professional Development and Instructional Issues Division. Boyd has nearly 15 years of administrative experience, including administrative and office management roles with the Boys and Girls Club of Mercer County. Boyd holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Phoenix. She lives in Robbinsville with her fiancé, son, and daughter.



in

NJEA welcomes **STEPHANIE NATERA** who joined NJEA staff on March 16 as an associate director for public relations in the Communications Division. Prior to joining NJEA staff, Natera was a school social worker in Passaic Public Schools and a school counselor in East Orange Public Schools. As a licensed clinical social worker, Natera worked more recently as a restorative practices trainer. For the Education Association of Passaic, she served as a building rep and on the Executive Board. Natera holds a bachelor's degree in women and gender studies with a minor in psychology. She earned a master's degree in social work from Rutgers University. Born and raised in Passaic, Natera lives in Berlin with her fiancé, Brandon.



Member Benefits 

\$250 MUSIC AND ARTS GRANT

California Casualty, provider of the sponsored NJEA and NEA Auto & Home Insurance Program, will award individual members with a \$250 grant for their classroom or program. Applications are accepted until June 30 of each year. Apply at calcasmusicartsgrant.com.



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Panasonic Student Eco Citizenship Program



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During the 2021-2022 school year over 100 New Jersey schools took action and became proud ambassadors creating solutions for a sustainable global environment and society.

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Belmont Runyon Elementary School
Branchburg Central Middle School
Camden Street School
Chancellor Avenue School
Cicely Tyson Middle school
Cleveland Elementary School
Cordero School PS #37
Cornelia F. Bradford PS #16
Dr Martin Luther King Educational Complex
Dr. E Alma Flagg School
Dr. Leroy McCloud Elementary School
Dr. Maya Angelou PS #20
Dr. Michael Conti PS #5
Eleanor Van Gelder School
Elliott Street Elementary School
Elysian Charter School of Hoboken
First Ave School
Frank R. Conwell Elementary School PS #3
Franklin Elementary School
Future Ready Prep
George Washington Carver Elementary School
Glenview Avenue School

Grant Elementary School
Green Brook Middle School
Harriet Tubman Elementary School
Haskell Elementary School
Hawkins Street Elementary School
Hawthorne Avenue School
Hoboken Charter School
Hoboken Middle School
Hudson Montessori School
Ivy Hill Elementary School
James F. Murray PS #38
Jersey City Global Charter School
Joyce Kilmer Middle School
Knowlton Twp. School District
Lafayette Street School
Lincoln Elementary School
Lincoln Middle School
Looking Exclusively To The Cross
Ministries School
Louise A. Spencer
Marcus Newcomb Middle School
Martin Center for the Arts PS #41
Martin Luther King Jr School PS #6
Maurice River Township Elementary School
McKinley Elementary School
Menlo Park Elementary School
Mount Vernon Elementary School
Nicolaus Copernicus School P #25
Noor-UI-Iman School

Northern Burlington Regional Middle School
Oliver Street School
Pace Charter School of Hamilton
Park Elementary School
Parker Elementary School
Peshine Avenue School
Rafael Hernandez Elementary School
Ridge Street Elementary School
River Edge School District
Rivera Community Middle School
Roxbury High School
Salome Urena Elementary School
Somerdale Park Elementary School
Sonia Sotomayor School PS #21
South 17th Street Elementary School
Sparta Middle School
Speedway Academies
Sussex Avenue Renew School
The Learning Community Charter School
Thirteenth Avenue Elementary School
Thomas Edison Energy Smart Charter School
Thomas Wallace Middle School
Township of Ocean Intermediate School
Unity Charter School
Vineland Public Charter School
Whitney M. Young, Jr. School PS 15
Wilson Avenue School
Woodrow Wilson Community School

The Foundation for Impact on Literacy and Learning would also like to thank Panasonic for their support of this program.
To learn more about the Panasonic Student Eco Citizenship Program visit: ecocitizenship.org

Panasonic

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LEARN MORE

Theresa J. Brown, Ph.D., BCBA-D
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LEARN MORE

Kristina Donovan, Ph.D.
krdonovan@georgian.edu



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Classroom Close-up NJ looks back at

Students Raising Students

The Students Raising Students (SRS) program in Bridgewater Public Schools encourages students to learn more about educational opportunities around the world while fundraising to help students in Kenya and Tanzania afford school.

One of the SRS programs is the Celebrity Chef competition. Students and alumni sign up to prepare food that is then judged; the winner is awarded the Golden Spoon and the money raised goes to scholarships.



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](https://www.facebook.com/crcunj) and visit classroomcloseup.org.





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MAY & beyond

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

<p>MAY 20</p>	<p>FRIDAY Executive Committee and County Presidents Council meetings</p>	<p>JUN 18</p>	<p>SATURDAY NEA RA Statewide Caucus</p>	<p>JUL 07</p>	<p>THURSDAY Delegates depart from the NEA RA</p>
<p>MAY 21</p>	<p>SATURDAY Delegate Assembly meeting</p>	<p>JUN 22</p>	<p>WEDNESDAY Executive Committee meeting</p>	<p>JUL 13</p>	<p>WEDNESDAY NJEA Conference for Hope and Healing</p>
<p>JUN 03/04</p>	<p>FRI TO SAT LGBTQIA+ Conference</p>	<p>JUL 01</p>	<p>FRIDAY Delegates arrive at the NEA RA</p>	<p>JUL 14</p>	<p>THURSDAY NJEA Radical Imagination Summit for Educators</p>

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

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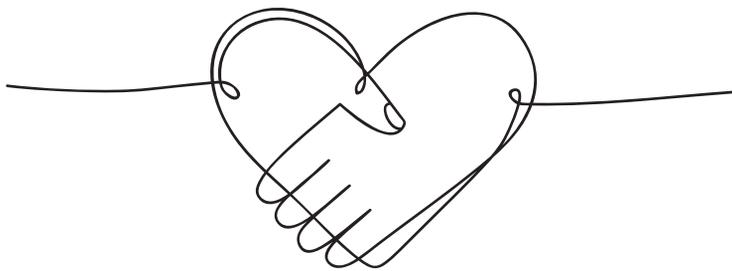
SAVE THE DATE

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MOC Empowerment Conference Members of Color Network

Hyatt Regency, Princeton

Details will follow in the June edition
of the *NJEA Review*.



Treating others with **dignity** and **respect**

All parents, regardless of their political affiliations, religious beliefs, genders or sexual orientations, and racial or ethnic backgrounds agree on one thing: they want their children to treat others with dignity and respect. That is what is at the heart of New Jersey’s Student Learning Standards for Comprehensive Health and Physical Education, adopted by the New Jersey State Board of Education without controversy in 2020. Dignity and respect are also the goal of the state’s 2019 curricular mandate concerning individuals with disabilities and LGBTQ+ persons and the 2021 curricular mandate concerning diversity and inclusion.

But it would be hard to know that from the misleading statements of some politicians and media outlets who appear to be more concerned with scoring political wins and ratings than with having an honest conversation about what’s actually in the New Jersey Student Learning Standards and state law.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STANDARDS AND CURRICULA

While most educators understand the difference between state standards and curricula, parents can be confused by the seemingly similar terms—a confusion often exploited by those more interested in spreading heat than light. The New Jersey Student Learning Standards are adopted by the State Board of Education to identify what students are supposed to have learned by the end of various grade spans. The standards do not mandate specific instruction and materials. Rather, they provide a blueprint for school district leaders and curriculum writers.

In 2020, the State Board of Education adopted revisions to the New Jersey Student Learning Standards for Comprehensive Health and Physical Education. The goal of the revised standards is to provide clear and consistent guidance for sexuality education that is age-appropriate for students in grades K-12. These revisions require students to be able to “demonstrate ways to promote dignity and respect for all people (e.g., sexual

“

All parents, regardless of their political affiliations, religious beliefs, genders or sexual orientations, and racial or ethnic backgrounds agree on one thing: they want their children to treat others with dignity and respect.

orientation, gender identity and expression, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, differing ability, immigration status, family configuration)” and to be able to “differentiate between gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation.”

Despite what certain media outlets and politicians are saying, this is not about teaching developmentally inappropriate material. It is about understanding and respecting the diversity of the human experience that is apparent to anyone living in New Jersey in 2022.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

In addition to revisions to physical and health education standards, two recently passed laws that seek to promote dignity and respect for all people have an impact on the work of curriculum writers and the educators who implement district curricula.

In 2019, Gov. Phil Murphy signed a law to create and implement new curricula concerning individuals with disabilities and LGBTQ+ persons. This law mandates that school curricula include the historical contributions of disabled and LGBTQ+ people in middle and high school classes, where appropriate. The text of the law reads that “a board of education shall include instruction on the political, economic, and social

contributions of persons with disabilities and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, in an appropriate place in the curriculum of middle school and high school students as part of the district’s implementation of the New Jersey Student Learning Standards.”

In 2021, Murphy signed a law that required schools districts to incorporate age-appropriate and subject-area-appropriate lessons on diversity and inclusion within curricula in grades K-12.

The 2021 mandate requires curricula to:

- “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.”
- “examine the impact that unconscious bias and economic disparities have at both an individual level and on society as a whole.”
- “encourage safe, welcoming, and inclusive environments for all students regardless of race or ethnicity, sexual and gender identities, mental and physical disabilities, and religious beliefs.”

SAFE AND INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS FOR ALL STUDENTS

Public schools are required by law to be safe and inclusive environments for all students. To provide that environment, standards, curricula and lessons are designed to promote interpersonal understanding and respect for all persons. In other words, to more deeply understand what it means to treat everyone with dignity and respect.

If there are questions or concerns about a lesson, parents should work with teachers and school administrators—not politicians—to offer insight and input on specific lessons being implemented in classroom.

An age-appropriate, student-centered approach to teaching about our state’s diverse communities helps young people understand the many complex issues facing our world today. And it helps them learn to treat one another with dignity and respect. 🌱



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