

NEW JERSEY EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

REVIEW

MARCH
2023

njea.org



an education and advocacy resource

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— DR. JUDITH OWENS' —

VOICE



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1.



2.



3.

1: At a congressional briefing in Washington, D.C., **Union Township Education Association** member Nicholas Ferroni discusses the American Teacher Act. Introduced by Florida Congresswoman Frederica Wilson, the bill would set the national minimum wage for teachers at \$60,000 per year. The bill would make grant funding available from the federal government to support state efforts to increase teacher salaries. Both the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers support the legislation. The Teacher Salary Project, a nationwide initiative, is a strong proponent of the bill. Learn more at teachersalaryproject.org.

2: The **Lenape District Education Association (Burlington)** hosted a February Family Fun Night. By all accounts it was a huge success. The many families who attended

enjoyed games, won prizes and had a delicious dinner. The event received funding from the NJEA Pride in Public Education program. Learn more about Pride at njea.org/pride.

3: The members of the **Lenape District Support Services Association (Burlington)** were recognized for their hard work and dedication to the Operation Yellow Ribbon drive in 2022. Craig Lafferty from the Medford Fire Department presented a plaque on behalf of the Union Fire Company to LDSSA President Marijean Andl. LDSSA members—bus drivers, mechanics, and custodial and maintenance staff—helped stuff buses with supplies for soldiers deployed overseas for Operation Yellow Ribbon.

FEATURES



18 | DR. JUDITH OWENS' VOICE

At the NAEA Equity Alliance on Jan. 14, NAEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson, the second Black woman in NAEA's history to be elected as a statewide officer, interviewed Dr. Judith Owens, NAEA's first Black elected statewide officer. Together they explored Owens' career and role in NAEA's history.

BY PATRICK RUMAKER



26 | MEET NAEA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR KEVIN KELLEHER

This year, Kevin Kelleher became NAEA's eighth executive director. He recently sat down with the editor of the Review to discuss his journey from the classroom and local union leadership to NAEA staff work and ultimately the position of executive director.

BY PATRICK RUMAKER



30 | HAMMONTON HIGH SCHOOL PANTRY HELPS STUDENTS IN NEED

Hammonton High School English teacher Cari Coia "sees" teenagers. She sees the things they are struggling with. She sees the things they would rather hide. She sees their talents and their dreams. She sees their hopes and disappointments. And quietly and kindly, with the help of people who support the Hammonton High School pantry, she gets them what they need.

BY KATHRYN COULIBALY



34 | MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR NAEA MEMBER BENEFITS

The NAEA Member Benefits program offers you access to a variety of benefits and programs to enhance your life at work, at home, and on vacation. From discounts on travel and every day purchases to home mortgages and financial planning, we have the tools to help you save time and money. Learn how you can make the most of the Member Benefits program.

BY BETH BUONSANTE




COLUMNS

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE 7*NJEA members serve in many roles***THE ADVOCATE 8***Know. Lead. Act.***THE BULLETIN BOARD 10***Cool stuff to check out***EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS 13***Having a job you love***LAW AND YOU 15***The PUMP Act protects breastfeeding workers***THE NJEA REPORT 16***Education in the news***HEALTH AND SAFETY 36***Understanding mold in schools***SPEAK OUT 39***ChatGPT and education***STAFF NEWS 40***Hires and promotions***NJEA PRESERVICE 41***The Preservice Career Summit***RAINBOW CONNECTION 45***LGBTQIA+ issues in our schools***EARLY CAREER 47***The first five years***SUSSEX TO CAPE MAY 49***Workshops and conferences***MEMBER BENEFITS 51***Get your money's worth***RETIRED MEMBERS 52***News and events***GOVERNANCE 54***D.A. minutes***COMING UP 57***What's next at NJEA***FINAL EXAM 58***Stay safe on social media*

The number 34%

The percentage increase in the number of calls to AID-NJEA from 2021 to 2022. In 2021, 4,063 calls were made to AID-NJEA. In 2022, that number increased to 5,444. The AID-NJEA helpline provides free, comprehensive, and confidential support, phone counseling, as well as resource referrals on issues and problems related to your work and personal or family life. Call 866-AID-NJEA (866-243-6352) or email helpline@njea.org.


Source: AID-NJEA, Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care

GOOD NEWS

We're Among the Top Two States AP Scores

New Jersey is among the top two states in the nation in the percentage of Advanced Placement exams taken by public high school students that result in scores high enough to qualify for college credit.



Source:
"AP Cohort Data: Graduating Class of 2021. 2022." College Board.



Dr. Judith Owens attended the NJEA Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Human and Civil Rights Celebration to deliver the Dr. Judith Owens Spirit Award. Owens became NJEA's first Black statewide officer when she was elected NJEA secretary-treasurer in 1973. In 1975, she was the first Black person elected NJEA President. Read her story, beginning on Page 18.

PHOTO BY
Andrea Kane

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Email: NJEAreview@NJEA.org

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NEW JERSEY EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

REVIEW

180 W. State St., P.O. Box 1211, Trenton, NJ 08607-1211 • 609-599-4561 • NJEA.org

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

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

Organizational Directory

NJEA headquarters, Trenton

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

UniServ regional offices

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

UniServ South

Reg. 1-3

Director's office

856-234-0522

Region 1 (Atlantic and Cape May counties):

609-652-9200

Region 2 (Cumberland, Gloucester and Salem counties):

856-628-8650

Region 3 (Burlington and Camden counties):

856-234-2485

UniServ Central

Reg. 7-9, 11, 13 and 29

Director's office

732-287-6899

Region 7 (Ocean County):

732-349-0280

Region 8 (Mercer County):

609-896-3422

Region 9 (Monmouth County):

732-403-8000

Region 11 (Middlesex County):

732-287-4700

Region 29 (Higher Education):

609-689-9580

UniServ Northeast

Reg. 15, 19-21, and 25

Director's office

973-321-3221

Region 15 (Union County):

908-709-9440

Region 19 (Hudson County-North and Newark):

201-861-1266

Region 20 (Hudson County-South):

201-653-6634

Region 21 (Essex County, except Newark):

973-762-6866

Region 25 (Bergen County):

201-292-8093

UniServ Northwest

Reg. 13, 17, and 27

Director's office

973-347-0911

Region 13 (Hunterdon, Somerset and Warren counties):

908-782-2168

Region 17 (Morris and Sussex counties):

973-515-0101

Region 27 (Passaic County):

973-694-0154

MEMBERSHIP

Active professional: \$999 (full time); \$199.80 (full time *low-earner); \$499.50 (part time); \$499.50 (on leave); \$199.80 (part time *low-earner). Active supportive: \$488 (full time); \$97.60 (full time *low-earner); \$244.00 (part time); \$97.60 (part time *low-earner); \$244 (on leave). Retired professional: \$88; \$1,095 (retired life). Retired ESP: \$60; \$675 (retired ESP life); Preservice \$15. General professional (outside N.J. public education employment): \$250. Subscribing \$250. Only those in education positions in N.J. public schools and colleges are eligible for active membership. Payment of annual dues entitles a member to receive the *Review* for one year, from January through December. Dues include \$5 for the NJEA Review. *Low-earner threshold 2020-21 is \$21,700.





PRESIDENT'S *Message*

NJEA members serve in many roles

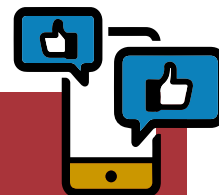
One of the challenges of public education, particularly in recent years, is the constant demand to do more. Educators juggle so many responsibilities as union members, school employees, community members, and in every other part of their lives. Every hour of the day is full—and particularly at this point in the school year, people need fresh ideas and inspiration to help them keep their stride through the last chill of winter.

In this edition of the *NJEA Review*, you'll celebrate our history with Judi Owens, the first Black president of NJEA and be inspired by the impact she has had on our union. You'll get to know our new executive director, Kevin Kelleher, and hear more about his vision for NJEA. You'll be energized by Hammonton High School English teacher Cari Coia's response to poverty in her community. And you'll learn how to make the most out of your NJEA Member Benefits program.

NJEA members are many things: advocates, education experts, family members, community leaders and employees, to name just a few. Each of you is instrumental to the success of our schools and the communities that surround them. It makes sense that NJEA's programs and initiatives strive to benefit you in all areas of your lives. After all, it's this holistic approach to our students and our schools that has helped drive our success and made us the best system of public education in the nation.

Thank you for all that you do for public education each and every day. I hope that this issue of the magazine inspires and informs you and helps you reach your personal and professional goals.

In Unity,



SEAN M. SPILLER

Facebook

@SpillerforNJEA: This #BlackHistoryMonth, let us celebrate all those who helped pave the way for so many of us. And let us renew our resolve to do our part and pave the way for others. Shout out to all those making, teaching or learning Black History this (and every!) month. #WEareNJEA

On Feb. 7, NJEA President Sean M. Spiller shared a video in which he discusses the importance of all educators celebrating Black History Month. As the first Black man to be president of NJEA, Spiller spoke of the importance of acknowledging those who came before him while encouraging his followers on Facebook to remember that they, too, are role models for students.

STEVE BEATTY

Facebook

@Steve BeattyNJEA: The Higher Education community—and our members who make up the group—is a vitally important part of our public education system in New Jersey. The mission: to provide an affordable and accessible on-ramp for EVERY STUDENT to continue their education towards their goals and dreams ... we must continually engage and work to support the vision and our members who serve in their community colleges. A wonderful and educational afternoon spent with our members at Warren County Community College, Discussing issues of importance and their role in THEIR union. Thank you all for your ... unwavering support for your students, your communities and your union!

On Feb. 8, NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty visited Warren County Community College to spend the day with the Higher Education NJEA members who work there. After his visit, he reflected on the vital role that Higher Ed NJEA members play in the work of our union and the overall success of public education in New Jersey.

PETAL ROBERTSON

Facebook

@PetalforNJEA: It was a great day to be a Pirate! And it's always a great day to be NJEA! I was so happy to represent NJEA as my alma mater beat DePaul today. There were some great educators in the crowd too! #njea #petalforthepeople #setonhalluniversity

On Feb. 6, NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson attended the Seton Hall University basketball game, where NJEA members were recognized for their commitment to public schools. Petal, an alumnus of Seton Hall, enjoyed the game alongside NJEA members, who were celebrated throughout the evening.

OFFICERS ONLINE

KNOW. LEAD. ACT.

GRAFF POLICASTRO APPOINTED DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



The NJEA Executive Committee named Denise Graff Policastro the association's newest deputy executive director. She is the first woman to hold this position. Graff Policastro has served as director of the Research and Economic Services Division since 2020.

Graff Policastro has served in many roles during her time as an NJEA member and staff member. She joined full-time NJEA staff in July 2013 as a UniServ field representative in the Region 21 office in Essex County. She had been an NJEA UniServ consultant since 2008.

In February 2017, Graff Policastro transferred to the Research Division specializing in negotiations assistance. In addition, she served as a mentor for the NJEA Bolivar L. Graham Practicing Apprentices Program, which is designed to foster the inclusion of women and ethnic-minorities in association leadership and staff positions.

During her time as director of the Research Division, Graff Policastro was instrumental in developing the Career Pathways Program for NJEA associate staff, as well as partnering with the staff union, the United Staff Association, to help finalize the associate staff mentoring program.

"I have known Denise for almost 10 years, and I could not ask for a better partner as we begin our new roles together," NJEA Executive Director Kevin Kelleher said. Kelleher, who was recently named executive director after having served as deputy for four years, had previously worked with Graff Policastro as a colleague in the Research Division.

From 1998 to 2013, Graff Policastro was a mathematics teacher in the Bernards Township School District, where she was co-president of the Bernards Township Education Association. She also served BTEA as negotiations chair and held other leadership positions in the association. Graff Policastro had been recording secretary of the Somerset County Education Association, a member of the NJEA Budget and Elections committees, and a representative to the NJEA Delegate Assembly.

THINKING ABOUT RETIREMENT?

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

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

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

NJEA SEEKS DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD NOMINATIONS

Do you know an individual or group that has made a significant contribution to public education in New Jersey? Nominations are now being sought for the 2023 NJEA Ruthann Sheer Award for Distinguished Service to Education. The award is named in memory of an educator from Hackensack who was its 1994 recipient. The award was first presented in 1934.

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

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

Nominations are accepted at njea.org/serviceaward. You may also submit nominations by mail to: NJEA; Ruthann Sheer Distinguished Service Award; PO Box 1211; Trenton, NJ 08607-1211.

Please include the nominee's name, address, phone number and email address along with a narrative explaining why the nominee should win the award. The deadline is June 16.

HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS THIS APRIL

Higher Education Conference set for April 14-15

The NJEA Higher Education Conference will be held on April 14-15 at the Princeton Marriott at Forrestal. The conference begins with registration at 2:30 p.m. on Friday followed by workshops and dinner. The keynote speaker on Friday after dinner will be organizer, author and scholar Jane McAlevey. You can learn more about McAlevey at janemcalevey.com. On Saturday, the conference continues with more workshops and concludes with lunch.

Workshops will address the following topics:

- A Proactive Approach to Supporting Learners with Disability
- Bargaining 101
- Contract Enforcement and Grievance Process
- From Gripping to Organizing: Using Politics to Get Good Policy
- Members of Color Roundtable
- Organizing for Local Power
- PERC Decisions and Their Impact at the Bargaining Table
- Social Justice Unionism

The cost to attend is \$150 single occupancy; \$100 resident double occupancy, per person (must indicate a roommate); or \$70 for commuters.

Higher Education Collective Bargaining Summit follows on April 15-16

The NJEA Higher Education Collective Bargaining Summit will immediately follow the conference on April 15-16, at the Princeton Marriott at Forrestal. The summit begins with registration at 3 p.m. on Saturday followed by workshops and dinner. The summit will continue Sunday and conclude with lunch.

The summit is an interactive program that will address current issues facing negotiations teams. Strategies and techniques for strengthening your local as a means to improve bargaining position will be explored.

The cost to attend is \$150 single occupancy; \$100 resident double occupancy, per person (must indicate a roommate); or \$70 for commuters.

Registration details for Conference and/or Summit

To register for either or both events, go to njea.org/highered or contact NJEA UniServ Region 29/Higher Education office at HigherEd@NJEA.org by March 31.

The fees include accommodations, meals, and materials. For additional information or if you have a disability-

related need that may require assistance to facilitate your participation in the conference, contact the office at 609-689-9580 or HigherEd@NJEA.org. All arrangements are subject to change in response to public health directives.

NJEA ELECTIONS SLATED FOR APRIL

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

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

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

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

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

RIF RESOURCES FOR NJEA MEMBERS

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

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

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

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

COOL STUFF



CIVIC EDUCATION TOOLS FROM NJCCE

The New Jersey Center for Civic Education (NJCCE) has extensive resources available for teachers on its website at civiced.rutgers.edu.

Civics resources:

- For elementary grades at civiced.rutgers.edu/civics/elementary-social-studies
- For middle school grades at civiced.rutgers.edu/civics/middle-school-civics
- For high school at civiced.rutgers.edu/civics/high-school-civics-history-and-economics

Civics, history, economics, etc. for all grades:

- Conflict resolution and U.S. history at civiced.rutgers.edu/conflict-resolution
- Media literacy at civiced.rutgers.edu/resources/media-literacy
- New Jersey history and government (for grades K-2, 3-5, 6-8 and 9-12) at civiced.rutgers.edu/nj-lessons
- Teaching controversial issues at civiced.rutgers.edu/resources/controversial-issues
- World History: Lessons About Africa at civiced.rutgers.edu/resources/world-history

Annual statewide student programs:

- Student Mock Election provides an online portal for students to vote on current candidates and issues, with background information for teachers to use in the classroom. njmockelection.org
- Project Citizen is a project based civic education program that involves students in gaining the skills to address a public policy issue to improve their community, with an annual showcase of class projects. civiced.rutgers.edu/programs/project-citizen
- We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution enhances the students' understanding of government and American constitutional democracy and the contemporary relevance of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, with an annual civics competition for high school students. civiced.rutgers.edu/programs/we-the-people

For more information or questions, contact Robert O'Dell at ro205@scarletmail.rutgers.edu or Arlene Gardner at arlenega@sas.rutgers.edu.



ESSAY CONTEST FROM NJ HALL OF FAME

Who belongs in the New Jersey Hall of Fame? The New Jersey Hall of Fame and its lead sponsor, Hackensack Meridian Health, want your students to participate in the decision-making process. New Jersey public school students are invited to participate in the N.J. Hall of Fame Essay Contest. Students may recommend nominees—living or dead—to the New Jersey Hall of Fame. Nominations can include famous people as well as ordinary citizens who do extraordinary things. Students should research or interview, if possible, the person they wish to nominate and write an essay no longer than 500 words.

Essays must be typed and double-spaced. The student must include their name, age, grade level as of April 1, 2023, address, phone number, parent/guardian's name, school name, and school district. If the essay is a school project, the student should also include the name of the teacher who assigned the activity. Nominations must be postmarked or emailed by April 1, 2023, to be eligible. Send entries to NJ Hall of Fame Contest, Meredith Barnes, c/o NJEA, PO Box 1211, Trenton, NJ 08607-1211, or email mbarnes@njea.org with "NJHOF Essay Contest" in the subject line.

Entries will be divided into two age categories: intermediate (grades 4 through 8) and high school (grades 9-12). Entries will be judged by a panel composed of NJEA and New Jersey Hall of Fame representatives. Winners will be notified by June 1. The winning students will receive a \$500 scholarship to pursue a camp, program or educational opportunity of their choice. They will also be invited to participate in the Annual New Jersey Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony scheduled for October 2023, which will be televised on My9NJ.

The winning students' nominations will be forwarded to the New Jersey Hall of Fame Academy for consideration in 2024.

For more information about the New Jersey Hall of Fame, visit njhalloffame.org.



REQUEST A FREE SPEAKER FOR LAW RELATED TOPICS

The New Jersey State Bar Foundation's Speakers Bureau has volunteer attorney speakers who are available to address law-related topics for school assemblies, class discussions, and on career days. There is no charge. Schedule them at njsbf.org/speakers-bureau.

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Communications Tools Workshop



SATURDAY
April 22, 2023

@ NJEA in Trenton – 8:30 a.m. – 2 p.m.
Continental breakfast & lunch provided

*Target audience: Association officers, webmasters, public relations chairs,
editors who want to strengthen their communications strategies.*

Register at
njea.org/commtools

If paying by credit card,
register at the link above.

If paying by check,
complete the registration
form found at the link
above and mail it to the
address indicated.

The CTW is sponsored by the
NJEA Editorial Committee.
No PD credit will be offered.

If you have a special physical
or communication need or
other disability that may require
assistance or accommodations
to permit or facilitate your
attendance and participation,
contact Liz Murphy by April 3 at
lmurphy@njea.org or
609-310-4321.

BREAKOUT SESSION I

1. Newsletters for Retiree Associations
2. Design Principles for Your Association
Featuring Canva and Photopea
3. Social Media: Overview for Your
Association

BREAKOUT SESSION II

4. Power Writing: Getting Members to
Read What You Write
5. Sendy: A Free Email Platform for Your
Association
6. Communicating through Smartphone
Photos

Space is limited, so register today!

Register at njea.org/commtools



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Brandi L. '09, Award-Winning Teacher



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Having a job and having a job you love

Meet Gloucester County ESP of the Year Debra DiJohn

The 2022 Gloucester County ESP of the Year Debra DiJohn started her career in the corporate world managing a payroll company. When her first child was seven months old, her sister-in-law saw a job posting for a secretary to the director of Elementary Education in Washington Township Public Schools and encouraged DiJohn to apply. Despite the massive pay cut, DiJohn felt it was the right move for her family. As she told the district during the interview process, she couldn't think of a better place to be than in her own school district, close to home, and having the same days off as her children.

When her older child was four years old, DiJohn transferred to Bunker Hill Middle School, where she continues to serve as secretary.

"This is a large district, but it felt very familiar to me," DiJohn said. "I love my job and the people I work with. We have a great culture; it's like a big family. We all have each other's backs and are there for each other. You walk down the hall and see so many friendly faces. The people in our building—teachers, administrators, support staff, other secretaries—we all work together. My colleagues make me want to be a better person and support the school in any way that I can."

DiJohn saw many benefits to working in the schools while her sons were growing up, but one of them was the support from her school community.

"When my sons had struggles, I was able to get help for them," DiJohn said. "The teachers gave me tools to help them succeed. My children didn't attend the same school I worked in, and that gave us some independence."



An entourage of well-wishers surprised Debbie DiJohn when she was named 2022 Gloucester County ESP of the Year. From left: WTEA Building Rep Julie Lyons, Asst. Principal Greg Muscelli, Principal Michael D'Ostilio, then Supt. Joseph Bollendorf, Ryan DiJohn (Debbie's son), Debbie DiJohn, Dave DiJohn (Debbie's husband), WTEA Executive Committee member Kim Crum, NJEA Associate Director of Organizational Development Bob Antonelli, and GCEA President Chrissy Kosar.

DiJohn's younger child, a college student, is working as a paraprofessional in the same school where DiJohn works. He was able to be there the day that DiJohn was awarded 2022 Gloucester County ESP of the Year, an honor that DiJohn truly appreciates.

"It was amazing to be named the Gloucester County ESP of the Year," DiJohn said. "It felt like justification for everything that I've done over the years for my school and the staff. It felt like everything I've done has been noticed and appreciated. I have always felt appreciated by my colleagues, but it meant the world to me to be recognized at this level. I felt like the work I do really does matter."

DiJohn believes strongly that the entire school team is responsible for creating a safe, healthy, and encouraging environment so students can succeed.

"The teachers are in the classroom with students every day, but there's a lot of stuff that goes on behind the scenes every minute of every day that the support personnel take care of," DiJohn said. "The secretaries, principals, technology department, everyone is doing their job to make sure that the teachers are able to concentrate on the students in their classrooms. Teachers have a lot on their plates, and we want to make things as easy and seamless as possible."

As DiJohn summed it up, "There's a difference between having a job and having a job that you love, and I absolutely love my job." 🌟

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New federal protections won for breastfeeding workers

By Kaitlyn Dunphy, Esq.



Additional support for breastfeeding workers was recently signed into law on Dec. 29, with the passage of the Providing Urgent Maternal Protections (PUMP) Act. After years of advocacy, this law provides breastfeeding workers with protections under federal law that require employers to provide accommodations of the space and time to express breastmilk while on the job.

In 2010, the Break Time for Nursing Mothers Act, passed as part of the Affordable Care Act, provided break time to breastfeeding employees. However, that law was limited to workers who were entitled to overtime pay under the Fair Labor Standards Act. The unintended consequence was that many salaried workers, such as teachers, nurses, engineers and other professionals, were not covered by these federal protections. According to the Economic Policy Institute, nearly 9 million working women of childbearing age were excluded from the law's protection.

Advocacy efforts to address this shortcoming have been ongoing since 2010. NEA and NJEA members were vital to the passage of the PUMP Act. Because of their successful efforts, those estimated 9 million women are now covered by the PUMP Act protections.

All employees who work for employers with 50 or more employees now have access to lactation accommodations. Smaller employers can be exempt from the law if they

demonstrate that compliance would cause undue hardship because of significant difficulty or expense.

The act requires that employers provide lactation spaces and reasonable break times each time the employee needs to express breastmilk. That break should be paid if it is taken during an otherwise paid break time or if the employee is not entirely relieved of their work duties during the break time. The space provided must be private, meaning shielded from view and free of intrusion by others, and cannot be a bathroom.

Beginning April 28, employees who sue employers for violations of the PUMP Act will have additional remedies they can request if a violation is found. Before filing suit, the worker must provide a notice of the alleged violation to the employer. The law gives the employer a 10-day period to cure the issue.

The federal law sets a floor for lactation accommodations that employers must offer. States and local districts can, and do, provide greater protections. New Jersey provides for additional rights under the Law Against Discrimination.

While federal pumping rights are limited to within one year of the birth of the child, New Jersey sets no such time limit. Lactation accommodations are available for as long as the employee needs to express breastmilk. Additionally, New Jersey law specifies that the lactation space must be in close proximity to the individual's workspace.

Local districts must comply with both federal and state requirements. They can also offer additional protections. Local leaders should review their district's lactation accommodation policies.

While districts are not required by law to adopt lactation accommodation policies, the New Jersey Department of Labor began collecting data on these policies in 2020. That year, the DOL reported that no grade 8-12 schools had a lactation policy in place. In 2022, the DOL reported that 73% of responding K-12 districts and 55% of responding colleges and universities had staff lactation policies in place.

For more information about advocating for lactation accommodations and policies, a group of NJEA members and staff have formed the Lactation Rights Task Force under the auspices of the NJEA Women in Education Committee. If you are interested in learning more or joining in that work, contact Kaitlyn Dunphy, Esq., kdunphy@njea.org or Meredith Barnes, mbarnes@njea.org.

Kaitlyn Dunphy is an associate director of NJEA Legal Services and Member Rights in the NJEA Executive Office.

NJEA Report

NJEA Equity Alliance Conference fosters social justice advocates, honors activists

At the NJEA Equity Alliance Conference on Jan. 13-14, NJEA provided opportunities for reflection and learning around social justice. The two-day event included a vibrant opening session led by the NJEA Minority Leadership and Recruitment Committee and a series of engaging workshops.

Six NJEA committees comprise the NJEA Equity Alliance: Human and Civil Rights, Minority Leadership and Recruitment, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity,

Urban Education, Women in Education, and Exceptional Children.

Following the conference, five members and a community organization were honored at the NJEA Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Human Rights Celebration for their commitment to social justice and equity: Caseen Gaines, Steven Koumoulis, Lori Lalama, Dr. Eva Lyle-Smith, Talena Queen and the Passaic Optimist Foundation.

In addition to the nine photos here, hundreds more can be found at [flickr.com/njea/albums](https://www.flickr.com/photos/njea/albums).



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1. Teacher Caseen Gaines, the 2nd Vice President of the Hackensack Education Association, receives the Dr. Judith Owens Spirit Award. From left: NJEA MLR Committee Chair Tiffanie ThrBak, Gaines and Dr. Judith Owens.

2. Camden music teacher Dr. Eva Lyle-Smith receives the Dr. Judith Owens Spirit Award. From left: NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson, Lyle-Smith, NJEA President Sean M. Spiller and NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty.

3. Teacher Lori Lalama, the president of the Clifton Education Association, receives the Elizabeth A. Allen Women in Education Award. From left: NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty, NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson, Lalama and NJEA President Sean M. Spiller.

4. Germaine Gibbons Williams receives the NJEA Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Human and Civil Rights Award on behalf of the Passaic Optimist Foundation. The foundation mentors Passaic youth and offers scholarships. It also helps families and seniors in need whether due to poverty or disaster. From left: NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson, Gibbons Williams, NJEA President Sean M. Spiller and NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty.

5. Middletown Township teacher Steven Koumoulis, receives the Equality Champion Award. From left: NJEA SOGI Committee Chair Chris Cannella, NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson, Koumoulis, NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty and NJEA President Sean M. Spiller.

6. Paterson educator and Paterson Poet Laureate Talena Queen receives the NJEA Urban Education Award. From left: NJEA Urban Education Committee Chair Todd Pipkin, NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson, Queen, NJEA President Sean M. Spiller and NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty.

7. Workshop presenter Andrew Suseno and Shan Byrd, a member of the NJEA Minority Leadership and Recruitment Committee, co-facilitated the Humanizing to Healing workshop at the Equity Alliance Conference.

8. Larry Hamm, chair of the People's Organization for Progress (P.O.P.), delivers a rousing keynote address at the 2023 NJEA Human and Civil Rights Celebration. Hamm encouraged the audience to read all of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s writings, including "Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?" Saying this and King's five other books should be required reading in schools, Hamm asked, "What sense does it make to have a holiday if young people don't know what Dr. King stood for, fought for, and gave his life for?"

9. From left: Members Robert Havas, Vilmary Hernandez, Joseph Landolfi and Sherman Denby discuss parental involvement strategies in the Issues-Based Organizing workshop.

— DR. JUDITH OWENS' —

VOICE

One education family because we all matter

By Patrick Rumaker



When Judi Owens was elected secretary-treasurer of NJEA in 1973, she was the first Black statewide officer in the association's 120-year history. Then, in 1975, she was elected NJEA president—the first Black person to be elected to that office. It was another 38 years before another African American would be elected to statewide office when, in 2013, current NJEA President Sean M. Spiller was elected NJEA secretary-treasurer. Spiller is the first Black man to be elected NJEA president, vice president and secretary-treasurer.

At the NJEA Equity Alliance on Jan. 14, Petal Robertson, the second Black woman in NJEA's history to be elected as NJEA secretary-treasurer, sat down with Dr. Judith Owens to discuss her leadership at a pivotal time in the association's history.

"You are Black history, not just for NJEA but for the state of New Jersey and for public education," Robertson told Owens.

Owens pondered those words.

"Being Black history? I don't know," Owens initially said. "I recognize that I was the first person with this color skin to do certain things, and I suppose that serves as an example to—as I jokingly say—help 'the children'

“ It's important that there be a living, breathing example of what you can be, and I'm happy to be that living breathing example.”

take over. I am proud of what I did so that we could help each other and the children we work with. It's important that there be a living, breathing example of what you can be, and I'm happy to be that living breathing example.”

Doing what needed to be done

Owens didn't set out to be a "living, breathing" example when she began her career in Asbury Park in 1962. The schools there were on a split session schedule at the time, and Owens taught sixth graders in a morning session. While she loved working with the students, Owens did not like the compressed schedule.

"We sort of raced through things, and I hated rushing the kids," Owens recalled.

Beyond the immediate concerns of split sessions, Owens looked around and saw that there was work to be done beyond teaching.

Patrick Rumaker is the editor of the NJEA Review.



NJEA leaders celebrate Dr. Judith Owens at the NJEA Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Human and Civil Rights Celebration on Jan. 14. From left: NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty, NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson, NJEA MLR Committee Chair Tiffanie ThrBak, former NJEA President Dr. Judith Owens, and NJEA President Sean M. Spiller.



The NJEA MLR Committee with Dr. Owens, who is seated. Standing from left: Janet Adams, Shan Byrd, Vilmary Hernandez, Nicole Kinsey, Chardae Ingram, Michael Boyd, Tiffanie ThrBak, Bianca Nicolescu, Evelyn Ayum, Michelle Hammond-Dudley, and Aaryenne White.

"I realized that we had to make a difference in Trenton if we were going to help local school districts," Owens said. "Getting involved with NJEA was a way of doing that and improving things for the whole state."

Like many future association leaders, Owens started at the local and county levels, active in both the day-to-day work of a local association advocate and in broader campaigns to improve working conditions for public school employees and learning conditions for students.

Owens chaired the salary committee for the Asbury Park Education Association at a time when collective bargaining rights had just been established in New Jersey. Her strong leadership led to her being appointed to the NJEA Fair Play for Teachers Committee. "Fair Play" was the name of a statewide NJEA campaign in 1972. County associations, including the Monmouth County Education Association where Owens served in many roles, such as vice president, had their own Fair Play Committees.

The goal of Fair Play was to lobby for legislation that would clarify the rights of educator unions to call strikes and to strengthen the power of the New Jersey Public Employment Relations Commission to intervene in unfair labor practices.

Listening to children

Throughout her interview with Robertson, it was clear that Owens' true love was teaching and that her activism was, and continues to be, rooted in providing for students.

This was especially apparent when Robertson asked Owens what her "superpower" is.

"I don't know if it's a superpower, but you need to listen to what the children are saying—and I don't mean the words they use—I mean *listening* to the children," Owens said. "Sometimes kids have a chance to share things with you that they wouldn't share with anybody else because you listen to them—and there's a difference between listening and judging."

Owens emphasized that listening was especially important when working with students who exhibit challenging behaviors.

"When you get past some of the—I don't want to say bravado, but they have a cover that they've put up to defend themselves—and you have to recognize that, and you have to get past that, and understand that some of the children in our schools have terrible situations," Owens said.

Robertson asked Owens about the value of social-emotional learning beyond teaching academic subjects. Owens hinted that social-emotional learning can be more important than some skills that the public worries have gone by the wayside, such as cursive writing.

"A child's social-emotional situation can affect how they learn to read and write," Owens said. "It's funny, there's a big controversy going on now because children aren't taught cursive writing anymore ... but you need to understand what kids have to put up with."

“ I have strong opinions on everything, and I’m not hesitant to speak up.”

Respect for ESPs

Owens’ association leadership in the 1970s encouraged a growing movement to include educational support professionals (ESPs) as full-fledged members of NJEA. Prior to 1979, NJEA was primarily a teacher organization that provided limited services to ESPs, who were known then as “associate members” of the association. Associate members could not vote in NJEA’s elections or hold office.

That began to change during Owens’ presidency. In 1976, the NJEA Delegate Assembly (D.A.) launched a debate over granting full membership rights to ESP members. In the March 1977 edition of the *NJEA Review*, just before the D.A. was set to consider amendments to the NJEA Constitution and Bylaws to embrace those rights, Owens wrote, “Shall the New Jersey Education Association remain an organization for the total educational family or be restricted to certificated personnel?”

While the amendment granting full membership rights to ESP was not passed until a year after Owens concluded her term as president, Owens continued to champion the needs of ESP members. Upon winning a seat on the NEA Executive Committee in 1980, she said, “We must work to make the association stronger, to examine support-members’ needs, and examine viable programs in state affiliates in gearing up to provide programs for these members.”

Today she continues to recognize the importance of ESPs in public education.

“All of the people who work with our children are important,” Owens told Robertson. “It doesn’t matter what your job title is. The fact that ESPs work with children and can help them is important. We need to back ESPs up, support them and get them the help they need.”

“We all matter”

When Owens was elected NJEA president in 1975, the *NJEA Review* and the *NJEA Reporter* did not note that she was the association’s first Black president.

“I don’t think it was discussed,” Owens said. “I don’t know that it necessarily mattered to anyone



Top: Owens with Coretta Scott King at the groundbreaking for Freedom Hall at the King Center in Atlanta.

Middle: Owens with President Gerald Ford.

Bottom: Owens with Sen. Ted Kennedy.



Top: Owens and NJEA Executive Director Fred Hipp march in Trenton with members for school funding.

Middle: Owens with one of her students in Asbury Park.

Bottom: Owens with First Lady Rosalyn Carter.

at that particular time.”

Owens had not served as NJEA vice president. She went directly from the office of secretary-treasurer to NJEA president. Owens noted that this was a decision that she and Frank Totten, who was the incumbent NJEA vice president, made together. Totten would run for reelection as vice president and Owens would run to be president.

“It was a political decision, not necessarily an ethnic-minority decision,” Owens recalled. “I suspect we just didn’t think about it. We didn’t give it the thought that maybe it should have had.”

Owens was elected president in a three-way race, taking a substantial lead over her two opponents—nearly double their combined vote totals. Totten ran unopposed.

Association publications, however, did note Owens’ involvement in racial justice work within and outside the association. Owens was the East Coast regional coordinator of the National Education (NEA) Association Black Caucus and served on the Minority Groups Advisory Council of the New Jersey Department of Education. Owens was active in the NAACP, the New Jersey Minority Groups Caucus, and the Central Jersey Club of the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women.

In 1976, Owens received the annual achievement award of the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women’s Clubs.

Association publications also noted her work with the Artists in Residence Program of the New Jersey State Council of the Arts’ Project Advisory Committee and that, in 1977, Gov. Brendan Byrne appointed her to the New Jersey State Board of Public Welfare.

Succeeding Kathryn Stillwell as NJEA president marked another milestone in NJEA history. It was the first time that one woman succeeded another as president.

A voice in the association

NJEA’s members of color discuss the experience of being the only member of color, or one of only a few members of color, at an NJEA event or meeting. Such an experience can discourage members of color from deeper involvement in the association. Today, the NJEA Members of Color Network (njea.org/moc) seeks to overcome that barrier. Robertson asked Owens how she navigated that experience in the 1960s through the 1980s, in the many rooms where she found herself.

“I suspect it goes back to my having a big mouth



Following in Owens' footsteps, Trenton educator Christine Sampson-Clark serves on the NEA Executive Committee. From left: Sampson-Clark, NJEA MLR Committee Chair Tiffanie ThrBak, Owens, NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson, and NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty.

and not being afraid to use it," Owens quipped. "I have strong opinions on everything, and I'm not hesitant to speak up. I'm able to discuss things with people and listen to them."

Robertson went on to ask about the importance of having a voice in the association.

"It's important to have a voice in our association because we all matter," Owens said. "We all have different views that we can bring to the association. We need to speak up—not hold things in silence—and we need to open our minds."

Leading NJEA through change

Owens took over the presidency amid a change in what it meant to be an association leader. She was only the second full-time-release NJEA president. Stillwell, her predecessor, was the first. Prior to Owens and Stillwell, NJEA presidents were still actively teaching in their school districts, doing association work in the evenings. It would be several more years before NJEA vice presidents and secretary-treasurers would serve as full-time-release officers.

As one of the first full-time-release presidents, Owens helped create a new kind of role for officers. In addition to freeing her up to advocate in the Statehouse for members

and students, it enabled her to begin a tradition today's officers have continued—visiting schools and members during the school day.

"It was a chance to get around to different types of schools because Asbury Park was a small district and it was suburban," Owens recalled. "I got to see the different kinds of education systems throughout the state."

But her identity as a teacher never left her. She continued to lean on her classroom management skills. She recalled setting some rules for an audience she was addressing at Montclair State College (now University).

"There was this shining light in the back, so I really couldn't see the audience," she laughed. "I told people, 'I can't see you, but I know you are there, so you have to behave!'"

As an advocate, economic issues were at the forefront of association priorities when Owens held statewide office.

"We had a lot of economic decisions to make," Owens told Robertson. "This was in the days when we were just beginning negotiations for salaries."

The collective bargaining law had been passed only seven years before Owens' presidency, and local associations and school boards were testing its boundaries at the negotiations table. The state income tax was enacted in



Dr. Eva Lyle-Smith, a Camden music teacher, was one of two recipients of this year's Dr. Judith Owens Spirit Award. From left: Lyle-Smith, NJEA MLR Committee Chair Tiffanie ThrBak, and Owens.

1976. The tax was meant to support public schools and provide property tax relief, and NJEA fought vigorously to increase state aid to public schools.

At the same time, a new law imposed caps on school district budgets. It was dubbed the "T & E" law because it stemmed from the first of many lawsuits focused on the "thorough and efficient education" clause in state's constitution. The "T & E" law included education reform proposals around basic skills in reading and math and changes to teacher evaluation. But the law also required districts to include teachers in the law's planning and implementation.

At the 1976 NJEA Summer Leadership Conference, which was held at Montclair State, Owens rallied members around the "boon" of increased school funding found in the "T & E" law, but also around the "bane" caused by the challenges to district budgets and attacks on certification and tenure it contained.

"We have work to do," Owens said at that conference. "We have four aces to use—the strength of our organization, the abilities of our individual members, our practical experience, and the rightness of our cause."

A national leader

After her term as NJEA president, Owens returned to teaching in Asbury Park.

But her commitment to advocacy continued. At the

1979 NEA Representative Assembly she was elected to the NEA Executive Committee. Her acceptance speech is one that could be delivered today.

"We must fight the negative attacks on public education and school employees that result in accountability, budget cuts and threats to teacher protection," Owens said. "We must develop a factual, positive image of public education and the job it has done for this country. We must also emphasize the facts that school employees are taxpayers and contributors to their communities. We must demonstrate our strength on many levels—instructional, political, social. Let's move NEA forward—together."

In 1980, President Jimmy Carter appointed Owens to the Intergovernmental Advisory Council on Education. The council advised Carter, Secretary of Education Shirley Hufstедler and Congress on intergovernmental policies and relations in education. Owens was appointed as the classroom teacher representative to the council. The advisory council was created at the same time that the U.S. Department of Education was created out of the former Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

After retiring from Asbury Park, and having taught at every level from elementary through high school, Owens became an assistant professor at Trenton State College (now The College of New Jersey). She instructed future educators in the teaching of social studies and science. She supervised student teachers in various school districts.

The Dr. Judith Owens Spirit Award

Since 2018, the NJEA Minority Leadership and Recruitment (MLR) Committee has conferred the Dr. Judith Owens Spirit Award. In June 2017, Teaneck Education Association members Delores Wilson-Connors and Mary Joyce Laqui attended an NJEA Team North weekend retreat. The last activity of the weekend tasked all participants with designing an event to engage new members. Everyone broke into teams to develop an original idea for an event.

As a team, Laqui and Connors researched NJEA history and found Owens. They proposed the idea of creating a spirit award in Owens' name. Laqui and Connors envisioned an inaugural award ceremony and reception, attended by Owens where she would be honored and present the award.

"The mark she made was something to be respected and honored," they said. "The essence of the award was to lift up her name and legacy, learn from history, and acknowledge current members who exemplify service to all students with a progressive and inclusive spirit of advocacy."

Since 2012, the MLR Committee had been conferring the NJEA Ethnic Minority Affairs and Leadership Image Award at its annual conference. In the fall of 2017, Alice Barnes-Vasser, the Cape May County representative to the MLR Committee, suggested that the award be renamed to honor Owens. Barnes-Vasser had researched Owens while participating in the NJEA Bolivar L. Graham Practicing Apprenticeship Program.

The D.A. approved the name change and criteria for the award at its March 2018 meeting.

"I felt that the award was a way to keep her name coming up each year," Barnes-Vasser said. "Otherwise important people get forgotten."

At the MLR Conference in April 2018, Willingboro teacher Janene Onyango was its first recipient. Subsequently, the Dr. Judith Owens Spirit Award has been presented at the NJEA Equity Alliance Conference. The awardees have been Bellmawr social worker Regina Andrews-Collette in 2019, Middle Township math teacher David Farrow in 2020, South Orange-Maplewood language arts teacher Thomas "TJ" Whitaker Jr. in 2021, Voorhees teacher Eleanor Clark in 2022, and Camden music teacher Dr. Eva Lyle-Smith in 2023.

At the invitation of Bridgeton educator Dr. Tiffanie ThrBak, the chair of the MLR Committee, this year was the first year that Owens attended this award ceremony.

"Tonight, at the Equity Alliance Awards, an award named after you will be given—the Dr. Judith Owens Spirit Award," Robertson said to Owens. "What would you want that recipient to know about you and what you value?"

"It's important that we help each other, that we have examples for the children that we work with," Owens said. "We join together. And I love that it's called the Spirit Award because it's the spirit of friendship, union and working together. And I think that's what's important to help both each other and the children that we serve." 🌟



Top: Owens speaks at the NJEA Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Human and Civil Rights Celebration on Jan. 14.

Bottom: Owens during her interview with NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson on the morning of Jan. 14.

MEET KEVIN KELLEHER

NJEA's new executive director

By Patrick Rumaker

This year, Kevin Kelleher became NJEA's eighth executive director. Born and raised in Larchmont, New York, he is a product of the public schools where he grew up. After graduating from Mamaroneck High School, he attended St. Bonaventure University in western New York state, where he majored in mathematics and enrolled in teacher education courses.

While at St. Bonaventure, Kelleher competed on the swim team. Swimming season precluded him from student teaching, so he did not initially pursue a career as an educator, despite having studied for it. After graduation, he worked at an actuarial firm in New York City before education lured him back.

"I eventually decided that being an actuary wasn't for me," Kelleher said. "I called St. Bonaventure and asked if I could come back and complete my student teaching. They said, 'Absolutely!'"

Not long after he finished his requirements to be certified, an education job fair led to his first job in public education, as a high school math teacher in Long Beach, California. While there, he earned a master's degree in education curriculum from the University of California at Dominguez Hills. He also holds a master's degree in classroom education from Walden University.

His time teaching in California was a brief stop in his public education journey, but it proved to be an important one for the career path that was to follow. Soon, though, the pull of family on the East Coast grew stronger and he found himself in New Jersey, teaching math in Mendham Township, a K-8 district in Morris County. Not long after arriving there, a question about family medical leave prompted him to reach out to his local union, the Mendham Township Education Association (MTEA). What happened next is not surprising.

"When you ask a question, they invite you to a meeting," he quipped. "When you go to a meeting, they give you an assignment. And in a small local like mine, you start to do a little bit of everything."



Before long, "a little bit of everything" led to Kelleher serving as the local's grievance chair, negotiations chair and, eventually, as MTEA President.

In 2003, after over 12 years as a teacher and local leader, Kelleher joined NJEA staff as an associate director in the Research and Economic Services Division. In 2013 he was promoted to director of that division. From 2018 to 2019, he served as interim director of the Government Relations Division while continuing to direct the Research Division. In 2019, he was appointed deputy executive director of NJEA, the position he held until his recent promotion.

Kelleher recently sat down with the editor of the *Review* to discuss his journey from classroom teacher to executive director and how the lessons he learned along the way will guide him as he leads NJEA's staff and helps chart the course for our union.

What were you like as a teacher?

I'm a very structured person—that's why I love math. But I think my students also saw me as a teacher who tried to understand and relate to them. And I understood the importance of fun as a part of learning. I was student

Patrick Rumaker is the editor of the NJEA Review.



Kevin Kelleher facilitates a workshop on negotiating health benefits at the 2006 NJEA Jim George Collective Bargaining Summit.

council adviser. Working with the students, I organized the big field trips at the end of the year and other activities. I loved being a teacher.

What stories stand out from your teaching career?

I taught a brother and a sister. Their father passed away when the sister was graduating from high school and the brother was in sixth grade.

At the end of the brother's eighth-grade year, his mother came to see me. She told me I was the topic of many dinner conversations right after her husband passed away. I had no idea. She talked about how her son really liked being in my classroom, and how he could relate to me.

Then she gave me a gift for my new baby daughter: a little piggy bank. We still have that bank. And when I see it, I'm reminded that you don't always know the impact you make outside your classroom. Students don't see you as just their teacher. You're someone they look up to. Whatever your job in a school, your impact is greater than you can really know.

What attracted you to employment with NJEA?

My county association [the Morris County Council of Education Associations] asked me to serve on the NJEA Member Benefits Committee. Through that, I met some of the staff in the Research Division who told me about a job opening in the pensions and health care unit. The connection between my education background and the work I had done at the actuarial firm made it feel like a perfect fit for me. I was ready for a new challenge.

How did your experience prepare you for union advocacy?

My mom volunteered in my high school in the College Education Center. Kids would go see her after school or during their free period to explore college options. She helped steer me toward education.

My dad was the vice president of a construction company, so he was on the management side. He would sometimes take me along on jobs. I watched how he interacted with the workers. That was probably my first exposure to unions, and my impression was that management and the union were all working to get the same job done. That

helped me see the value of unions and also the benefit of working together toward a shared goal. That's still the ideal to me.

I'm the fourth of five kids in my family. One of my older sisters was a mental health provider. Another worked for the Red Cross in fundraising. I think the idea of giving back has always been a value my sisters and my mom held, and that influenced me.

When I became a teacher, I saw that unions are really just people coming together to help each other. It's about supporting each other and bringing each other along. It's a natural fit with the values of giving back and helping others that I learned at home.

Why do you want to be executive director?

When I first started to teach in New Jersey, I just knew I was in a union. Eventually, I started to learn more about how the whole structure of local and county affiliates works within NJEA. The more I learned, the more I saw that NJEA is a union that truly cares about its members and the students we educate. No other organization does more to keep our schools the best in the nation. That requires involved members and a talented, dedicated staff. It is an absolute honor to lead that staff and to serve those members.

I've always wanted to contribute as much as I could. When the Research Director position opened up, I applied for the job because I had a vision for the staff and what we could do for our members. When I was asked to help out as the interim Government Relations director, I saw how I could guide the staff there as we worked with our members to get laws passed that gave them better working conditions and more secure retirements.

I loved my work as the deputy executive director over the last three years and seeing how all the parts of NJEA work together to support members. So when Steve Swetsky retired and the executive director job opened up, I couldn't resist the opportunity to lead our 254 full-time staff and our 150 part-time staff.

And with Sean, Steve and Petal leading on the governance side, along with Denise Graff Policastro, our new deputy executive director, I know NJEA will continue to be a strong union that represents every member.

NJEA strives to be a justice-centered union. What stands out in your personal justice journey?

I grew up in Westchester County. I wouldn't say we were upper class, but we were comfortably middle class. My dad would say to me, "Work hard, put your nose to the grindstone, and you're going to do great things."

And he was right. I did all the things he said. I graduated college. I went to New York City. I worked hard and did



Kevin Kelleher explains the newly created New Jersey School Employees Health Benefits Program (SEHBP) at the 2007 NJREA Convention

well there. Life just seemed to work out for me.

Then I decided to become a teacher. I got a job in Long Beach, California—a district with a lot of poverty and almost no middle-class families. It sure didn't look like the neighborhood I grew up in. It was an eye-opening experience for me.

Looking back at my time there, I was the math teacher who put the problems up on the board and demonstrated the solutions. At the end of the period I sent my students away with homework. I thought that was the job. When they would come back the next day empty-handed, I'd ask, "Why didn't you do your homework?"

At the time, I didn't fully appreciate all the advantages I had. As a kid, I was able to concentrate on my homework because I didn't really have other responsibilities. I didn't have to go home and make dinner for myself or watch my little brother. I knew if I needed extra time to finish my homework, my dad would drive me to school. My mom had my lunch ready every day.

I also didn't fully appreciate all the challenges my students in Long Beach faced that I never did. I didn't have to face racial or gender discrimination. I didn't have to deal with poverty or hunger. Looking back, I recognize that I was given opportunities because of my gender and the color of my skin. I had an easy road compared to the students I was trying to teach.

There are times now when I wish I could go back and teach those same students again. I would look at the whole student instead of just the math problem on the board.

How do we get to the point where people don't just see NJEA as “the teachers’ union”?

If education is only considered to be the time that students sit in the classroom, we're missing a lot. The reason we have the number one schools in the nation is, yes, because of great teachers, but also because of outstanding bus drivers and secretaries and custodians and librarians and paraprofessionals and nurses. Success comes from everyone who is educating, supporting and protecting our children—from the time they get on the bus in the morning until they get home at the end of the day.

So we're going to keep highlighting the contributions of all of our members, and we are going to keep fighting for the respect and recognition that every NJEA member deserves for making our schools the best in the nation.

What issues do you see dominating the start of your tenure?

I think we have four main things we need to focus on right now.

One is membership. The *Janus* decision in 2018 changed the landscape we operate in. To attract and retain members in the post-*Janus* world, we need to be a union that understands what members value and that keeps members' priorities at the center of everything we do.

It also means helping to build a pipeline of future educators that meets students' needs and looks like New Jersey. This is one of the most diverse states in America, but our membership does not yet fully reflect that. We need to recruit the next generation of educators—and I mean all educators, whether bus drivers, secretaries, paraprofessionals, custodians or teachers—by removing barriers and creating opportunities for talented people from every New Jersey community to join this great profession.

Another priority is restoring respect for the profession. To attract the best people to our schools, educators need to be respected. That means good salaries, benefits and working conditions, of course, but also treating our members as the professionals and experts they are. So we will keep reminding the public and our elected leaders of how successful our schools are and who made that happen. And we will keep fighting back against people who attack and demean our members to score cheap political points.

And that leads to the third priority, which is political engagement. We will work to elect people at every level of government who believe in public education and who demonstrate that by funding our schools and supporting our students. Because our schools' success is everyone's success. Companies get started here and families settle here because of New Jersey's great public schools. We



Executive Director Kevin Kelleher and Deputy Executive Director Denise Graff Policastro.

know all of that is at risk if we don't play our part in the political process and fight for our profession, our students, and the communities where we live and work.

Finally, we will continue to lead as a justice-centered union. Justice isn't something that happens overnight, or in a year, or even 10 years. It's something we will always need to focus on. To do that, our union needs to reflect the diversity of our members and our students, and it needs to advocate for what members and students need to thrive and succeed. Our schools succeed when our communities succeed. We have to be a union that works to make that success possible for everyone. Justice has to mean justice for all.

What do you want to say to NJEA members?

I see you, and I hear you.

NJEA isn't just for a few people in leadership positions. It's not your president's union. It's certainly not your executive director's union. This union is for everybody. It's your union. Your voice is just as important as anyone else's. So speak up. Get involved. Help build the union you want to belong to.

It's your union. 🏠

helps students in need

By Kathryn Coulibaly

Hammonton High School English teacher Cari Coia “sees” teenagers. She sees the things they are struggling with. She sees the things they would rather hide. She sees their talents and their dreams. She sees their hopes and disappointments. And quietly and kindly, with the help of people who support the Hammonton High School pantry, she gets them what they need.

In 2019, Coia recognized a need for a school pantry at the high school—a place where students could go and “shop” with dignity; where they could get clothes, personal hygiene materials; school supplies, and food when they were in need. She submitted a grant with the Hammonton Education Foundation and was awarded \$7,500 to convert a former storage space into a pantry with cabinets, a colorful rug, and a washing machine and dryer.

"I wanted it to be a 'boutique-y' looking place," Coia explained. She hung students' artwork on the walls and modeled the pantry after something she had seen on TV; a place where the students would want to go.

Coia has reapplied for grants from the Hammonton Education Foundation every year since then and has raised funds from local businesses, staff, and organizations such as the Puerto Rican Civic Association, the Victory Bible Church and the Kiwanis Club. Whatever she can get for her students is quickly disbursed because the need is so great.

"We had a student whose house burned down, and we were able to help them," Coia said. "Another student was devastated because her family had lost their food stamps,

and the pantry helped. Some students are dealing with really challenging home situations. You really can't imagine the things that some students are struggling with at home. For them, school is a refuge."

Stocking the pantry

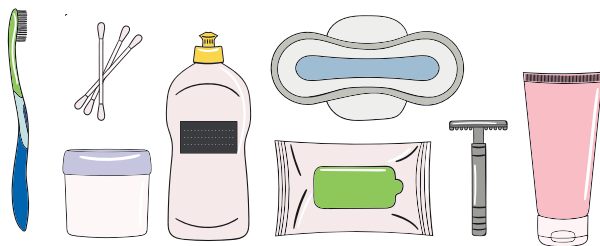
Coia stocks the space with new clothing whenever possible. She chooses things the teenagers will like. She displays the clothing in appealing ways. She wants the teens to feel good about choosing things from the pantry. If money is available, they try to order each student exactly what they need and want.

"Choice is empowering for students who don't have a lot of choice in their lives," said Stacy Gerst, an English teacher and member of the Hammonton Education Foundation.

There are shoes and winter coats, hats, gloves, and scarves. Students love when soft blankets are available. There are art supplies and bookbags. Whatever students could need, Coia tries to provide it, but it's hard to keep up.

“Students are proud and don’t like to be singled out,” Coia said. “When we first started the pantry, its existence spread by word-of-mouth, through the Counseling Department, and by just letting students see the pantry under the guise of ‘helping a teacher restock items.’ Students were recommended by counselors, teachers, and staff members. We tried to pair each student in need with an adult they trusted. Thankfully, we’re at the point now where kids are asking for help.”





Feeding hungry families

Coia's main challenge now is that the grant money she receives cannot be used on gift cards, and sometimes the best thing to help a student is to give them gift cards to ShopRite or Walmart so their families can purchase what they need, especially food.

"The food that we stock in the pantry is really for students to consume here at school," Coia said. "Sometimes, a teacher will come down and get some food if they know they've got a few students in their next class who will be hungry."

Like many communities, there are so many families in need, it's nearly impossible to keep up, especially with the gift cards. The cards are distributed through the Counseling Department, and unfortunately, the supply of cards disappears quickly.

"We don't give less than \$50, and we try to give families what they need. If they need diapers, we try to get them diapers. We are here to help the whole family," Coia said.

The pantry's washer and dryer provide an essential service for students who may not have in-home machines, or transportation to laundry facilities.

"It may seem like a little thing, but it can make all the difference in the world for students," Coia said.

Scholarships recognize motivation

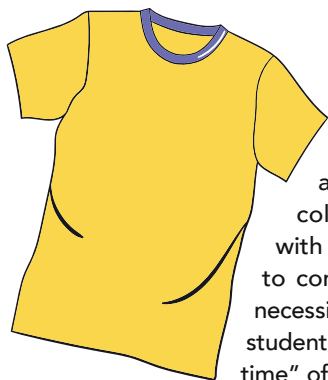
Andrea Streitfeld, a retired HHS teacher who sponsors a scholarship, Coia, and the entire high school staff help to provide the funds for scholarships given students who may not be the top academic achievers, but who work hard and overcome tremendous obstacles in order to graduate high school.

"Two or three years ago, we started giving out a \$500 scholarship, and you should see how proud these kids are," Coia said. "I see how hard it is for them to get to school, keep up with their school work, even stay alert in class with everything they have going on at home. Some of them are shouldering adult burdens at their young age. We wanted to show them that they are seen and respected for the hard work they are putting in to get their educations."

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



Top: English teacher Cari Coia and Hammonton Education Foundation member Monica Kemp pose in the pantry. Bottom: Students can take food, school supplies, and clothing from the pantry, and wash clothes there.



One of the challenges to fundraising for the pantry is that the need is constant, ever-present and overwhelming. Coia and her colleagues are trying to come up with solutions that would allow them to consistently provide gift cards and necessities to students. Very few of their students are effectively helped with a “one time” offering of assistance.

“If I give the Counseling Department \$1,000 in gift cards, they are gone in four days or less,” Coia said. “The cards go to students who really need them; the problem is that there are always more students in need than there are gift cards. And now that the students are willing to ask for help, it is heartbreaking to have to tell them that we simply don’t have what they need at the time.”

A checks and balances system is at work in the pantry. Coia works closely with the head of Counseling Mike Ryan, his counseling team members, the child study team, and other teachers and staff members to ensure that someone is always aware of how every donation and grant dollar is spent. The goal is to help as many students as possible. Any adult at the high school can access the pantry or to ask for assistance for a specific child. The more people who notice a child in need and get them assistance, the better.

The pantry is available whenever students need it, even over the summer. All students or staff need to do is reach out to Coia and she will make sure students can get what they need.

“Schools can be so focused on data and testing, and on the academic parts of high school that we forget that students experiencing trauma or dealing with difficult situations are truly unable to function as learners.” Coia said.

The pantry’s impact has been profound, not just on the Hammonton High School community, but on other schools in the district. The middle and elementary schools have now started their own pantries, and the early childhood education center will soon follow. The middle school staff are envious of the washer and dryer that are available at the high school.

Poverty in New Jersey

Hammonton is not unique in its need. According to the state of New Jersey, 14% of children under the age of five in the state live in poverty, and these numbers are higher for Black and Hispanic children. Atlantic County has one of the highest percentages in the state, with 23% of children under the age of five living in poverty.

According to some analyses, almost one million New Jerseyans are living in poverty post-pandemic. These are



Coia is constantly looking for donations to restock the pantry.

just the numbers that can be verified. Keep in mind, the federal poverty level is \$20,598. Adjusted for the cost of living in New Jersey, the minimum a family of three needs to earn in order to get by is \$74,372. More than three million people in New Jersey are living below this number.

At the same time, government programs intended to help struggling families are falling short of their goals.

“Fewer than one in six families living in poverty are supported by Work First New Jersey, and even those who receive assistance do not get enough to make ends meet,” said Brittany Holom-Trundy, senior policy analyst at New Jersey Policy Perspective, was quoted in the *NJ.com* article, “N.J. families living in extreme poverty need more help from vital safety net, advocates say.”

Coia and her colleagues in Hammonton are doing what they can to help make a difference for their students and their families. The pantry welcomes any and all help to meet the needs of the students and their families.

Anyone interested in learning more about the pantry can email Coia at ccoia@hammontonps.org.

“Everyone needs help sometimes, especially since COVID.” Coia said. “Make no mistake, investing in these students now will not only yield significant rewards for our community, but will also help our struggling students overcome the obstacles in their way and become the adults they are meant to be. After all, isn’t this why we all are in education?” 🏠

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Make the most of your



By Beth Buonsante

There are so many benefits to NJEA membership—from contract negotiation and enforcement to world-class professional development and networking opportunities to the opportunity to advocate for your profession and your students.

But there's one benefit of membership that can help you save money every day, easily covering the cost of your members. The NJEA Member Benefits program offers members access to a variety of benefits and programs to enhance your life at work, at home, and on vacation. From discounts on travel and every day purchases to home mortgages and financial planning, we have the tools to help you save time and money.

How to get started

From buying a car to financing a home to legal and mental health services to daily discounts on coffee and monthly cellphone discounts, it pays to be an NJEA member. Here's how to make the most of your membership.

First, log in to the NJEA Member Benefits website.

Go to memberbenefits.njea.org.

1. Sign in with your PIN and password. (You'll find your PIN on your NJEA membership card. Your PIN has six characters in a two letter-two number-two letter combination. If you can't find your PIN, the email address NJEA has on file for you will work as your PIN. Your default password is the last four digits of your Social Security number until you change the password.)
2. Select "For Members."
3. Click on "Access Your Member Benefits."

Once you log in, scroll down to the Virtual Fair video for a quick tutorial.

In addition to your state level benefits, you also have access to thousands of national level benefits. To check out your NEA Member Benefits discounts, log into the NEA Member Benefits website.

1. Go to neamb.com/start.
2. Click "Register Now."
3. Enter your name, personal email address and create a password.

4. Complete the registration process with your address and date of birth and click "Create Account."
5. Use your personal email address and the password you created to log in to future sessions.

Use NEA Discount Marketplace by Rakuten

The NEA Discount Marketplace, powered by Rakuten, enables members to earn cash back when you shop and save on brand-name merchandise from more than 2,500 top retailers including Macy's, Nordstrom, Target, Kohl's, Ulta and much more. NEA members have access to exclusive members-only deals at neamb.com/marketplace.

1. Go to neamb.com/marketplace and browse the NEA Discount Marketplace. If you are a first-time user to the NEA Member Benefits website you will be asked to register an account to verify your NEA membership.
2. Sign up for a Rakuten account through neamb.com.
3. Earn cash back on qualifying purchases.
4. Get paid via PayPal or by quarterly check.

Discounted personal legal services

Everyone needs a good lawyer at some point, and all NJEA members are entitled to receive two free 30-minute consultations per year, plus a 30% discount on personal legal services.

You can save on routine legal services, including:

- Buying a home.
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- Writing a will.
- Drawing up a lease.
- Settling consumer problems.
- Resolving matrimonial matters.
- Defense on traffic violations.

For more information, call NJEA Headquarters at 609-599-4561 and choose Option 6 or visit njea.org/networkattorneys.

Free, confidential member helpline

All NJEA members have access to AID-NJEA. The AID-NJEA helpline provides free, comprehensive, and confidential support, phone counseling, as well as resource referrals on issues and problems related to your work and personal or family life.

Active and retired members and/or member health clinicians are available to talk with you. This service is available to all NJEA Preservice, NJEA and NJREA members and their families.

Call 866-243-6352 or email helpline@njea.org.

This free helpline is funded through our Sponsored Partner revenues provided by Prudential Insurance, NEA Member benefits and California Casualty Auto and Home Insurance.

Who does NJEA partner with and why?

NJEA Member Benefits is made up of Sponsored Partners and partners in our Member Discount program. NJEA Sponsored Partners are a handful of partners who offer very special products that are believed to be the best of the best. These are products and services that have broad-based appeal and provide superior quality and value. To the best of NJEA's understanding, these products and services are worthy of sponsorship.

These Sponsored Partners are:

- Educators Insurance Services/Prudential – Provides disability, critical illness, and group life insurance.
- California Casualty Auto & Home Insurance – Offers NEA/NJEA Sponsored auto and home insurance.
- Buyer's Edge, Inc. – Delivers savings on major purchases, such as appliances, cars, furniture, kitchen cabinets, mortgage financing, and more.
- NEA Member Benefits – Administers your national membership benefits.

The NJEA Member Discount Program is a courtesy listing of businesses that offer discounted services and products to our members. This includes more than 300 providers who are listed within the NJEA Member Benefits directory, which is available online and in a paper copy that is handed out at Member Benefits fairs, conferences and the NJEA Convention.

The ACCESS/My Deals App is a service that NJEA pays for to provide members with discounts to thousands of nationwide businesses that can be found in a separate database and app.

Beth Buonsante is an associate director in the NJEA Research and Economic Services Division. She specializes in the Member Benefits program. Buonsante can be reached at bbuonsante@njea.org.

The Member Discount Program and the ACCESS Discount program are provided as a service to NJEA members and do not constitute an endorsement by NJEA or a representation regarding the product's quality or characteristics.

Stay informed of deals and resources

Look for more information online at memberbenefits.njea.org where you can find the NJEA Member Benefits Directory, highlighted partners and providers, new and upcoming deals, and opt into emails by scrolling down to the "Deals Newsletter."

You can follow NJEA Member Benefits on Facebook at NJEA Member Benefits and register for a monthly webinar at njea.org/mbwebinars.

Finally, if you have a favorite business, invite them to join the NJEA Member Discount Program. Information is available at njea.org/mdpapplication.

If you have a question, or can't find what you are looking for, contact NJEA Member Benefits at 609-599-4561, ext. 2222. 📞



Become a Member Benefits Ambassador

If you are interested in saving money and helping your peers do the same, your local association can assign you the role of Member Benefits Ambassador. Once assigned by your local president, you'll be recorded as a Member Benefits Ambassador in NJEA's membership database. As ambassador, you'll receive emails detailing savings opportunities and event discounts that you can decide to share with your local's members.

For those who are interested, a training is provided during the annual Jack Bertolino Summer Leadership Conference to give you all the tools you need to inform members about the latest services and offers from NJEA and NEA Member Benefits!

Contact your local association president to ask to be appointed as one of your local association's Member Benefits Ambassadors.

For additional questions, contact Beth Buonsante at bbuonsante@njea.org.



The importance of understanding **MOLD** in schools

*By Yvette Way, BA, MPH (c) and
Derek G Shendell, D.Env., MPH*

How often do we stop to think about the air we breathe inside our schools? Without constant monitoring, biological agents such as mold have ample time to spread in schools, affecting the quality of the air. Mold is a common name for many genera and species of multicellular fungus. Mold requires only a food source, humidity and oxygen. It can be identified by its musty odor and its appearance of multicolored splotches.

The lightweight nature of mold spores allows them to spread in the air from outdoor environments to indoors. Once it lands on a damp substance, mold can continue growing. In a short time, it can go from a single spore to a large colony.

The introduction of mold from the outdoors into the school building or on various materials/surfaces can occur through a leaky roof or pipe, open windows, structural openings or the foundation of the school itself. High humidity (especially during the summer), floods, or poor drainage systems can be other pathways of mold into schools. Once it is present, mold can cultivate in many places: roofing material in ceilings, around windows, close to water fountains, around tiles, inside ductwork, in carpets, rugs and even books. Spores can grow on or behind walls and other hidden areas of the school such as wallboard.

Once indoors, students and staff may experience

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

adverse health effects. Eye, nose, skin, lung and throat irritation are common responses to mold exposure. Those who are sensitive and vulnerable because of age and underlying health conditions can also have an allergic reaction to mold exposure. Even dead mold can cause allergic reactions. Thus, if mold is spotted, it is safer to completely remove it.

Mold prevention

The best way to prevent mold in schools is to control the moisture and humidity of the building. Indoor relative humidity should be kept between 30% to 60% year-round. Proper ventilation will also help control the spread of mold.

For schools, the best way to control humidity and allow proper ventilation is through the heating, ventilation and air conditioning, or HVAC, system, which contains a particle filter that can capture aerosols and mold spores. They are used to maintain good indoor air quality (IAQ) by providing ventilation and filtration and controlling temperature. Although most schools already have an HVAC system in place, the building and the system may not be completely updated or maintained, which allows easier access for mold to enter and spread within the school.

District infrastructure and mold

According to the Report Card for America's Infrastructure, produced by the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), schools scored a D+ for 2021. This grade reflects in part how many schools were built between 1950 and 1969, including here in New Jersey.

The U.S. Government Accountability Office (USGAO) reported about 40% of the public-school districts needed



The best way to prevent mold in schools is to control the moisture and humidity of the building.

to update or replace their HVAC system. Officials reported on 55 different school districts they visited in six states. Half of them had HVAC problems causing leaks and damage to floor and ceiling. If left untreated this can lead to mold growth.

The National Center for Education Statistics at the U.S. Department of Education (NCES) also reported over half or 53% of public schools need to repair or renovate infrastructure to good conditions. An older NCES report found about 30% of each HVAC system was in fair or poor condition.

Despite the growing need to repair or even replace HVAC systems, schools are not getting the funding needed. The ASCE report card noted state-based capital funding for schools in 2017, compared to 2008, declined over 30% (nearly \$20 billion), and 38 of 50 U.S. states cut school capital spending from 2008 to 2017.

With limited funding, it is difficult for many schools to afford the necessary replacements or even repairs needed to HVAC systems. Nevertheless, there are still options teachers and staff can take to protect themselves and reduce the growth of mold.

With your local association, reach out to local school district and government officials and inform them of the school's conditions and why preventative maintenance, especially for HVAC systems, is important. If possible, use natural ventilation by leaving windows and doors open. However, it is important to note this may not be possible at every school because of safety concerns—especially for first-floor classrooms—and prevailing outdoor conditions.

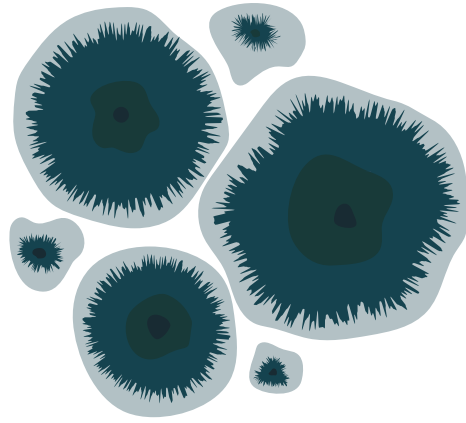
Stay vigilant on the conditions of the school infrastructure

What local associations can do

Through the local association health and safety committee or local association leadership:

- Request a record of maintenance on the HVAC System and its filters.
- Report conditions such as damp rugs and leaks and keep logs of your reports; include pictures when feasible.

If your local association does not have a health and safety committee, consider forming one.



such as damp rugs, leaking ceilings or pipes, or any musty smells in certain areas of the building. Raise your concerns to those responsible to deal with mold. If mold is suspected in the building, then be sure to file a report.

Never attempt to clean mold yourself. Why? Without proper knowledge and tools, you run the risk of getting sick. Finally, take note of where and when you may feel sick. If you are only unwell or get allergies during school hours, then it may be an indication mold is present in the building. 🏠

Visit these government agency websites and reports cited in this article for more information.

American Society of Civil Engineers

"ASCE's 2021 Infrastructure Report Card"
(July 13, 2022)

infrastructurereportcard.org/cat-item/schools-infrastructure

U.S. Department of Education

National Center for Education Statistics
"How Old are America's Public Schools?"
bit.ly/3X0zVBB

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

"Fact Sheet: Mold in Schools" (August 2014)
bit.ly/3RpnX3a

"Heating, Ventilation, and Air-Conditioning Systems, Part of Indoor Air Quality Design Tools for Schools"
bit.ly/3DDEDhM

U.S. Government Accountability Office

"K-12 Education: School Districts Frequently Identified Multiple Building Systems Needing Updates or Replacement" (June 4, 2020)

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ChatGPT Will Disrupt Education. That Is Great News.

By Jonathan Lancaster

"Education is a fundamental building block of society, providing individuals with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in their personal and professional lives. In recent years, the field of education has undergone a number of significant changes, from the growing use of technology in the classroom to the increasing focus on personalized learning. However, there are new trends and developments in education that need to be explored to indicate the ways in which these changes are shaping the future of learning."

One new development that has disrupted the world of education is the introduction of ChatGPT, which is an open-source, free language model. Developed by a company called OpenAI, it can understand and generate human-like text to perform complicated tasks.

For instance, the introduction of this article was not written by me, it was written by ChatGPT. I asked ChatGPT to "Write an engaging introduction to an article about changes in education," and it developed the introduction to this article. While ChatGPT is an interesting tool, it may have a fundamental impact on education.

Currently, ChatGPT is able to write original responses to nearly any given prompt. It can develop entire essays, write original poetry, create scripts, assemble a lab report,

summarize books or concepts and much more. Nearly any given task that teachers may ask students to complete for an assessment can be done by ChatGPT in its current state, and it will only get better with time.

Students have already started using it to complete or assist with assignments, and the complications stemming from this have been—and will be—complicated. Do educators restrict students' access to these tools? Do teachers grade work completed by artificial intelligence (AI)? What is considered cheating and what is not?

Educators and media outlets are already stating that the essay is dead (bit.ly/3Yxbaye), that homework is now obsolete (strattechery.com/2022/ai-homework) and that educators will need to rethink how they operate. I agree. However, this is a disruption that educators should embrace and leverage.

Many educators can recall a time where the rationale for learning long-hand mathematics was, "You'll never have a calculator in your pocket!" Now, 7.3 billion people around the world have calculators in their pockets in the form of a cellphone. Similarly, AI assistance is here to stay, and educators should attempt to use it as a tool for students and themselves.

Lastly, ChatGPT is an opportunity for educators to reflect on what actually *matters* in the classroom and what we are actually *doing* as educators. As ChatGPT wrote, "education is a fundamental building block of society," and while it may be able to do students' assignments, it cannot kindle connection, show care or develop empathy. 🧠

Jonathan Lancaster is a member of Bergen County Vocational Technical Schools Education Association, where he serves as Legislative Action Team chair, early-career liaison, webmaster and parliamentarian. He can be reached at lancaster.jonathan.l@gmail.com.



STAFF NEWS

HIRES AND PROMOTIONS



NJEA congratulates **MURJANI HOWARD** on her promotion to chief membership specialist in the Business Division. Howard initially joined NJEA staff as an office assistant in the UniServ regional office in Camden County in June 2014. In September 2017, she was promoted to principal clerk in the Membership Office. Prior to NJEA, Howard worked as a scriptwriter at a television station in Edison. She lives in Hamilton Township with her husband, Mark.



NJEA welcomed **MICHAEL OLDANI** as a computer technician in the Information Systems Office of the Business Division on Jan. 17. Oldani has several years of experience in information technology providing support to large and small enterprises. He holds an associate degree in computer science from Burlington County Community College and a certificate of program completion in network systems administration from the Cittone Institute. Oldani lives in Hamilton with his wife, Angela, and their two daughters, Kylie and Luna.



NJEA welcomed **ANGELINA CARIONE** as an external partnership coordinator in the Government Relations Division on Jan. 2. Carione comes to NJEA with several years of experience in advocacy, organizing and teaching. She most recently worked as senior director of economic development at The Aubrey Group, a grants-based development consulting firm. She had also previously worked for the New Jersey Work Environment Council as a Healthy Schools Now organizer. Carione was a teacher for nearly 12 years in the Buena Regional School District at the middle and elementary school levels. Through a grant, she served for one year as professional development coach in the district. A 2013 graduate of NJEA's Apprentice Program and a 2014 graduate of the NJEA Union School program, Carione served as a vice president of the Buena Regional Education Association. She holds a bachelor's degree in political science and a master's degree in teaching, both from Rowan University. She lives in Moorestown with her husband, Jason, and their son, Alexander.

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THE NJEA PRESERVICE CAREER READINESS SUMMIT

An informative and empowering opportunity
for future educators

BY CATHERINE GONZALEZ

After two years of running virtually, this year's annual NJEA Preservice event—the NJEA Preservice Career Readiness Summit—will be back in person and held on Saturday, April 15, at the Princeton Marriott at Forrestal Hotel. Registration will begin at 8:30 a.m.

The annual NJEA Preservice event offers a variety of different sessions for Preservice members to take advantage of.

"The topics change from year-to-year, but there's often guidance for preparing to enter student teaching and the workforce," says Nicholas D'Antuono, the NJEA Preservice Political Action Co-Chair. "There are also special interest topics regarding things like COVID-19."

This year, there will be sessions covering how to get employed as an educator after graduation, student debt forgiveness, the steps to receiving a teaching certification and information about various school districts in New Jersey. There will also be an interactive Early Career Panel, where Preservice members can learn from educators who are in their first five years of teaching.

In addition to equipping future educators with knowledge on their vocation and contemporary issues, the summit will host keynote speakers. This year's speakers will be Dr. Angello Villarreal, a teacher of English language learners in the Freehold Regional High School District, and Anthony Elia, an elementary school teacher at Ridgewood Avenue School in Glen Ridge.

Last year's New Jersey State Teacher of the Year, Theresa Maughan, left an impact on NJEA Preservice President Sarah Adamo through her exploration of cultural wealth during her speech at the 2022 event.

"Maughan talked about the idea that we each bring our own cultural assets, and how you need to see differences in the classroom as an asset rather than as a deficiency,"



At the 2019 NJEA Preservice Conference, Nyasia Drye and Emmanuel Barchue, both Rutgers-Newark students at the time, discuss their future in education. Today, Drye is an English teacher at Piscataway High School. Barchue is a math teacher at the Burlington County Institute of Technology.

Adamo recalled. "She was inspiring, and it's clear that she really cares about her students."

Adamo was so touched by Maughan's speech that she invited her to speak to other Preservice members on her campus afterward.

After the formal sessions, students will get the chance to network and celebrate the work they've done throughout the school year together.

Marguerite Schroeder, the NJEA field rep and staff contact for Preservice, said that "This annual event is not only one of the features of the Preservice year, but is also the work of the NJEA Preservice Full Leadership Team, which includes officers, chairs and ambassadors."

If you are an active NJEA member who works with Preservice educators, encourage them to become a member of NJEA Preservice, so they have the opportunity to participate in this summit and other programs. They can join by visiting njea.org/join-preservice. 📍

By Catherine Gonzalez is a student at The College of New Jersey where she serves as an NJEA Preservice ambassador.



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Photo: Matt Wilson

Eliot Schrefer is a *New York Times* bestselling author, has twice been a finalist for the National Book Award for Young People's Literature, received the Stonewall Honor for best LGBT teen book, and received the Printz Honor for best young adult book from the ALA. In naming him an Editor's Choice, the *New York Times* has called his work "dazzling... big-hearted." His science writing has appeared in *Discover*, *Sierra*, *USAToday*, *Nautilus*, and *The Washington Post Magazine*. He is in the process of receiving his M.A. in Animal Studies from NYU and is on the faculty of the Fairleigh Dickinson and Hamline MFAs for creative writing. He lives with his husband in New York City.

NJEA TRANSFORM CONFERENCE

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\$15 for NJEA Preservice members

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The conference provides five hours of professional learning credit.

Preregistration required: Visit njea.org/transform to register.*

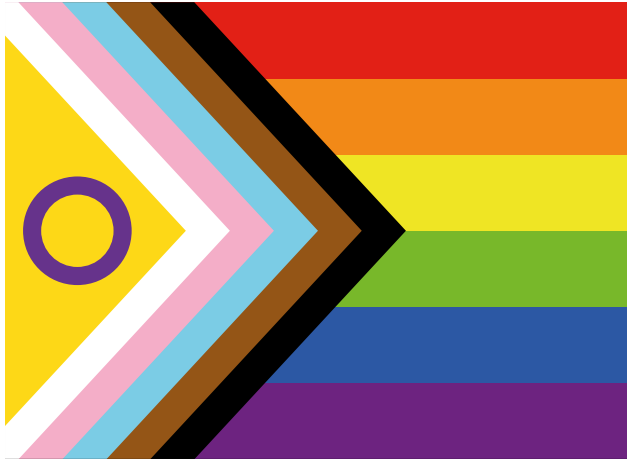
*Purchase order registrations are not available online and must be placed with the conference registrar, Cindy Vannauker, at cvannauker@njea.org, or 609-310-4263.

Registrations are accepted on a first-come, first-served basis. No on-site registration.

If you have a special physical or communication need or other disability that may require assistance or accommodations to permit or facilitate your attendance and participation, please contact Cindy Vannauker as listed above by April 7.

Questions? Email pdevents@njea.org.

njea Carol Watchler LGBTQIA+ Advocacy Conference



May 12-13, 2023

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Agenda

Friday

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

Saturday

- 7:30 a.m. Breakfast
- 8:30 a.m. Session 1
- 10:30 a.m. Break
- 11 a.m. Session 2
- 1 p.m. Lunch

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTIONS:

Registration required by April 21, 2023

1. Advocating for Queer Professional Learning

What does high-quality professional learning on LGBTQIA+ issues look like, and how do we advocate for it? Join a hosted conversation to explore these topics with members from around the state.

2. LGBTQIA+ Inclusive Language

This session will focus on LGBTQIA+ inclusive language for the workplace and how it applies to association documents such as the constitution and bylaws, as well as collective bargaining agreements.

3. Black, Brown, and Queer

Join us for a conversation on how we navigate today's society in the face of rising hate crimes and extreme political rhetoric against both people of color and members of the LGBTQIA+ community.

4. 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 LGBTQIA+ folks in and out of the classroom.

5. NJEA and You: Creating a More Perfect (and Queer) Union

This will be a hosted conversation about what NJEA does for its queer members and, moving forward, what NJEA still needs to do to make our union more perfect and queer.

6. Gender and Sexuality Alliances Roundtable

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!

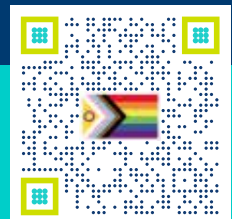


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Sexual Orientation and
Gender Identity Committee

Visit njea.org/lgbtqia+conference for registration details.

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



WHAT NOT TO DO

By Amy Moran, Ph.D. and Kate Okeson

Has any mascot—bulldog, cougar or tiger—ever stood up for you in a terrifying moment in which you were being verbally, emotionally or physically assaulted in a school? Can one of those fictitious animals reasonably be credited for solving racism, classism, misogyny, religious hatred, or antagonism toward LGBTQIA+ people in schools?

Though everyone knows the answer is a resounding NO, students across the country are watching the adults running their school districts making the shameful decision to remove all rainbow flag-type support symbols schoolwide. New Jersey isn't immune: In one school district, school leaders will replace these symbols of inclusivity with images of their school mascot as part of a "kindness" initiative.

In the last several years, we have witnessed a substantial uptick in attendance at school board meetings by outsiders who commandeer microphone time to espouse anti-LGBTQIA+ sentiments, to advance their personal queer-antagonistic agenda and to manufacture outrage. These tactics are called astroturfing, and they are anything but local, spontaneous or "grassroots."

Named for the way it falsely represents community sentiments and lacks grassroots convictions, astroturfing is the practice of hiding the actual sponsors and financial backing of a message or intent and giving undeserved credibility to a cause. It is prevalent in New Jersey and is one of the reasons we see a spotlight on attempts to ban books, opt out of inclusive curricula, and hijack important school board business for things such as anti-CRT screeds.

When pressuring district leaders to pursue a regressive agenda replaces a real interest in the education and well-being of all students, it's no wonder the dam breaks and our students are traumatized. When exactly does a queer kid, a trans kid, get to see themselves in their school? Using current statistics, if approximately 14% of the student body knows or expresses themselves as part of the LGBTQIA+ community, 1 in 6 of the students in any school that bans rainbow representation may not see themselves as having worth or being "seen" in the same ways their straight, cisgender peers are.

One might also ask: if the rainbow stickers come down, did a school district add books? Are they balancing their action with representations of a wide variety of cultural contributors on posters all around the school?

As queer Gen Xers, we vividly remember our own experiences with absolutely no LGBTQIA+ visibility in our school hallways, classrooms, policies, textbooks or in the language of the educators entrusted to educate us. The only LGBTQIA+ language we heard was the verbal violence of anti-queer insults. Our LGBTQIA+ peers were physically assaulted, and their high-school-aged assailants were exonerated with administrators' "boys-will-be-boys" ideologies. We started our careers in schools like that too.

Let's be clear: school mascots were never there to protect us or intervene or bring restorative justice to all parties involved. In their silence, school mascots may not have been exactly complicit in the social, emotional, and physical damage that LGBTQIA+ marginalization created, but neither were they agents of social change.

Claiming that a school's mascot is all the support any student needed is an aggressive erasure of hard-earned and desperately-needed LGBTQIA+ affirmation.

The agency of social justice activism is alive and vibrant in schools—the critical thinking, the strategic inclusion, the impetus of young people's passion for change—all to support the evolution of a school culture and, yes, our future society in which social-emotional principles are integrated as intended. 🏡



Use this QR code for book recommendations and resources.

Want to share your ideas? Email rainbowconnectionNJEA@gmail.com.



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THE LIFE OF AN ANXIOUS TEACHER

Remember: You are enough.

BY YULIANA SORIAL



**Early Career
Network**

A 2022 study conducted by the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health found that 73% of teachers struggle with symptoms of anxiety. Here's what a "normal" day looks like:

There are 24 hours in a day and seven hours in the school day. Add another hour because 20 minutes in homeroom are not nearly enough to read your essential question a hundred times to ensure that it is accurate, to go over your lesson plan for the 20th time since last night—when you changed your lesson at the last minute because you felt like it wasn't challenging enough. Or, you felt like it was too challenging. But did it meet the standards? Did you differentiate it to meet all of your students' needs?

At the end of the school day, you erase the board for the 10th time because it is soothing to feel accomplished after your last class. But then you remember that you forgot to answer a parent's email, so you quickly do that.

Twelve tabs later and you're making materials for next marking period because the clock is ticking, and you're worried that your pacing is off. Two hours pass. You check your watch and remember that you need to go home to make dinner for your family. At home, your family has been watching you grade assignments until you fall asleep on the couch.

The doctor told you to find ways to relieve the stress of your job and that you needed to incorporate more physical exercise into your day. So, you spend an hour working up the confidence to go to the gym and then another hour at the gym.

You need time to spend with your family, so you put on a movie as you keep your laptop open to try to get some grading done. But like nails on a Smartboard, the sound of a teacher having time to themselves isn't "resourceful." Once the movie ends, you feel instant regret that you only graded one assignment, so you stay up another hour to be productive.

By the next day, you've made even more materials, but you think you can do better. You've spent too little time with your family, got yelled at by a 15-year-old because they couldn't use their phone during a test, and got an email that you haven't practiced NJSLA standards enough.

For all the educators going through this cycle, you are not alone.

You are an amazing educator.

You are doing enough. 🙌

Yuliana Sorial is a 9th Grade English teacher at Bayonne High School. She is a member of the NJEA Early Career Network which can be found at njea.org/early-career.

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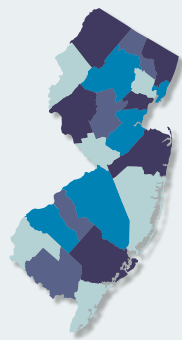
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highlights

Character education, school culture, and social-emotional learning

SHOWCASE

Showcase experiences have been endorsed by NJEA's Professional Development Institute and are also posted on njea.org. Those seeking endorsement of a professional development experience that they will provide should call NJEA's Professional Development Division at 609-599-4561.

FROM SURVIVAL TO SUCCESS: EXPLORING THE THREE C'S

There is an emphasis on buzz-words and jargon when referring to current trends and topics. Sometimes this jargon leads to confusion and exclusion when similar concepts and ideas are labeled with different terms. The New Jersey Alliance for Social-Emotional and Character Development (NJASECD) Conference will address this issue in the fields of character education, school culture and social-emotional learning.

A panel of educators will address the essential points in each of these fields and discuss how they overlap to create individuals who are ready to face the tests of life. Following the panel discussion, breakout presentations will illustrate the practical use of these concepts in schools. Best practices from across the content areas, with examples from award winning schools around the state, will be shared.

NJASECD's mission is to assist educators and all other stakeholders in their efforts to foster ethical, responsible and caring people as they model and teach the social-emotional skills and ethical and performance values that lead to good character.

Location: Rider University

Date/Time: May 23; 8:15 a.m.-3 p.m.

Registration Fee: \$150.00

Registration/Information: Visit bit.ly/njasecd-3cs to register. For more information, email njasecd@gmail.com.

MORE TO LEARN

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FROM THE NJ CENTER FOR CIVIC EDUCATION

The New Jersey Center for Civic Education offers statewide and regional workshops. Topics, information and registration forms can be found at civiced.rutgers.edu/events/range.listevents.

NJCCE also offers in-service workshops on civics, history, government, media literacy, teaching controversial issues, and other social studies issues. To learn more, go to civiced.rutgers.edu/professional-development.

Also visit civiced.rutgers.edu for extensive resources on civic education and other social studies topics.

BARNEGAT BAY ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATORS ROUNDTABLE

The Ocean County Soil Conservation District invites you to its 26th Annual Barnegat Bay Environmental Educators Roundtable at the Lighthouse Center for Natural Resource Education. The roundtable takes place on Wednesday, April 19 after school hours. Classroom teachers, environmental educators and nature enthusiasts are invited to participate in this in-person, indoor/outdoor, professional development event that takes place during afterschool/evening hours. Engage in lessons and field experiences that inspire and educate.

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

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

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

Location: Lighthouse Center for Natural Resource Education

Date/Time: April 19; after school/evening hours

Registration Fee: \$150.00

Registration/Information: Visit OCSCD's Environmental Educators Roundtable at soildistrict.org/environmental-educators-roundtable for a complete description of programs and registration information. Call 609-991-1534 or email education@soildistrict.org for further details.

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Questions? Email
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bbuonsante@njea.org.



PAST, PRESENT
AND FUTURE

GET THE FACTS ABOUT ENROLLMENT IN MEDICARE

As required by law, retired members or their dependents who qualify for the School Employees' Health Benefits Program's (SEHBP) state-paid, post-retirement medical benefits, or those more recent retirees who may be contributing a percentage of the premium and are eligible for Medicare, must enroll in both Medicare Parts A and B.

Medicare Part A is paid for while actively employed and Part B is paid for during retirement, usually through a deduction from retirees' Social Security checks. State law requires the SEHBP to reimburse these eligible retirees and their dependents for the cost of enrolling in Medicare Part B.

Most members and their dependents will qualify for Medicare benefits under one of the following four conditions:

- Have reached age 65.
- Have received Social Security disability benefits for 24 months.
- Have end-stage renal disease.
- Have ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease).

If a member is currently receiving Social Security retirement benefits, they will be automatically enrolled in both Medicare Part A and Part B. They do not need to contact anyone. They will receive a package in the mail three months before their 65th birthday with the new Medicare card.

However, members who are 65 but are not receiving Social Security retirement benefits will need to actively enroll in Medicare. Members should sign up for Medicare online at medicare.gov or ssa.gov approximately three months prior to turning 65. If this and the steps below are not completed before they are eligible for Medicare, their SEHBP health benefits could be temporarily terminated.

When Medicare-eligible members or dependents receive their Medicare card or the letter confirming their enrollment, they must add the information to their account through Benefitsolver.com. This ensures that their post-retirement medical benefits will continue without interruption.

- Click on "Change My Benefits" (Pencil and Paper Icon).
- Click the arrow next to "Life Event – Add Medicare Information (Enter Medicare Effective Date)"
- Put in effective date.

More importantly, retirees enrolled in SEHBP should NOT sign up for alternate supplemental Medicare coverage. Enrollment in another plan will result in the loss of SEHBP coverage.

The Division of Pensions will send a reminder letter to those who are about to qualify by means of turning 65, but the Division of Pensions will not send a reminder letter to those who qualify by the other identified means.

Any questions about this process should be directed to the Division of Pensions and Benefits at 609-292-7524.



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Retirees who are members of the School Employees Health Benefits Plan (SEHBP) and are enrolled in Medicare are automatically enrolled in the OptumRx Medicare Part D Prescription Drug Plan (PDP). Retirees may waive the OptumRx Medicare PDP only if they are enrolled in another Medicare Part D plan. To request that your coverage be waived, you must submit a Cancel/Decline/Waive Retired Coverage Form, along with proof of other Medicare Part D coverage, to the NJ Division of Pensions & Benefits (NJDPB).

The address is:

NJ Division of Pensions & Benefits
Health Benefits Bureau
P.O. Box 299
Trenton, NJ 08625-0299.
Medicare Supplement Plan (Horizon)

Retirees who choose to enroll in another Medicare Part D plan, such as their spouse's, will lose any prescription drug benefits provided by the SEHBP. However, their medical benefits will continue.

Medicare Advantage Plans (Aetna)

Retirees who are enrolled in a Medicare Advantage Plan may only waive their prescription drug coverage for another group Medicare Part D plan. Please note: If you waive coverage for an individual Medicare Part D plan, your SEHBP Medicare Advantage Plan for both medical and prescription will be terminated.

Returning to the SEHBP

Retirees who have previously waived their prescription drug coverage for another Medicare Part D plan and wish to re-enroll in the OptumRx Medicare PDP must send proof of their termination from the other Medicare Part D plan. Acceptable proof is a letter from the other Medicare Part D plan confirming the date upon which you are officially disenrolled. The NJDPB must receive this proof within 60 days of the termination from the other Medicare Part D plan.

Retirees who have additional questions and/or wish to learn more can visit the division's website at nj.gov/treasury/pensions or by calling 609-292-7524.

Around the counties

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

GLOUCESTER COUNTY REA

March 28: Laura Maltman Health & Wellness workshop on "Scams & Frauds on Seniors" held at GCREA Office Suite 108 Lakeside Professional Plaza 190 N. Evergreen Ave. Woodbury, NJ. Light refreshments. No cost to attend. To attend, call Candy Zachowski at 570-710-5514.

HUNTERDON COUNTY REA

April 20: Spring luncheon at the Mt. View Chalet. Cost is \$30. To attend, contact Joyce Kucyn at kucyn143@comcast.net.

MONMOUTH COUNTY REA

April 18: Spring meeting/ luncheon at Jumping Brook Country Club in Neptune. Meeting will be a member benefits fair. Cost is \$35. To attend contact Lois Lyons at MCREAinformation@gmail.com by April 7.

OCEAN COUNTY REA

March 16: March meeting/luncheon at the Clarion Hotel in Toms River. Cost is \$28. To attend, call Barbara DiCicco at 732-773-4917 by March 2.

PASSAIC COUNTY REA

March 29: Spring luncheon/meeting at The Brownstone in Paterson. Cost is \$35. To attend, call Kitty Sausa at 201-410-1325.

SOMERSET COUNTY REA

May 3: Spring luncheon at Somerville Elks Lodge. Cost is \$25. To attend, call Kathy Kapp at 908-722-7715 by April 27.

CLEARING THE RECORD

In the February edition of the NJEA Review, a Morris County REA event was inadvertently listed under Monmouth County REA. The editor of the Review regrets the error.

NJEA Delegate Assembly

The NJEA Delegate Assembly met Virtually on Jan. 9, 2021 at 9:30 a.m.

Roll Call was taken. There were 128 out of 128 present. Alternates were seated as follows: Andrew Susan Lewis for Ray (Middlesex).

NJEA President Marie Blistan asked for a Moment of Silence for NJEA Consultant Candida "Candy" Palmieri who passed away on Jan. 1, 2021.

Kim Cacciato (Preservice) gave the Inspirational Message and led delegation in the Flag Salute.

Blistan asked if there was objection to adopting the DA Rules of Procedure. There was no objection. Agenda was adopted with flexibility.

President's report

NJEA President Marie Blistan reported that a coalition had been formed with 20 stakeholders to discuss school's post-pandemic, utilizing a document (Re-Invention of Schools Post COVID) co-authored by Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond that proposed 10 principles to follow as schools reopened. Blistan asked Michael Cohan, NJEA Director of Professional Development and Instructional Issues, to speak to these issues. Cohan presented a slide show (Blueprint for the Post COVID Reinvention of Schools) in which he gave a synopsis of what has been covered and next steps in the process.

Vice president's report

NJEA Vice President Sean M. Spiller updated provided an update of NJ State Board of Education meetings. Spiller highlighted the return of Paterson Public Schools to local control. Spiller reported on Higher Education Contract negotiations, the Higher Ed Restart Advisory Group, and conversations surrounding mental health support during the pandemic. Spiller discussed role the Work Environment Council (WEC) in addressing COVID. He highlighted the importance of the COVID Worker Protection Executive Order 192 and noted the importance of the "Healthy Schools Now" Campaign.

Secretary-treasurer's report

NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Steve Beatty presented the fiscal report of NJEA. Beatty spoke to the naming of Jeanne DelColle as director of the Center for Future Educators at The College of New Jersey who we are in partnership with. Beatty spoke to the continuing work of the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Taskforce. Beatty reported of the work of the 200,000 Conversations "core group." Beatty presented a slide show on the impact of the 2019-20 NJEA Budget and introduced the Independent Auditor's Report.

Annual Audit Presentation

Steve Mazur of Novak Francella, LLC, presented the audit report and took questions from the delegation.

Nondelegate speakers

Brian Riley (Preservice) spoke to issues of edTPA and its requirements to achieve teacher certification. Christina Cucci (Bergen) spoke to the importance of school librarians. Beth Thomas (Summit EA) spoke to a study titled "The School Librarian Investigation: Decline or Evolution". Robin Cogan (Camden) spoke to vaccine confidence. Gina Emge (Burlington) spoke to the importance of vaccinations.

Executive director's report

NJEA Executive Director Steve Swetsky spoke to the audit report presented by the Firm of Novak Francella and how it shows the priorities of the NJEA. Swetsky introduced Gary Melton Sr. as the manager of the Office of NJEA Human and Civil Rights, Equity and Governance. Swetsky thanked Jerell Blakeley and staff who participated in organizing phone banks. Swetsky spoke to the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol. Swetsky introduced Steve Baker, director of Communications for a presentation of a survey that asked members about their thoughts and views concerning the pandemic. Baker took questions from the delegation. Swetsky recognized UniServ Central Director Jim Loper on his retirement. Loper addressed the delegation.

Committee reports without recommendations

Elections Committee: Eda Ferrante (Chair)

NJEA PAC Operating Committee: Marie Blistan (Chair)

Committee reports with recommendations

Constitution Review Committee: Chris Carpenter (chair) spoke to the report and answered question from the delegation.

Recommendation No. 1: Moved "that, as required by NJEA Constitution Article XIV, "Amendments to the Constitution," the following amendments to the NJEA Constitution, Article VI, new Section (See February 2021 NJEA Review, p. 53), be approved for publication in the NJEA Review and placement on the spring 2021 NJEA election ballot with recommendation for adoption, to become effective Sept. 1, 2021."

The motion carried.

Pandemic Relief Subcommittee: Deanna Nicosia-Jones (chair) spoke to the report and answered questions.

Recommendation No. 1: "that the Pandemic Relief Food Assistance Program, process for administering it as outlined below, and application, as indicated in Appendix B (See. D.A. Book, Jan. 9, 2021) of this report, be approved."

Recommendation No. 2: Nicosia-Jones moved "that the Executive Committee's Donations account in cost center 0400 be reimbursed an amount not to exceed \$500,000 from the pandemic relief funds for the cost of the Pandemic Relief Food Assistance Program.

The motion carried.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 3: Nicosia-Jones moved “that \$1 million be transferred from Net Assets to the Pandemic Relief Fund budget line in Cost Center 0935 to enable the Association to give more eligible members the opportunity to apply for food insufficiency relief.

The motion carried.

Professional Development Committee: Jennifer Clemen (chair) spoke to the report and answered questions.

Recommendation No. 1: Clemen moved “that the following rule be amended as follows (with additions boldfaced and underlined; deletions in brackets and struck out): “that NJEA members who lead professional learning programs at NJEA-sponsored professional development conferences (excluding the NJEA Convention) be offered a ~~[\$250]~~ **\$300** honorarium for preparation and an added ~~[\$250]~~ **\$300** for the day of the presentation or presentations, plus reasonable expenses for mileage reimbursement. Members shall only present at NJEA conferences if ~~[there is not an available]~~ no consultant or staff member **is available. Every effort shall be made to use staff and consultants before reaching out to members.** This honorarium shall be reviewed every two years in odd-numbered years, prior to development and adoption of the succeeding year’s NJEA budget. (This rule replaces the prior rule adopted on Sept 9, 2017.)

The motion carried.

Recommendation No. 2: Clemen moved “that a digital database of NJEA Professional Development workshops be maintained behind the members’ only area of the Association’s website, *njea.org*, accessible by county and local presidents and vice presidents. This database must be searchable, sortable, and capable of generating reports, and completed as soon as possible.”

The motion carried.

Working Conditions and Youth Services Committee: Barbara Rheault (Chair of Working Conditions), Cheryl Willis (Chair of Youth Services). Barbara Rheault speaking to report.

Recommendation No. 1: Moved “that NJEA believes that vaccines are essential medical tools in preventing infectious diseases. The Association acknowledges that vaccines must be pervasive to be effective. NJEA also believes that parents/guardians should follow vaccination guidelines from the American Academy of Pediatrics and the N.J. Department of Health. The Association further believes that the N.J. Legislature should establish clear guidelines for waivers that minimize the numbers of unvaccinated students to those necessary due to documented medical conditions.

The motion carried.

Recommendation No. 2: Moved “that NJEA believes that educators, with school nurses having first access, should receive priority access to COVID-19 vaccines because of the importance of safe, equitable, and effective in-person instruction and support, and our members’ role in delivering nutrition, instructional materials, and remote instruction to our students even when school buildings are closed. NJEA further believes that any COVID-19 vaccine mandates for school employees should be the same as COVID-19 vaccine mandates for the general public.

The motion carried.

Recommendation No. 3: Moved “that NJEA believes evidence-based vaccination campaigns are integral in maintaining student and community health. NJEA will support statewide efforts to build vaccine confidence and remind the public of appropriate mitigation strategies to stop the spread of disease. We recognize that racial inequities have been made exponentially worse due to the cross-sector impacts of the pandemic, and this will require us to stand and advocate with our students and their families. The CDC and other government agencies should consistently and explicitly acknowledge and communicate the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Black, Latinx, and Indigenous communities and other people of color and take steps to ensure vaccines are readily accessible and available to our most impacted communities. Vaccine distribution planning and evidence-based vaccination campaigns must specifically address the disproportionate suffering in communities of color and must account for vaccine hesitancy based on historical abuses and exploitation of communities of color. NJEA will advocate that any such vaccination campaigns include representation of Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and other people of color. Vaccine plans must also ensure equitable access to vaccines in rural and isolated communities.

The motion carried

For the good of the order

Ann Margaret Shannon (Union) thanked NJEA and Union County Education Association for support in Union with superintendent appointment. Helff (Higher Ed) asked that the three recommendations concerning vaccines be shared with the Governor. Rheault (Atlantic) reporter on ACCEA work that is being done in the community. Fuller (Somerset) asked delegates to reach out to their legislators concerning the events of January 6th. Infanger spoke to getting adults that work in school systems inoculated. Aileen O’Driscoll spoke to inoculations in schools. Cheryl Willis Thanked everyone for their support on passing her committee recommendations. Petal Robinson announced that NEA is holding their Movement Moment honoring the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Motion to adjourn: Barbara Rheault (Atlantic)

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MARCH & beyond

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

MAR 03	FRIDAY Executive Committee meeting	MAR 18	SATURDAY Celebration of Women luncheon	APR 15-16	SAT & SUN Higher Education Collective Bargaining Summit
MAR 04	SATURDAY Delegate Assembly meeting	MAR-APR 31-01	FRI & SAT Winter Leadership Conference – Central	APR 15	SATURDAY NJEA Preservice Career Readiness Summit
MAR 04	SATURDAY ACCESS Model Statewide Conference	APR 14-15	FRI & SAT Higher Education Conference	APR 22	SATURDAY Transform Conference

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

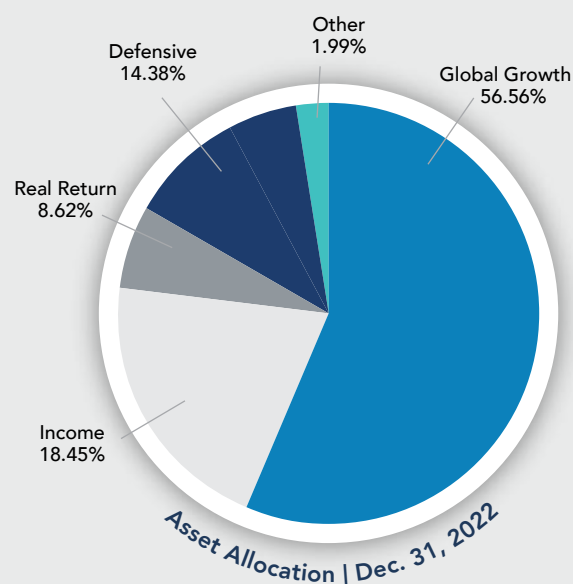
PENSION UPDATE

TOTAL PENSION FUND:
\$85.38 BILLION

The totals below reflect market values as of Dec. 31, 2022, and for comparison, June 30, 2022. The figures, which are rounded, may not reflect the current market values of some alternative investments through the period noted, because of lags in reporting under industry standards.

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

	Dec. 31, 2022		June 30, 2022	
	Market Value (\$ billions)	Asset Allocation	Market Value (\$ billions)	Asset Allocation
Global Growth	\$48.29	56.56%	\$48.03	54.89%
Income	\$15.75	18.45%	\$15.35	17.54%
Real Return	\$7.36	8.62%	\$7.86	8.99%
Defensive	\$12.28	14.38%	\$14.67	16.77%
Other	\$1.70	1.99%	\$1.59	1.82%
Total	\$85.38	100%	\$87.50	100%



SPEAKING UP, STAYING SAFE ON SOCIAL MEDIA



It's no secret that misinformation and disinformation spread quickly on social media. This inaccurate information often leads to derogatory and hateful speech online. As NJEA members, we must stand up for what we believe and push back against mis/disinformation and hateful, racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, and all derogatory ideas and language. The best way to stand up for what we believe in is to understand our rights and have a plan to effectively address harmful speech on social media.

When speaking up to hateful and harmful comments, be aware that what you post on social media can be considered a reflection of your professional conduct. As a result, all public employees should exercise discretion when posting on social media, as some content might be considered unprofessional or offensive. It is crucial to avoid using words or phrases that could be interpreted as bullying, harassment or discrimination.

Your rights

The First Amendment protects people's freedom of speech, but it does not always apply to public employees—including teachers and educational support professionals. In extreme cases, a court could decide if an educator's speech is allowed or not allowed by determining if it causes problems at a school, if it harms relationships with fellow educators, if it makes it harder for the school to educate a child, or if it harms the school's normal operations.

As noted by Cosmas Diamantis in the December 2019 issue of the NJEA Review, "New Jersey Public Law 2013, Chapter 155, prohibits your employer from requesting access to your personal social media accounts. But they are not prohibited from viewing what you post publicly or what others, such as your co-workers, your students or parents bring to their attention."

Speaking up

With all this in mind, these are the top tips recommended for educators to follow when interacting with hateful comments or mis/disinformation on social media:

Don't feed the trolls

Do not engage with or respond to negative or harmful comments or messages from individuals who seem to

be intentionally trying to provoke or upset you. Ignoring them is the best way to avoid giving them the attention they seek.

Block/Ban/Report

Block and/or ban individuals who post hateful, threatening or violent comments. When you encounter egregious comments or content, it's recommended that you report the content and/or users to the platform to review potential violations of their terms of service.

Know privacy settings, perform social audits

Review and adjust your privacy settings on social media platforms to control who can see your content and personal information. Regularly review your past posts and activity to ensure that it is consistent with your professional image.

Never use profanity or offensive language

Refrain from using language that is considered offensive, vulgar or disrespectful.

When you disagree, remain kind

When disagreeing with someone online, remember to do so in a respectful and professional way. Always avoid engaging in personal attacks.

Wait before you reply

Always take time before responding to a message or comment. Read comments carefully to avoid responding impulsively and potentially escalating a situation.

Remember professionalism

Always maintain a professional image and behavior on social media. What you post online is a reflection of your conduct as a public school employee. Always consider that what you post online could be shared with your employer.

As NJEA members, we proudly use our voices to advocate for our profession and students. Social media is a powerful medium for us to partner with parents and allies in our communities. By speaking up we can help foster the best possible learning environment for all students. And as we do our part to ensure that our schools and communities are safe, inclusive and welcoming to all, we should always remember to do so safely, strategically and effectively. 🗣️



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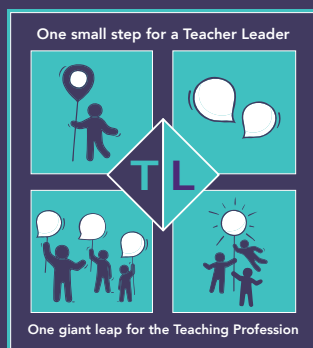
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