

REVIEW

JUNE
2023

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24 KINDERGARTEN MARINE

28 NJEA HONORS HIGHER
EDUCATION MEMBERS

30 READ, LEAD AND SUCCEED

34 UNDERSTANDING
YOUR RETIREMENT

Kindergarten Marine



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At the annual NJEA Higher Education Conference in April, members paused to honor the **Higher Education Faculty, Educational Support Professional, and Administrator of the Year**. To learn more about these distinguished educators, turn to Page 28.

From left: NJEA UniServ Field Reps Marcia Kleinz and Maury Kauffmann, Faculty Member of the Year Dr. Matthew Kochis, Administrator of the Year Noreen Kane, ESP of the Year Tereke Bell, NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty, and UniServ Administrative Assistant Karen "Skip" Perry.



The future of public education is in good hands. Leaders of NJEA Preservice from across multiple colleges and universities in New Jersey gathered on April 15 to sharpen their leadership skills.

Front row (l-r): Melissa McClymont, Esther King, Emma Selinger, Cara Grabowski, Catherine Gonzalez, Wendy Diaz, Alexis Nadeau, Chelsea Berwick, Victoria Tierney, Kayla Kanarkowski and NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty.

Back row (l-r): NJEA Membership Manager Jaime Valente, NJEA Organizing Consultant Hannah Pawlak, Bianca Nicolescu, Brian Reilly, Jenna Cooper, NJEA Preservice Vice President Matthew Yuro, Nick D'Antuono and NJEA Organizing Consultant Andrew Lewis.

FEATURES



24 | KINDERGARTEN MARINE

After graduating from high school in 1981, Al Harrell joined the United States Marine Corps, a move motivated by his desire to join the “toughest branch of the military.” Today, he’s a kindergarten teacher. While this may not be the typical career path for an elementary school teacher, Harrell believes the lessons in leadership he acquired as a Marine help his students become leaders in the classroom.

BY KATHRYN COULIBALY



30 | READ, LEAD AND SUCCEED

Princeton Middle School teacher Lisa McGhee could see there was a problem: too many of her students hated to read. While they were willing to read books for fun, being tested on what they read reinforced their insecurities about how well they read. Thanks to the Read, Lead, Succeed Book Club, funded through a grant from the NJEA Frederick L. Hipp Foundation for Excellence in Education, McGhee’s students are discovering the joy of reading.

BY KATHRYN COULIBALY



28 | NJEA HONORS HIGHER EDUCATION MEMBERS

Since 2018, NJEA has honored the work of our higher education members from the faculty, educational support professional (ESP), and administrative branches. These distinguished members are recognized for their remarkable records of union advocacy and service to their association. At the NJEA Higher Education Conference on April 14, this year’s honorees were announced.



34 | UNDERSTANDING YOUR RETIREMENT

It’s never too early to begin planning for retirement, especially if you are changing districts, job titles or taking an unpaid leave of absence. As this school year draws to a close, now would be a good time for a primer on some basics concerning your pension—whether you work at the preK-12 level or one of our state’s community colleges.

BY THE PENSION POLICY COMMITTEE



COLUMNS

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE 7*A commitment to service***THE ADVOCATE 8***Know. Lead. Act.***THE BULLETIN BOARD 10***Cool stuff to check out***EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT****PROFESSIONALS 12***A reputation for adaptation
Achieving her dreams***LAW AND YOU 15***Sexual assault prevention***THE NJEA REPORT 16***Education in the news***HEALTH AND SAFETY 38***Drinking water and PFAS***RETIRED MEMBERS 40***News and events***PROFESSIONAL****DEVELOPMENT 42***Your summer reading list***STAFF NEWS 44***Hires and promotions***SPEAK OUT 45***Advocate for your students
and your profession***RAINBOW CONNECTION 46***LGBTQIA+ matters in our schools***SUSSEX TO CAPE MAY 49***Workshops and conferences***MEMBER BENEFITS 51***Get your money's worth***EARLY CAREER 52***Tips to de-stress***HIPP FOUNDATION 53***Get your ideas funded***GOVERNANCE 54***Delegate Assembly minutes***COMING UP 57***What's next at NJEA***FINAL EXAM 58***LGBTQIA+ youth need support*

The number 48,867,123

Total public school enrollment in the U.S. in the fall of 2022.

The National Education Association (NEA) estimates that enrollment in the fall of 2023 will be 48,820,227. By comparison, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) estimates that in the fall of 2019, 4.7 million students were enrolled in private schools.

Sources: NEA, "Rankings of the States 2022 and Estimates of School Statistics 2023," April 2023.

NCES, "Fast Facts: Private and Public School Comparison," nces.ed.gov/fastfacts.




GOOD NEWS

Our high school graduation rate is among the top in the nation

New Jersey is one of the top two states in the nation in public high school graduation.

Source: Education Week, "Quality Counts 2021: Chances for Success. January 2021," edweek.org.




Retired U.S. Marine Al Harrell is a kindergarten teacher in Atlantic City. Harrell believes the lessons in leadership he acquired as a Marine help his students become leaders in the classroom.

PHOTO BY
Kathryn Coulibaly

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NEW JERSEY EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

REVIEW

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Organizational Directory

NJEA headquarters, Trenton

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

UniServ regional offices

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

UniServ South

Reg. 1-3
Director's office
856-234-0522

Region 1 (Atlantic and
Cape May counties):
609-652-9200

Region 2 (Cumberland,
Gloucester and Salem
counties):
856-628-8650

Region 3 (Burlington and
Camden counties):
856-234-2485

UniServ Central

Reg. 7-9, 11, 13 and 29
Director's office
732-287-6899

Region 7 (Ocean County):
732-349-0280

Region 8 (Mercer County):
609-896-3422

Region 9 (Monmouth County):
732-403-8000

Region 11 (Middlesex County):
732-287-4700

Region 29 (Higher Education):
609-689-9580

UniServ Northeast

Reg. 15, 19-21, and 25
Director's office
973-321-3221

Region 15 (Union County):
908-709-9440

Region 19 (Hudson County-
North and Newark):
201-861-1266

Region 20 (Hudson
County-South):
201-653-6634

Region 21 (Essex County,
except Newark):
973-762-6866

Region 25 (Bergen County):
201-292-8093

UniServ Northwest

Reg. 13, 17, and 27
Director's office
973-347-0911

Region 13 (Hunterdon,
Somerset and Warren
counties):
908-782-2168

Region 17 (Morris and
Sussex counties):
973-515-0101

Region 27
(Passaic County):
973-694-0154

MEMBERSHIP

Active professional: \$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*

A commitment to service

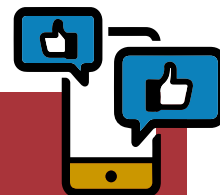
One of the things that binds us together as educators and union members is our commitment to service. The desire to help others and to make everyone's lives better through education and advocacy for economic and social justice is a strong motivation to persevere, even when times get tough. And there is no question that this was a tough year for everyone working in New Jersey's public schools.

The ability to keep going even when times get difficult, the resilience to outlast the challenges, and the desire to serve and support the most vulnerable are also hallmarks of another kind of service. Those who serve in the military make so many sacrifices for the people of our country. They put their lives on the line in order to preserve democracy and strive to make the world a better, safer place for all of us.

Former Marine and current Atlantic City kindergarten teacher Alphonso Harrell is one person who knows the unique challenges and benefits of both military service and working in public education. Al is an active member of his local, county and state unions, as well as a much-honored and appreciated member of the Atlantic City and Atlantic County education communities. In this issue, we learn more about Al's journey as a Marine and an educator, and how he uses everything he has learned in order to benefit the students and staff at Pennsylvania Avenue School—and beyond.

As educators and advocates, we carry a great deal of responsibility on our shoulders, but as another school year ends, I hope that you feel proud of all that you have accomplished, not only this year, but over the course of your career as an advocate and educator. Thank you for all that you have done for New Jersey's public school children and for the profession.

In Unity,



SEAN M. SPILLER

Facebook

@SpillerforNJEA: Honored to attend our NJEA Transform Conference this past weekend. Hundreds of NJEA members joined us for this fantastic and empowering conference. Our members' dedication to their students and public education is simply inspiring! #WEareNJEA

On April 24, NJEA President Sean M. Spiller shared photos from NJEA's inaugural Transform Conference. The conference, spearheaded by the NJEA Professional Development and Instructional Issues Division, offered an exciting format for NJEA members to expand their professional teaching practice while also focusing on the mental and emotional health of educators and students alike.

STEVE BEATTY

Facebook

@SteveBeattyNJEA: Who says "you can't go home again"? Overwhelmed and happy after a "lunch in local" visit to my local, the Bridgewater-Raritan Education Association! So great to see and talk with good friends and colleagues from my 25+ years at BRHS and Bradley Gardens School! And wonderful to walk around campus, see the changes from the last six years and connect with my roots—staying grounded in the work ... I know my colleagues persevere—giving of themselves every day despite the changes that come and the challenges they face. NJ schools rank #1 in the nation—and the BREA and BRHS, #1 in my heart!

On May 5, NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty spent the day with his local association. Beatty shared his thoughts on returning to his local association to spend the day with BREA members. He expressed that the day kept him focused on how the statewide work of NJEA impacts members in every local association.

PETAL ROBERTSON

Facebook

@PetalforNJEA: Congratulations to @njstoy2022, Theresa Maughan, on winning the Horace Mann award at the NEA NFIE Salute to Excellence Awards. It was a spectacular night in celebration of educators and community groups that keep our public schools strong.

On May 7, NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson shared photos from NEA's Salute to Excellence in Education Awards Gala, which she attended along with NJEA member and 2022 NJ State Teacher of the Year Theresa Maughan. Maughan was honored with the Horace Mann Award for Excellence in Education.

OFFICERS ONLINE

KNOW. LEAD. ACT.

NOMINATIONS OPEN FOR AWARDS TO BE CONFERRED AT NJEA EQUITY ALLIANCE WEEKEND

Nominations are now open for five awards that will recognize advocacy and achievement in equity and justice. The awards will be presented at NJEA's Equity Alliance Weekend to be held on Jan. 12-13, 2024.

The weekend will feature training on social justice issues and social justice activism, recognizing the intersection of diverse identities and circumstances among NJEA members and the communities they serve. With roots in the annual NJEA Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Human Rights Celebration and the Minority Leadership and Recruitment Conference, the event is a collaboration of these NJEA committees: Exceptional Children, Human and Civil Rights, Minority Leadership and Recruitment, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, Urban Education, and Women in Education.

Five of NJEA's highest awards will be presented during the NJEA Dr. Martin Luther King Human and Civil Rights Celebration, held at the conclusion of the Equity Alliance Weekend.

- **Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Human and Civil Rights Award:** This award is conferred by the NJEA Human and Civil Rights Committee. Nominees may be an individual, group or organization working in the area of civil rights, and if eligible, NJEA members.
- **Dr. Judith Owens Spirit Award:** This award is conferred by the NJEA Minority Leadership and Recruitment Committee. Named for Dr. Judith Owens, the first African American president of NJEA, this award honors a member who has been a champion of ethnic minority rights and issues and who has had a significant impact on education and the achievement of equal opportunity for those facing discrimination because of their ethnicity.
- **Equality Champion Award:** This award is conferred by the NJEA Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Committee. This award honors a member who has been a champion of human and civil rights, and who has had a significant impact on education and the achievement of equal opportunity for those facing discrimination because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

- **Elizabeth A. Allen Women in Education Award:**

This award is conferred by the NJEA Women in Education Committee. Named for NJEA's first female president, the award honors a member or an individual living or working in New Jersey who promotes women's rights and equality for all persons, particularly in education.

- **Urban Educator Activist Award:** This award is conferred by the NJEA Urban Education Committee. The award honors active and retired members who have been champions for urban education and who champion the well-being of all stakeholders in urban communities.

Nomination forms and documentation for these awards are due Oct. 31, 2023.

For awards criteria and to make a nomination, go to njea.org/equitynominations.

For more information, contact Colleen Lopez at clopez@njea.org or 609-599-4561, ext. 2290.

CLEARING THE RECORD

The April edition of the *NJEA Review* featured members who had been honored as County Educational Support Professionals (ESP) of the Year. Unfortunately, Somerset County ESP of the Year Theresa Kamen was not included, and an incorrect job title was listed for Burlington County ESP of the Year Sandra Wilcox. Their correct listings are below.



Burlington

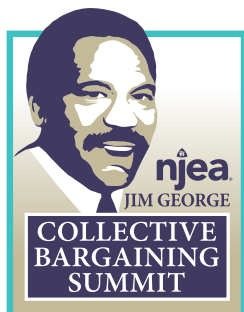
Sandra Wilcox,
Paraprofessional
Burlington County Special
Services Education Association



Somerset

Theresa Kamen,
Paraprofessional
Franklin Township
Education Association

NOMINATE A LOCAL ASSOCIATION FOR BARGAINING EXCELLENCE



A local association that has demonstrated excellence in negotiations will be honored at the Jim George Collective Bargaining Summit with the 2023 Jim George Collective Bargaining Award. Those nominated will also be recognized. The summit will take place on Oct. 20-21 at the

Doubletree Hotel and Conference Center in Somerset.

Criteria

A local qualifies for nomination by meeting one or more of the following criteria:

- Bargained one or more new contractual provisions not already found in another affiliate's contract.
- Conducted an extraordinary community-organizing effort that resulted in a settled agreement.

- Used the bargaining process to propel new members into association involvement and leadership positions.
- Achieved a particularly good settlement, in comparison to state averages, in salary increases, benefits, professional development, and/or member protection, and follows best practices for salary guides.

Nomination

Local associations can be nominated by any NJEA member or NJEA staff member.

To nominate a local, visit njea.org/cbaward.

To be considered for the 2023 Jim George Collective Bargaining Award, settlements must be ratified by both parties between July 1, 2022 and June 30, 2023.

Nominations are due Sept. 8, 2023.

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COOL STUFF



RUTGERS MAKERSPACE CAMPS THIS SUMMER: GRADES 6-12

The Rutgers Center for Mathematics, Science, and Computer Education is offering a weeklong Makerspace Camp for middle (grades 6-8) and high school students (grades 9-12). This year's theme will focus on climate change and sustainability. Students will work in teams to solve a problem centered on that theme, with the goal of developing an innovative product using the engineering design process. Students will follow a process similar to Science Olympiad, Odyssey of the Mind or STEAM Tank.

Over the course of four days, students will work with experts in the Makerspace to design their prototypes. Students will also create a Shark Tank-like pitch to present on the last day of camp. They'll share the problem they are trying to solve, their engineering design process and their prototype.

The camp runs Aug. 7-10, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day. Participants bring their own lunch.

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



AID-NJEA CAN HELP

The AID-NJEA helpline has served NJEA members and their families for nearly 20 years. NJEA members and their families have access to this free and confidential service 24 hours a day and seven days a week. Educators and school counselors are on the line from noon until 8 p.m. Monday through Thursday, and until 6 p.m. on Fridays to provide peer-to-peer support and information to callers. In addition, University Behavioral Health Care provides mental health professionals who answer the helpline during all other hours for 24/7 coverage.

Callers seeking help from AID-NJEA can count on:

- Help from a staff of education support specialists experienced in education and trained in behavioral health.
- Immediate personal response — a "real voice" with no buttons to push.
- Access to thousands of resources from the AID-NJEA Information Directory.
- High quality help by telephone with personal, family and school-related demands.

Why handle tough times alone? Whether you are a new teacher, a support staff member, or a retired school employee, AID-NJEA has people on the line who can provide guidance and information to help. Dial 866-AID-NJEA (243-6532) or email helpline@njea.org.

AID-NJEA is a program or partnership between the NJEA and Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care.



RECYCLE INK, RAISE FUNDS FOR HIPPI!

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

Did you know that more than 375 million empty ink and toner cartridges are thrown out every year, with most ending up in landfills? It can take up to 1,000 years for these cartridges to decompose.

By recycling your ink cartridges through Planet Green Recycle, you'll help reduce this colossal amount of waste.

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

It's simple to do!

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

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



TEACHING TIP

FREE TOOLS THAT FOSTER MEDIA LITERACY

By Michael Warren

On Jan. 4, Gov. Phil Murphy signed a bipartisan piece of legislation aimed at K-12 public schools. As an educator, I always brace myself for any new laws that are enacted that would produce new outcomes and expectations on behalf of our profession. In this case, the law that was signed had to do with addressing a problem that has already shown real-world negative consequences.

The problem is information illiteracy—better known as misinformation, fake news, deepfakes, conspiracy theories, and manipulated photos and content. Our social media feeds are steeped in this type of content or with content that is manipulated by big tech companies that benefit from clicks and engagement.

In Hasbrouck Heights High School in Bergen County, we have established a class that starts to open up a conversation about our relationship with things we consume on our personal devices. Our connections to our devices are so strong that we take what we see on them personally and at face value. In January, my class was featured in an article on NJ.com (see bit.ly/hasbrouck-debunk) to showcase the course that I cobbled together back in 2019—with the full support of my administration—to help students learn how to find reliable sources online.

From those humble beginnings, I began to research what tools were available to expand the course's offerings. There isn't a lot out there right now. Even though the options were few, some nonprofits were organizing curricular tools to teach media/news literacy.

For example, the **News Literacy Project** is a nonprofit and nonpartisan group dedicated to analyzing and dissecting the information we consume online. It shows students how to avoid falling for the things that people put out either by mistake (misinformation) or on purpose (disinformation).

The News Literacy Project provides a curriculum with relevant interactive videos and exercises. I encourage teachers interested in bringing these tools to their classes to start there. Language arts teachers can tie many of the

modules into their 21st-century and College and Career Readiness standards. Math and science teachers can utilize the modules based on health, statistics, and data that are often presented out of context.

Other tools I use are from **PBS Learning Network** including its partnership with **MediaWise**, which goes deeper into understanding context, satire and faulty science. MediaWise also provides video and graphic organizers and activities to engage students.

I also use the **New York Times Learning Network**, which provides deep reads into conspiracy theories and their consequences in both the real world and online. It includes questions and activities that spur critical thinking.

The course I teach today looks very different from the one we started in 2019—thanks to COVID-19, Jan. 6, and the various conspiracies and hefty misinformation connected to both events.

In an ever more polarized society—where the information we align ourselves with becomes part of our political and social identity—how do we teach people HOW to think critically about the images and words that appear in their social feeds without slipping into telling them WHAT to think? I'm curious how the New Jersey Department of Education will develop the standards for a course like this and am eager to help if I can to maintain the core purpose of a course like this. 🧠

Resources

Below are links to the free resources mentioned in this article.

News Literacy Project Checkology
get.checkology.org

PBS Learning Media - MediaWise lessons
bit.ly/pbs-mediawise

New York Times Learning Network
nytimes.com/section/learning

Michael Warren is a history teacher at Hasbrouck Heights High School and the president of the Hasbrouck Heights Education Association. He can be reached at mwarren@njea.org.

A reputation for adaptation and skill

Meet 2022 Warren County ESP of the Year Robert Lilly

Working in the Maintenance Department of Phillipsburg Public Schools, Robert Lilly has mastered many skills, including electrical, plumbing, concrete work, HVAC and roofing.

"Many years ago, I fell into a job with an electrical contractor who trained me in everything I needed to know," Lilly remembers. "As a contractor, you have to adapt and pick up whatever work they need you to do. I used to kid him that the only thing he never taught me to do was how to lay brick—and his dad was a mason! But he taught me everything else."

Later, Lilly was working for a cable company. When he was laid off, he applied for an opening in Phillipsburg.

"I thought this would be secure," he says. "And I've been here for 25 years."

Lilly enjoys how different each day in the schools is and the opportunity to work with a team.

"We have three guys in our districtwide Maintenance Department who go building to building," Lilly says. "And what happens with the three of us is people forget about us because they don't see us every day. The building-based guys are more integrated into the schools."

For that reason, Lilly was surprised to be named the 2022 Warren County ESP of the Year, but he appreciates the honor.

"I take that recognition as acknowledgement of the work my team and I do," Lilly says. "I'm happy to work alongside my colleagues John Turnbull and Jim Miczulski."

Lilly spends more time problem-solving than thinking about accolades.

"Schools need people who can make things work and fix things without expensive repairs," he says. "We have to work with the budgets we're given. When I first started in the district, one of the old-timers who trained me told me that when they tell you there's no more money for materials and supplies, you go to the agriculture teacher who does projects with the Future Farmers of America, because he has been fundraising and has money for projects."

At the same time, Lilly knows he is providing an example for students who may not be thriving in school.

"History was my favorite subject," Lilly says. "I love



museums and going to old buildings and seeing the old construction methods. But not everyone is built for college. The trades are a great career path for many students. There are kids you might not be able to reach with a book, but you can reach with a tool bag."

Lilly also makes his voice heard when it comes to health and safety issues. After 25 years on the job, he's built a reputation for adaptation and skill that has made him an invaluable asset to the entire school community.

"I'm not one for the recognition aspect of things," Lilly says. "I like what I do. I believe I do my job and do it well. I know what I can do. I'm keeping our buildings safe and healthy, especially these past couple of years. What means more to me is when a principal or someone brings us doughnuts and says, 'I appreciate what you did.' I don't need fanfare. But a doughnut is nice. I can have that with my coffee." 🍩

Using her career to achieve her dreams

Meet 2022 Atlantic County ESP of the Year Ashley Vitullo

As chickens squawk in the background, 2022 Atlantic County ESP of the Year Ashley Vitullo describes her career as a daytime custodian who also provides shipping and receiving services for the Mullica Township School District. The chickens are a clue to her real passion, one that she has been working toward—and using to inspire her students.

Vitullo is working on a degree in environmental science and a minor in natural science. She went back to school online in 2021 at Wilmington University because they provide her with the flexibility she needs to balance her career and her studies.

"I started going to college but had to stop because I was paying my own way," Vitullo says. "I began working as a night custodian right out of high school in another school district and eventually came to Mullica."

Vitullo, who lives in Mays Landing, keeps chickens, roosters and goats. She appreciates that Wilmington University makes it possible for her to continue her studies. All of her previous credits transferred, and they send lab kits to her home. Every week, a different kit arrives in a giant box so she can pursue her passion for science.

Vitullo hopes to eventually work for the state's Department of Environmental Protection. She appreciates that, as a public employee, she has access to a quality paycheck, health benefits, and a pension, and one of the perks of working for the state is those benefits will transfer.

When one of Vitullo's colleagues heard she was taking online classes to pursue her degree, she encouraged her to apply to work for Mullica's after-school enrichment program, known as ACES. Barbara Rheault, Atlantic County Council of Education Associations president and a past president of Mullica Township Education Association, encouraged Vitullo to work with the students to share her love of science.

"I make my own lesson plans, and I sign up to teach every semester," Vitullo said. "I give teachers a lot of credit—it is a hard job!"

"I really like everyone at my school; the people here are awesome," Vitullo said. "The kids are really fun and



Vitullo is working on a degree in environmental science and a minor in natural science.

this is such a small community you're bound to run into someone you know in the area."

Vitullo was shocked to be named the Atlantic County ESP of the Year.

"I feel honored that I was picked out of every school district in the county," Vitullo said. "I didn't realize how many districts there were until I attended the awards luncheon! It's crazy when you think of how many schools there are. It felt good to be recognized for my hard work. 🏆"

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Sexual assault awareness and prevention

Requirements and resources for Erin's Law

By Katrina Homel, Esq.



The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) released a toolkit during Child Abuse Prevention Month this spring to support educators in teaching students about sexual assault awareness and prevention. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 25%

of girls and 8% of boys experience child sexual abuse. The new toolkit was developed to buttress implementation of Erin's Law. Adopted in July 2019, the law requires instruction about this critical topic.

The law, which has been in effect since the 2020-21 school year, requires school districts to "incorporate age-appropriate sexual abuse and assault awareness and prevention education in grades preschool through 12 as part of the district's implementation of the New Jersey Student Learning Standards in Comprehensive Health and Physical Education." The law allows teaching staff members to meet one or more hours of their professional development requirements each professional development cycle "through participation in training programs on sexual abuse and assault awareness and prevention."

Erin's Law is named after advocate, author and child sexual abuse survivor Erin Merryn, who founded a nonprofit organization also named Erin's Law. As of January 2023, similar laws or regulations have been passed in 38 states and introduced in the remaining 12 states. On the federal level, the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) authorizes school districts and charter schools receiving federal funds designated under the act to develop "child abuse awareness and prevention programs or activities," including age- and developmentally-appropriate instruction for students in recognizing and reporting child sexual abuse.

Under the law, the New Jersey commissioner of education is required to develop "age-appropriate sample learning activities and resources" in consultation



The Resource Document for Educators: Supporting the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse is available at bit.ly/erins-law-toolkit

with stakeholders in the state with expertise on these issues. NJEA was included in this stakeholder group, and several NJEA staff members from the Legal Services and Professional Development Divisions participated in the working group to create a toolkit with resources to support teaching sexual assault awareness and prevention in classrooms.

The toolkit, titled Resource Document for Educators: Supporting the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse, was released this April and is available on the NJDOE's webpage for Child Abuse, Neglect, and Missing Children at bit.ly/erins-law-toolkit. The document includes information about:

- Responding to and reporting suspected and disclosed child sexual abuse and assault.
- Best practices for prevention education.
- Roles for various district stakeholders in supporting prevention.
- Curricula and sample learning activities.
- Opportunities for professional development.
- Resources for parents and caregivers.

The toolkit also includes a frequently asked questions section that addresses general concerns and questions that members may have related to mandated reporting and teaching about sexual abuse and assault prevention.

NJEA members may also find it helpful to review the article about reporting obligations and the Institutional Abuse Investigations Unit, "What You Should Know About Mandatory Reporting to the IAIU," which appeared in the April 2023 issue of *NJEA Review*. If you are interested in additional resources on this topic, reach out to your NJEA UniServ representative who can connect you with the appropriate NJEA staff. [📧](#)

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

NJEA Report

\$60K professional pay is now the way Strong starting salaries keep our public schools strong

NJEA has been steadfast in its belief that to recruit the best, school districts need to be willing to offer strong, competitive salaries. Since 2008, through its “\$50K Right Away!” program, NJEA has been working with its local affiliates to bargain \$50,000 starting salaries, and—to date—over 500 of New Jersey’s school districts have them in place.

Earlier this year, the *NJEA Review* reported that NJEA has set its sights higher and has been working with its local associations to fight for the “\$60K Professional Pay Means Teachers Stay” initiative to quell the teacher exodus and begin to rebuild the profession, salary step by salary step. (See njea.org/show-me-the-money and njea.org/60k-the-first-day.)

As of press time, 171 local associations have negotiated a starting salary at or above \$60,000 in their current settlements—an increase of 52 locals since November. Additionally, nine locals have negotiated a starting salary above \$70,000.

Here is a list of districts with a starting salary of at least \$60,000 in their current contracts. **Districts in bold** are those that have joined the list since it was first published last September.

Bargained a great contract for ESPs?

We want to hear from you!

Everyone knows it takes an entire school team to have a great public school. Through the efforts of caring and committed educational support professionals (ESPs) like secretaries, custodians, paraprofessionals, security guards, maintenance teams and more, New Jersey’s students do more than just succeed—they thrive.

More than ever, it’s vital to attract and retain dedicated professionals in these indispensable positions. That can only happen when these jobs come with strong salaries, superior health benefits and the best working conditions.

Last fall, the *NJEA Review* spotlighted the Atlantic County Special Services Bus Drivers/Aides Association (ACSSBDAA) and the contract they secured for their bus drivers and bus aides, but we know there are more stories out there. If your local has bargained a great contract, let your fellow members know by emailing the highlights to NJEAReview@njea.org.

Atlantic

Atlantic County Special Services*
Atlantic County Vocational

Mainland Regional

Margate City
Pleasantville*
Ventnor City

Bergen

Allendale
East Rutherford
Englewood Cliffs

Fort Lee
Hackensack
Ho-Ho-Kus

Leonia

Northern Highlands Regional
Ridgewood

Saddle River

Wood-Ridge

Burlington

Burlington County Institute
of Technology
Burlington City
Burlington Township
Cinnaminson Township
Eastampton Township
Lenape Regional*
North Hanover Township
Pemberton Township
Riverside Township*

Camden

Brooklawn
Camden County Educational
Services Commission
Gibbsboro
Merchantville
Mount Ephraim
Pennsauken Township

Cape May

Cape May County Special Services
Cape May County Technical HS
Lower Cape May Regional
Middle Township
Wildwood City

Charter

Dr. Lena Edwards Academy
Marion P. Thomas Academy
New Horizons
Soaring Heights

Cumberland

Cumberland County Vocational**
Bridgeton City
Deerfield Township
Downe Township
Hopewell Township
Lawrence Township
Millville
Upper Deerfield Township
Vineland

Essex

**Essex Regional Educational
Services**
Irvington
Nutley
Orange

Gloucester

Delsea Regional
Deptford Township
Kingsway Regional
Mantua Township
Washington Township

Hudson

Guttenberg
Harrison
Jersey City
Secaucus
West New York

Hunterdon

Alexandria Township
Flemington-Raritan Regional
High Bridge Borough
Hunterdon Central Regional
Lebanon Township
South Hunterdon Regional
Tewksbury Township

Mercer

East Windsor Regional
Ewing Township
Lawrence Township
Mercer County Special Services*
Mercer County Vocational
Princeton

Middlesex

Cranbury Township
East Brunswick Township
New Brunswick
Sayreville
South Amboy
South Brunswick

Monmouth

Asbury Park
Atlantic Highlands
Eatontown
Freehold Regional
Henry Hudson Regional
Holmdel Township
Keyport
Marlboro Township
Millstone Township
**Monmouth-Ocean Educational
Services Commission**
Monmouth Beach
Neptune City
Ocean Township
Red Bank Regional
Rumson-Fair Haven Regional
Sea Girt Borough
Spring Lake Borough
Upper Freehold Regional
Wall Township

Morris

Boonton Town
Chatham
East Hanover Township
Hanover Park Regional
Kinnelon
Long Hill Township
Madison
Morris County Vocational
Morris Hills Regional
Morris School District
Mountain Lakes
Parsippany-Troy Hills Township
Pequannock Township
Randolph Township
Rockaway Township
Washington Township

*Includes at least a \$70,000 starting salary in current settlement

**Shop teacher guide

Ocean

Bay Head Borough
Eagleswood Township
Lacey Township
 Lakehurst
Lakewood Township
 Little Egg Harbor Township
 Long Beach Island
 Manchester Township
 Southern Regional

Passaic

Clifton
 Passaic County Technical-Vocational
 Pompton Lakes
 Ringwood
 Wanaque

Salem

Penns Grove-Carneys
 Point Regional
 Quinton Township
 Upper Pittsgrove Township
Woodstown-Pilesgrove Regional

Somerset

Bedminster Township
Bernards Township
 Hillsborough Township
 Montgomery Township
 North Plainfield
 Somerset Hills Regional
Somerville*
 Warren Township

Sussex

Fredon Township
 Green Township
Hamburg
High Point Regional
Hopatcong Borough
 Montague Township
 Sparta Township
 Sussex County Technical
 Wallkill Valley Regional

Union

Kenilworth*
 Linden
 Morris-Union Jointure
 Commission
 Plainfield
 Rahway*
Scotch Plains-Fanwood
 Springfield
 Union Township
 Westfield*
 Winfield Township

Warren

Hackettstown
Phillipsburg
Pohatcong Township
 Warren County Vocational
 Technical
White Township

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**Shop teacher guide

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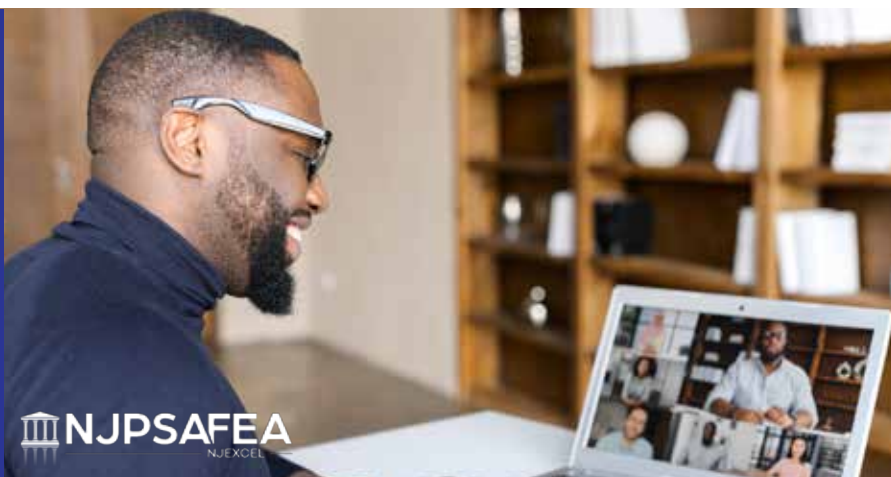
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njea Member Benefits

Advocating for members' lactation rights

Lauren Zucker, Ph.D.

Sitting in a dark closet crammed with dusty textbooks, NJEA member Sarah Reichenbecher struggled to pump breastmilk for her twins, balancing pump parts in one hand while attempting to eat some bites of the lunch she packed but never finished. This isolating experience drove Reichenbecher into activism in her local association, and later as a member of NJEA's Women in Education Committee, advocating for workplace support for parents and caregivers. Her story was shared by NJEA on the Statehouse floor to encourage the passing of stronger lactation protections in 2018.

When asked about their recent experiences, several NJEA members shared examples of pumping struggles:

- "I asked the only female administrator [for a pumping space] and was offered a bathroom."
- "I was told I could use a bathroom, or pump behind a curtain in the nurse's office, where anyone could walk in and hear the obvious noise of a pumping machine."
- "Not even a couple of days into pumping, a male student walked in on me! I was mortified and furious!"
- "Students turned the light off on me while I was in the closet because the switch was on the outside."
- "I was always too swamped during preps and lunch time that I couldn't make it work. The 'pumping area' was a dusty closet that housed the computer server and didn't feel clean. When I had my second child, I just did an extended leave. I just couldn't take the stress."

While New Jersey has comparatively strong protections for lactating employees, the recently enacted PUMP Act (2022), supported and endorsed by NEA, protects employees' right to pump or express milk at work across

the nation. Though some employees had been covered by the federal Break Time for Nursing Mothers Law (2010), that law excluded nearly 9 million workers, including many salaried employees.

The PUMP Act—PUMP stands for Providing Urgent Maternal Protections—expands workplace protections to all industries. Additionally, the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act, a civil rights law effective June 27, 2023, requires employers to provide reasonable accommodations for pregnancy and childbirth and related medical conditions (including lactation) and protects pregnant and postpartum employees from discrimination or retaliation for requesting accommodations.

Despite recent advances, many educators and administrators are not familiar with the laws protecting employees' rights to lactation accommodations. To raise awareness, union leaders can share the following NEA resolution passed at the 2021 Representative Assembly: "The National Education Association believes that all workplaces must provide lactating employees with safe, clean, comfortable, appropriate, and private facilities to express breast milk."

While each family makes their own choices about how to feed their children, union leaders can support and advocate for members who wish to express or pump milk at work.

Lactation rights: The basics

- Employees have a right to pump in a private space, shielded from view and free from intrusion.
- The lactation space cannot be a bathroom.
- Break time should be paid if it occurs during an otherwise paid break time, if the employee is not completely relieved of work during the break period, or if another state or federal law requires it.
- When an employee requests accommodations, the employer must promptly engage in an "interactive process" and have a good-faith conversation with that employee to coordinate accommodations.

Note: The Federal PUMP Act applies to employers, regardless of size. The Pregnant Workers Fairness Act excludes private employers with fewer than 15 employees. For both laws, employers may be exempt if granting such accommodations would be an "undue hardship," though according to breastfeeding law expert Ellen Maughan, those exemptions are "very rare and hard to earn."

Lauren Zucker teaches English at Northern Highlands Regional High School in Allendale. She serves as membership chair for her local association, represents Bergen County on the NJEA Women in Education Committee and chairs NJEA's Lactation Rights Task Force. Drawing from her experience as a parent who pumped at work, Lauren has organized and led several trainings for NJEA members on parental health issues. At laurenzucker.org, she writes about teaching and research. She can be reached at lauren6@gmail.com.

Lactation rights: Advocacy opportunities

While the law supports the rights of members to pump at work, members may need their local association to help them access those rights.

- Union leaders can support members requesting accommodations. Since employees requesting accommodations may be out on leave, union leaders can work with the administration and the lactating employee to secure an adequate lactation space and coordinate a schedule prior to the employee's return or start date.
- Many educators are asked to pump in the nurse's office. Medical professionals advise against expressing or pumping milk in the nurse's office, which exposes the lactating employee and their child's food to germs. Union leaders can advocate for alternative spaces.
- Lactation spaces should be held to the same standards for cleanliness and air quality as other building areas. Schools should follow applicable health and safety guidelines, and the lactation space should be cleaned as frequently as other spaces (or more so, to accommodate multiple employees utilizing a shared space).
- Advocates can ensure that lactation spaces have appropriate ventilation and temperature and nearby access to running water, and include a chair, outlet and a table for pumping equipment. Ideally, the space has a sink and refrigerator for milk storage.
- If an employee requires coverage for their breaks, union leaders can ensure that the lactating employee is not required to arrange their own coverage on a daily or as-needed basis.
- Many educators fear or report being walked in on by colleagues or students. Advocate for additional measures (i.e., an internal sliding latch, a room divider, a privacy screen), to provide extra protection and/or allow multiple employees to have privacy within a shared space.
- Federal lactation rights extend to one year after the child's birth/placement, though some states (including New Jersey) place no cap on the child's age.
- Union leaders can familiarize themselves with applicable state laws, which may provide additional protections beyond federal law. For example, New Jersey's breastfeeding law stipulates that the lactation space must be in proximity to the employee's place of work.

Streamlining the process

Union leaders can work with members and administrators to streamline the process of requesting accommodations to relieve the burden on individual employees.

Questions to Consider

- **Is there a lactation policy in your school and/or in your contract?** If not, how can the administration and union collaborate to ensure that employees' legal rights are met?
- **Is there a standard process for employees who are requesting accommodations?** Employees should be advised to request accommodations in writing as early as possible.
- **When are employees informed of their rights to lactation accommodations?** The administration can announce accommodation details at the start of the school year. The union might consider informing all members annually at a general meeting and informing individual members at key points in their employment, such as when they are hired, when they join the union, and when they request parental leave.

Troubleshooting common challenges

Lack of available space

Schools may need to think creatively to find spaces. There need not be a permanent, dedicated space, as long as one is available to the employee when needed throughout the workday. For example, some administrators or employees offer their private office. Custodians are also often able to suggest underutilized or hidden spaces, or to consolidate spaces to create new options.

Lack of coverage

Employees who work directly with students may need coverage during pumping breaks. Schools can arrange for coverage in the same ways that they arrange for coverage for absent employees. In the event of staff shortages, administrators and local associations may need to think creatively—it is not acceptable for an administrator to tell an educator, "We can't find coverage, so you can't pump."

Get Involved!

Anyone with an interest in advocating for members' lactation rights can email Meredith Barnes at mbarnes@njea.org to learn more about NJEA's Lactation Rights Task Force, a group comprising NJEA staff and members of the NJEA Women in Education Committee and the New Jersey Breastfeeding Coalition (NJBC).

Inconsistent schedules

School employees' schedules may not be consistent from day-to-day, though to avoid medical complications, lactating employees should express or pump milk at similar times each day. Interruptions such as emergency drills or special schedules may also alter the typical workday. While the employer may prefer that an employee express or pump milk during a lunch or prep period, that may not be appropriate for the employee. With advance notice, an employee's schedule might be designed or altered to build in consistent break times. A back-up space and/or coverage option for emergencies should be discussed ahead of time.

Fear of retaliation, discrimination, or complaints from employers and/or colleagues

Nontenured staff in particular may fear retaliation, though firing an employee for requesting lactation accommodations is illegal under the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act. In the event that an employee is fired, under the PUMP Act they can file a lawsuit and request monetary compensation. As more employees request lactation accommodations and conversations occur both within the union and between union leaders and administrators, lactation accommodations can become more normalized.

Many employers and employees are unfamiliar with

“ Though an employer might face challenges when arranging an employee's lactation accommodations, under most circumstances, they are still bound by the law.

the amount of time pumping or expressing milk requires. Leaders can set appropriate expectations by educating administrators and members. According to the New Jersey Breastfeeding Coalition, **lactating employees may need to pump or express milk every three hours, and an average pumping session can last between 15-20 minutes, not including time needed to travel to and from the lactation space, or to clean and store pump parts and milk.**

Pregnant and postpartum workers are free from pregnancy-related discrimination under several federal laws. Even though lactation rights are legally protected, advocates may wish to prevent or respond to employer pushback. “The Business Case for Breastfeeding” report from the Office on Women's Health (OWH) shares several benefits of breastfeeding directed toward employers. You can read the report at bit.ly/owhbusiness.

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Violations of the Law

Though an employer might face challenges when arranging an employee's lactation accommodations, under most circumstances, they are still bound by the law. If an employer fails to provide break time and space for lactation accommodations, and/or the employee is experiencing discrimination or retaliation, members have several options.

Under some circumstances, the employee has a right to file for damages. They should first work with their local association leaders to resolve the issue. They can also contact the Department of Labor (DOL), which enforces the PUMP Act, or the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), which will enforce the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act. Unions can also reach out to their state breastfeeding coalition (bit.ly/44xtWJi) for guidance and resources.

Success stories

NJEA member Vicki Dunn returned to work this year after childbirth and learned that there was no designated pumping area.

"The administrator quickly found me a locked office to pump in whenever I needed it," Dunn said. "I was pleasantly surprised at how fast this was fixed. Being able to do this was incredibly important to me, especially with the formula shortage."

Other members shared positive aspects of their experience, often referencing the support of fellow members:

- "I have a storage closet in my classroom that I pumped in, and the custodial staff put in proper security and electrical support to allow me to be successful."
- "My school didn't have a designated lactation space, so when I was on leave my local president worked on my behalf with administrators to locate and prepare an appropriate space and coordinate my breaks and coverage."
- "My co-workers went out of their way to work elsewhere so that I could have privacy during my pump times. I can't emphasize enough how much their kindness and support has meant. It was extremely hard to leave my baby, but feeling supported by my colleagues has made me feel like I can do this."



Additional resources

PUMP Act resources

bit.ly/dol-73

bit.ly/balance-explainer

Pregnant Workers Fairness Act resources

bit.ly/eeoc-fairness-act

bit.ly/balance-fairness

Guide: "Taking to Your Boss About Your Pump"

English

bit.ly/talk-pump-guide-eng

Español

bit.ly/talk-pump-guide-esp

The Business Case for Breastfeeding

bit.ly/owhbusiness

Tips for lactating workers and educators (via the Office on Women's Health)

bit.ly/oash-tips

bit.ly/owheducation

NJEA Review, "Pumping at Work"

njea.org/pumping-at-work



KINDERGARTEN MARINE

Atlantic City teacher Alphonso Harrell leads by example

By Kathryn Coulibaly

Growing up in Philadelphia, Alphonso “Al” Harrell attended rigorous parochial schools staffed by demanding nuns and Jesuit priests, thus beginning a lifelong relationship with authority, self-discipline and high expectations.

“Growing up, I loved school,” Harrell says. “I was a top student, and I thrived under that structure. I learned to adapt and keep moving, no matter what was expected of me.”

A left-handed writer, he was strongly encouraged to write with his right hand, an experience that he recounts as another example of his ability to adjust and meet whatever was required of him.

After graduating from high school in 1981, Harrell joined the United States Marine Corps, a move motivated by his desire to join the “toughest branch of the military,” according to Harrell, and finance his continued academic career.

Following basic training at Parris Island, South Carolina, a notoriously difficult regimen, and training as a radio operator at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, Harrell

trained as an air traffic controller. For the next 12 years, Harrell would travel to more than 35 countries including Zimbabwe, Turkey, Greece, Yugoslavia and many more. But for his family back in Philadelphia, most of his life was a mystery.

“I couldn’t tell them everything I was doing, or sometimes even where I was,” Harrell remembers. “I could just tell them I was OK, and everything was fine.”

Harrell left the Marine Corps after an injury and began working as a corrections officer in Atlantic County, New Jersey. On his days off, he worked as a substitute teacher, which led Harrell to a realization.

“Substitute teaching opened my eyes to a career in education,” Harrell says. “I was going to college for criminal justice and pre-law at Temple University, and I finished my degree at Rowan University. When a long-term substitute position opened up at Pleasantville’s South Main Street School in 1994, I knew I’d found my calling.”

Harrell took a permanent position as a student relations assistant at the school and helped out with security and discipline problems. He went on to earn master’s degrees in early childhood education and educational leadership. Eventually, he became the security director for the entire Pleasantville School District, hiring staff, conducting training and installing security systems. But the call of a classroom of his own brought him back.

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.

“ They are the leaders in the classroom, and I am there to guide them along.

In 2010, Harrell was hired to teach pre-kindergarten in Atlantic City.

“I loved it,” Harrell says. “The kids loved it, the parents loved it. They requested me year to year.”

After seven years, Harrell was moved to kindergarten, where he is today.

Ductus Exemplo – Leading by Example

As an educator, Harrell always has drawn heavily on his experiences as a Marine.

“One of the things that benefited me in the Marine Corps was the emphasis on leadership,” Harrell says. “In my classroom, we are building leaders. I’m there to nurture and guide them, but the emphasis is on learning what you need to do and doing it.”

Harrell believes in letting the students run the classroom on their own so they see they can do it. Seeing this philosophy in action affirms the students’ abilities, even at a young age, to manage themselves.

“It still looks like a typical kindergarten classroom,” Harrell says. “We use timers, songs and organizational structures like folders and charts. But if a student needs to use the restroom attached to our classroom, they know they can do that. If they need to grab a pencil or scissors, they can do that. The classroom is their community. They are the leaders in the classroom, and I am there to guide them along.

“You build them up. Our motto is: we always try our best. And when you build them up, they will do their best,” Harrell says.

Harrell calls his teaching style a “firm, military style” that heavily emphasizes structure and uses cadence calls and marching to songs, which the students love.

“It’s not yelling at them,” Harrell emphasizes. “This is kindergarten. You have to be nurturing. But children feel most secure when they know what to expect.”

Harrell believes that 90% of success in education is classroom management, at every age level.

“I think that teachers need to show their passion for the material and love and care for their students,” Harrell says. “But you need a firm tone. Everyone succeeds when everyone has a chance to learn, and learning can’t happen without strong classroom management.”

Harrell takes his role as one of his students’ first teachers very seriously.



Harrell served in the Marines for 12 years before embarking on his career in education.



Harrell brings all his experience in the military and education to benefit his students.

"Kindergarten is very important in their formative years," Harrell says. "We get them on track with reading, writing, learning their letter sounds, and what the expectations are for how they will behave and treat each other, and be treated in return."

The few, the proud

In addition to being former military, Harrell knows that it's rare for students to have a male teacher in early elementary, and even more rare for that teacher to be a man of color.

"I know there are not a lot of men in early childhood education," Harrell said. "Students need to see a father figure, someone who looks like them and who can relate to them."

Harrell is often called "Dad" accidentally by his students. As a father and grandfather, he understands. While he nurtures his students, he doesn't baby them. He shows that he has high expectations for them—and that he is proud of them when they meet those expectations.

NJEA Patriots Alliance

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

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

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

"Being a man, it's important that we show them that we love them just as much as their other teachers do," Harrell says. "It's so powerful for students to see a man in their school showing kindness and being nurturing. It shows them all the different parts of being a man—and being human."

Harrell strongly believes that more male teachers are needed in the early elementary grades. He is an acknowledged leader in the school, not only thanks to his years in education, but also due to his active involvement in the union.

"People look to me as a leader," Harrell says. "I share my ideas and strategies with my team, and we balance out how our classes are run. I like to be knowledgeable and informed when people come to me with questions." Harrell holds, or has held, many positions in his local, county and statewide unions. Currently, Harrell is a member of the NJEA Editorial, Constitutional Review, and Human and Civil Rights committees. He is a member of NJEA's Patriots Alliance, a coalition of educators who are military retirees, veterans, JROTC instructors, reservists, and New Jersey National Guard members. He also is very engaged in NJEA's Members of Color Network, which seeks to connect and engage with an underrepresented group. At the local level, Harrell is currently the Atlantic City Education Association membership chair, and he has previously served on other executive board positions and on negotiations.

Semper Fidelis – Always Faithful

Harrell draws on his military experience in all areas of his life and you can often find him wearing his U.S. Marine Corps hat to union meetings.

"I think the military benefited me because it allowed me to travel to various countries and learn about other cultures," he says. "Being an educator, you have to accept everyone for who they are and where they come from. Particularly in New Jersey's public schools, we are educating a cross-section of the world. Once you've been exposed to the way that other people live, work, speak and survive, you really just see people as human beings. Whatever differences there might be are inconsequential." 🇺🇸



Harrell works to instill confidence and leadership skills in his students, while meeting their needs as kindergarteners.

Members of Color Network

In 2019, NJEA established the Members of Color (MOC) Network as an intentional organizing effort to connect and engage with an underrepresented affinity group within the association.

The network's goal is to elevate the advocacy, engagement and ownership that all members have in their union. Through targeted conversations and continual advocacy and educational opportunities, MOC will build a stronger NJEA that reflects its rich diversity of membership.

Learn more about the MOC Network at njea.org/members-of-color.

NJEA HONORS HIGHER EDUCATION MEMBERS

NJEA names faculty, ESP and administrative members of the year

Since 2018, NJEA has honored the work of our higher education members from the faculty, educational support professional (ESP), and administrative branches. These distinguished members are recognized for their remarkable records of union advocacy and service to their association.

At the NJEA Higher Education Conference on April 14, this year's honorees were announced.

Dr. Matthew Kochis: Higher Education Faculty Member of the Year

Dr. Matthew Kochis from the Mercer County Community College Faculty Association (MCCCFA) is the 2023 NJEA Higher Education Faculty Member of the Year.

Kochis has been on the faculty at Mercer County Community College for nine years. During that time, he has worked closely with students and helped lead the student newspaper staff to dozens of national awards. He is a scholar of modernist English and Irish novels.

Upon joining the English Department, Kochis joined the Faculty Association Executive Committee and the negotiations team. He created a committee, in collaboration with administration, to address contract issues in between negotiations periods.

In addition, he has been a force for addressing student debt. He helped create and now serves on Mercer County Community College's Loan Forgiveness Committee, which considers applications from MCCCFA members for one of six \$7,500 grants. The unique grant program is now part of the MCCCFA contract.

"When I found out that I was nominated, let alone had been awarded the NJEA Higher Education Faculty Member of the Year, I was beyond touched that anyone would consider me for this honor," Kochis said. "I find joy in the work itself and don't seek out attention. There is always so much to do, whether it's helping a student, negotiating a contract, tackling complicated equity issues, or just supporting the union and its members. Anything I can do to help someone out helps bring meaning to what I do."

"When six of my colleagues showed up at the awards banquet, I was completely overwhelmed. Whatever success I achieve was and is thanks to their unwavering support and leadership."

"This award more than anything demonstrates how lucky I am to have the support of my union, and I truly wish that for everyone. Because without them, I would not be the best version of myself, for either my students or my union. To me, this award means that I have a great union and I am beyond grateful for the support that NJEA provides us."

Tereke Bell: Higher Education ESP Member of the Year

Tereke Bell from Union County College Public Safety Association (UCCPSA) is the 2023 NJEA Higher Education ESP Member of the Year.

Bell is the longtime president of the UCCPSA. He is a fearless advocate for his members and is highly respected by members as well as the greater college community.

Bell has been a powerful advocate for union engagement and involvement throughout his career.

Noreen Kane: Higher Education Administrative Member of the Year

Noreen Kane from the Brookdale Community College Administrative Association (BCCAA) is the 2023 NJEA Higher Education Administrative Member of the Year.

Kane is the president of the BCCAA. She recently brought the association through contract negotiations and was instrumental in organizing the campus-wide member blitz to engage and motivate greater participation among the membership.

Kane has been a staunch advocate for BCCAA members since joining the college more than 17 years ago. She is passionate about helping employees fight for their rights, particularly when it relates to upholding contract language and advocating for fair and equitable treatment.

NJEA advocates for higher education members

NJEA is proud to represent faculty and staff at 16 of New Jersey's community colleges and one affiliate at Rutgers School of Health Professions. NJEA is committed to protecting the interests of members and students in higher education. NJEA supports local associations' efforts to negotiate for improvements in salary, benefits and working conditions.

The safeguarding of academic freedom, tenure, the retirement system, and the School Employees' Health Benefits Program are a major function of NJEA's Higher Education advocacy.

In addition to representation at the bargaining table and in day-to-day contract enforcement, NJEA holds an annual Higher Education Conference and Collective Bargaining Summit—both of these are usually held in April. At the NJEA Convention, in addition to programs for all members on both days, NJEA has a full day of programming designed specifically for NJEA's higher education members.

Learn more at njea.org/highered. 



Nominate higher education advocacy excellence

Do you know an NJEA member working in higher education who has a distinguished record of service and advocacy? Since 2018, NJEA has recognized the accomplishments of individual higher education members in the faculty, educational support professional and administrative categories.

These members have achieved association accomplishments in such areas as bargaining, communications, research, association finances and budgeting, professional learning, membership, political action, public relations, working conditions, campus or community service, and other issues affecting members and higher education.

Each nominee must be an active professional or ESP member working in higher education or an NJREA member who was previously an NJEA member working in higher education.

Nominees must be or have been an active NJEA member for at least 10 years.

Any NJEA member may nominate a member working in higher education or may nominate themselves if working in higher education. Current members of the NJEA Higher Education Committee are not eligible.

For full nomination criteria and to learn how to make a nomination, go to njea.org/highered.



Top: NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty and NJEA Higher Education Faculty Member of the Year Dr. Matthew Kochis.

Middle: NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty and NJEA Higher Education ESP of the Year Tereke Bell.

Bottom: NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty and NJEA Higher Education Administrator of the Year Noreen Kane.



Read, lead and succeed with Princeton Middle School's book club

Hipp Grant project tackles literacy and reading reluctance

By Kathryn Coulibaly

Princeton Middle School teacher Lisa McGhee could see there was a problem: too many of her students hated to read.

"I began my career in education as a basic skills teacher," McGhee says. "But too many of my students hated to read. They asked me, 'Why can't we read books for fun and not be tested on them?'"

McGhee agreed with her students. Working with school librarian Carolyn Bailey, she decided to hold an extracurricular book club for students where they would read books that interested them that were about people who looked like them, sounded like them and who faced similar issues. They would read them together so they could discuss the books and help motivate each other to read for enjoyment.

In 2021, McGhee won an NJEA Frederick L. Hipp Grant for Education Excellence for \$5,000 for the Read, Lead, Succeed Book Club.

"Our school librarian runs a Project Lit Book Club," McGhee says. "Project Lit is a national literacy movement. It is an online community where educators, students, and authors decide on a list of books to read during the year."

McGhee explains that Project Lit book clubs from across the nation come together online to discuss the books, talk to the authors, and explore their thoughts and ideas about what they've read. The novels chosen represent various genres and promote diversity and equity.

"Many of my sixth- through eighth-grade students involved in this project have been in basic skills reading classes for several years," McGhee says. Due to this, their motivation to read and their self-esteem has declined because they felt they don't have the ability to read well."

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.



Book club members follow along as McGhee reads aloud and leads discussion.

“ We know that people who are literate are more inclined to vote, take part in their community, and seek medical help for themselves and their families.

Addressing a national reading crisis

What McGhee and her colleagues were observing in Princeton is part of a national reading crisis.

According to Reading is Fundamental (RIF), the oldest and largest nonprofit children's literacy organization in the United States, 67% of fourth graders read below grade level, contributing to 8,000 students dropping out of high school every day.

The National Assessment of Educational progress (NAEP) reports that “the shares of American 9- and 13-year-olds who say they read for fun on an almost daily basis have dropped from nearly a decade ago and are at the lowest levels since at least the mid-1980s.”

The slump in reading has significant economic costs for people. According to RIF, 93 million Americans read at or below the basic level needed to contribute successfully to



McGhee and school librarian Carolyn Bailey select books that are relevant and appropriate for students.

“With the \$5,000 grant from the Hipp Foundation, McGhee purchases the books and makes them available for free to students.

society. They estimate that 43% are functionally illiterate, which prevents them from accessing jobs, government resources, and more.

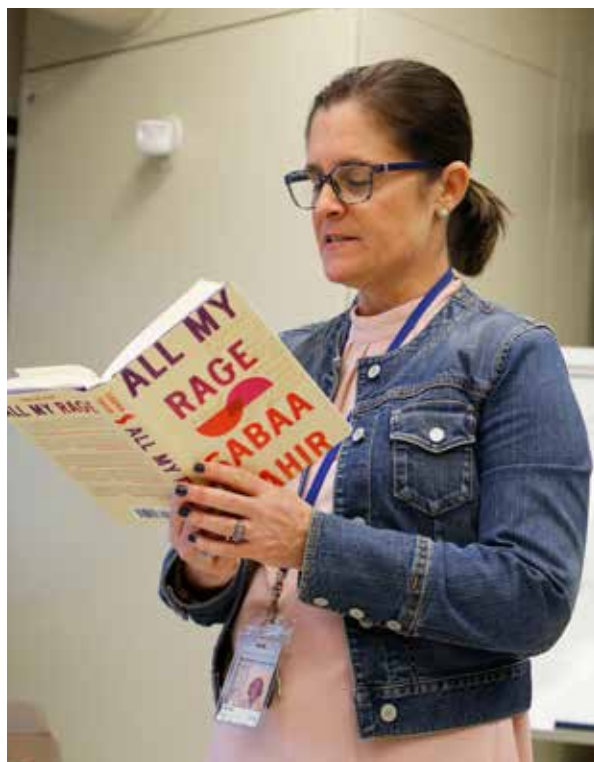
“We know that literacy helps people escape the bonds of poverty and live longer,” Marcie Craig Post, executive director of the International Literacy Association, said in a panel discussion at the Institute of International Education in New York City in 2015. “We know that people who are literate are more inclined to vote, take part in their community, and seek medical help for themselves and their families. They’re also better equipped to take advantage of knowledge jobs, which are growing at explosive rates.”

The literacy crisis disproportionately affects lower income and minority students. Male students also score lower in reading assessments than female students.

While New Jersey’s reading scores are higher than the national average, too many students struggle with reading. Isolation and other impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have accelerated the literacy crisis among students, and with summer break on the horizon, all children are at risk of losing some of the learning they obtained during the school year. Unfortunately, students who lose reading ability over the summer rarely catch up, according to RIF.

Inspiring a love of reading

The Read, Lead, Succeed Book Club is working to challenge lost learning opportunities and inspire a love of reading in students.



McGhee has won several Hipp grants to fund projects for her students.

According to McGhee, “The purpose of this project is to help students see the value and entertainment of reading in hopes to make them lifelong readers. In addition, the book club helps the students use reading strategies to demonstrate comprehension and increase their fluency by reading aloud. We want them to connect with their peers across the U.S. to discuss the novels they read, and to view themselves as successful readers.”

Monthly, McGhee and her students attend an online Project Lit discussion group. During these meetings, the students share their thoughts about the book with their peers and educators across the country. At various times throughout the year, the author of the book makes an appearance and allows students to ask questions about the novel.

The book club reads four novels over the course of the year, with the option of adding a fifth novel, if possible. McGhee measures their objectives with a pre/post self-reflection survey and a pre/post comprehension and fluency assessment.

With the \$5,000 grant from the Hipp Foundation, McGhee purchases the books and makes them available for free to students. The books belong to the students and can help to encourage the creation of a personal library and hopefully influence other students and family members to read more.

Apply for an NJEA Hipp grant



NJEA Frederick L. Hipp grants help educators bring creative ideas to life. The only foundation of its kind in New Jersey, the Hipp Foundation supports initiatives to promote excellence in education. More than \$2.4 million in grants for innovative educational projects that represent a bold, fresh approach by public school employees have already been awarded.

Apply for a Hipp grant and bring your innovative ideas to life. The portal will open July 1 and the deadline is March 1, 2024. Grants range from \$500 to \$10,000. Learn more at njea.org/hipp.



The club will read four to five books together throughout the year in order to encourage a love of reading.

Participation in the extracurricular book club varies by season. During swim season, for example, fewer students are able to fit it into their schedule.

Some of the books McGhee and the students have read include *All My Rage* by Sabaa Tahir, *When You Get the Chance* by Emma Lord, *Concrete Rose* by Angie Thomas and *Jackpot* by Nic Stone. McGhee worked closely with the librarian to choose high interest, award-winning books.

A multiple Hipp grant winner

McGhee has successfully written four Hipp grants. Her first grant, in 2019, was for a project called Finding our Voices Through Creative Writing. In 2020, she won a continuation grant and expanded the program to include writing and reading. The Read, Lead, Succeed Book Club began in 2021 and won a continuation grant in 2022 for an additional \$5,000.

For McGhee, administering the book club and working on Hipp grants has had personal benefits, as well.

"These are stressful times in education and we're tackling big issues," McGhee says. "We can't solve them overnight but working on these projects has really given me a sense of ownership and optimism about what we can do." 🍕

Summer reading suggestions



Make a fun summer reading list scavenger hunt. Provide a short list of must-read books and create a flyer enticing students to read by teasing clues to the plot.

Create a "must read" list curated by the people in your school, from the school secretary to the custodian to the librarian/media specialist, and anyone else willing to share their favorite age-appropriate book. It'll give students someone to discuss the book with and show the diversity of interests that books can explore.

Organize a book swap of age-appropriate books. Anyone in the school can participate. The goal is to put good books in the hands of engaged readers.

Select a "Book of the Summer" that families, students and staff are encouraged to read and promote the book through the classroom communication tools, the school newsletter, website and social media.

Promote reading the works of New Jersey artists and create a community connection about readers and writers. New Jersey's Judy Blume has many books that are widely available, and a new movie coming out this summer that can help inspire students to read.

Plan a "Drop In & Read" where students, families, staff and the community can meet at a park, local library or community center. Everyone can bring their own book or choose one together.

Understanding your RETIREMENT

by the NJEA Pension Policy Committee

NJEA members are in one of four retirement programs—two are defined benefit pension systems and two are retirement savings account programs. The retirement system you are in is determined by your job, where you are employed and the date your employment began.

Defined benefit pension systems

The two defined benefit pension systems for NJEA members are the Public Employees' Retirement System (PERS) and Teachers' Pension and Annuity Fund (TPAF). In both PERS and TPAF, you contribute 7.5% of each paycheck to your pension. If you are enrolled in PERS or TPAF and work at least 10 years or reach the minimum

age to retire, you will qualify for a pension that you will receive monthly for the rest of your life.

- TPAF: K-12 certificated members such as teachers, guidance counselors, child study team, certified school nurses.
- PERS: Support staff such as custodians, maintenance, bus drivers, secretaries, aides, technology, and others at both K-12 and higher education levels.

If you were hired after May 21, 2010 and do not work at least 32 hours per week you are not eligible for enrollment in TPAF or PERS, but you can be enrolled in the Defined Contribution Retirement Program (DCRP). There's more information on the DCRP later in this article.

Starting in 2007, enrollment requirements, retirement age, and the formulas to determine retirement benefits began to change in both PERS and TPAF, creating a system of tiers based on the year in which a member enrolled. This chart can help you determine your tier.

PERS AND TPAF PENSION TIERS

Pension Enrollment Date	Tier	Enrollment Requirements
Before July 1, 2007	1	Minimum salary \$500 for certificated staff and \$1,500 for support staff
July 1, 2007 to Nov. 1, 2008	2	Minimum salary \$500 for certificated staff and \$1,500 for support staff
Nov. 2, 2008 to May 21, 2010	3	Must be making more than \$9,000 (this amount increases slightly each year)
May 22, 2010 to June 27, 2011	4	Must work at least 32 hours/week
June 28, 2011 or later	5	Must work at least 32 hours/week

Use MBOS to review your pension

If you are in PERS or TPAF you can look at an overview of your pension through your Member Benefits Online System (MBOS) account. You should be periodically accessing MBOS and reviewing your Personal Benefits Statement to ensure everything looks correct in your pension account.

Keep in mind this statement runs a few months behind, because the New Jersey Division of Pensions and Benefits updates your pension credit on a quarterly basis. You can see when the last update was made by looking at the date at the top of the page. Your Personal Benefit Statement should have the correct pension tier, enrollment date, and years and months of pension credit.

Go to bit.ly/mbos-instructions if you need to register for MBOS.

You will need your Social Security number and pension number to set up this account. If you cannot find your pension number, you can reach out to the business or human resources office in your school district.

When you set up MBOS, you will create a login ID and password. Be sure to keep your MBOS username and password in a safe place. If you lose your login and password, you will need to know the email address you entered when you set up your account. Instructions on how to set up a new username and password will be sent to the email address you used to set up the account.

The state has also instituted multifactor authentication (MFA) for your MBOS account. This is to prevent someone gaining access to your account fraudulently. If you have already set up your MBOS account but have not logged in recently, you will need to set up MFA by registering your cellphone number or an authenticator app. Each time you log into your MBOS you will receive a code via a text message or an authenticator app.

Unpaid leaves of absence and your pension

If you are on an unpaid leave for any reason, you will not receive pension credit during the time you are not receiving pay. Depending on the length and reason for your leave, you may be able to purchase all or some of the time you were unpaid once you return to active employment. See the fact sheet at bit.ly/pension-fs1 to see whether your unpaid leave can be purchased.

Changing districts or positions

If you take a job in another district, even if it is the same type of position, you will need to transfer your pension account. You should let your employer know you have a pension account, and they will complete a report of transfer online through the employer system.

Similarly, if you change job types—for example, you are an aide and then become a teacher—you must transfer your pension account. This is because support staff members are in a different pension fund than certificated members. If you do change job types that would result in your being in a different pension fund, an interfund transfer form must be completed by you and your former employer.

Keep in mind that it is your responsibility to ensure that any transfer of your pension is completed properly and submitted in a timely manner. You can verify that a transfer was completed by checking your MBOS account and seeing that you have credit for all of your years and months of service. Also, your enrollment date should reflect the date you were originally hired. It typically takes several months for the update to go through.

If a transfer does not take place within two years, the former pension account will become inactive. If the former pension account has less than 10 years of service credit, you will have to purchase that time into your new pension account. If the former pension account has more than 10 years of service credit, you will either have two pension accounts or you can do a tier-to-tier transfer into the active account.





If you are a tenured employee and you are subject to a reduction in force (RIF), you can extend the active status of your pension account for up to 10 years. This means that you have 10 years to find a full-time, pensionable position before your account becomes inactive. To qualify for an extension, you will need documentation from your board of education supporting the fact that you lost your position due to budgetary reasons.

If you have received a communication from the Division of Pensions that indicates your pension account is expiring when it should have been transferred, call your UniServ office. You can find your UniServ office's contact information at njea.org/regional-offices.

Retirement savings account programs

Both the Alternate Benefit Program (ABP) and the Defined Contribution Retirement Program (DCRP) are types of savings accounts. In these retirement programs

the employee and the employer contribute a percentage of salary to an account and the employee can choose what the monies are invested in.

When the employee retires, they can choose either to receive withdrawals from their funds in the form of an annuity, which is a set payment, or draw down their funds as they would like. Keep in mind that while years of credit in ABP do count toward the 25 years needed for post-retirement medical benefits, DCRP years do not count toward post-retirement medical benefits.

Alternate Benefit Program

The Alternate Benefit Program (ABP) is for full-time higher education faculty, officers and administrative staff who are required to have a bachelor's degree. Some adjunct faculty and part-time instructors are eligible, but they must make at least 50% of the normal base salary. ABP members contribute 5% of salary, and the college/university contributes 8% of salary.

You will have an account with a provider where you can invest your funds on a pre-federal tax basis. ABP members have the choice of six providers, including Equitable, Empower, MetLife, TIAA, Corebridge and Voya. This is



Don't just **dream** of retirement, build it.



Explore our new
online investing tools
or
Partner with a
financial professional
to help reach
your goals

VISIT neamb.com/retirementprogram



The NEA Retirement Program ("NEA Program") provides investment products for retirement plans sponsored by school districts and other employers of NEA members and individual retirement accounts established by NEA members. Security Distributors and certain of its affiliates (collectively, "Security Benefit") make these products available to plans and accounts pursuant to an agreement with NEA Member Benefits ("MB"), which markets the NEA Program. NEA and MB are not affiliated with Security Benefit. Neither NEA nor MB is a registered broker/dealer. All securities brokerage services are performed exclusively by the local sales representative's broker/dealer and not by NEA or MB. NEA Retirement Specialists, when making recommendations to an NEA member, offer only Security Benefit products. RT330623

not a pension, but rather a savings account that you can draw from or turn into an annuity in retirement.

Defined Contribution Retirement Program – For those not eligible for TPAF, PERS or ABP enrollment

The Defined Contribution Retirement Program (DCRP) is for education employees (K-12 and higher education) not meeting the minimum enrollment requirements for ABP, PERS or TPAF. Many adjunct or part-time faculty are enrolled in DCRP as well as part-time support staff and certificated staff depending on their hire date.

For K-12 employees, those hired after May 21, 2010 who work less than 32 hours a week (but make at least \$5,000) are in the Defined Contribution Retirement Program (DCRP). This is not a pension, but rather a savings account that you can draw from or turn into an annuity in retirement.

DCRP members contribute 5.5% of pay into the account and the employer contributes 3% of pay. DCRP members have an investment account through Empower and can select which fund(s) to invest in.

Vesting in DCRP happens once someone commences the second year of DCRP covered employment. Once you are vested, if you pull contributions out of DCRP or roll them over to another account, you are considered retired. This means that you would not be eligible to participate in any of the other state-administered retirement systems. This applies even if you obtain a full-time, pensionable position. A financial advisor may not be aware of this and may recommend that you roll DCRP monies into another retirement account—which you should not do.

What happens if I have an ABP or DCRP account and then get a different job that makes me eligible for the pension system?

If you have a DCRP or ABP account and then enroll in the pension system in PERS or TPAF, you need to leave your money in the DCRP or ABP account until you are ready to retire from the PERS or TPAF position. ABP years do count toward the 25 years needed for state-sponsored health benefits in retirement, but DCRP years do not.

Importance of updating your beneficiaries

Regardless of which retirement program you are enrolled in, make sure that your beneficiaries are updated for your life insurance and your pension or defined contribution account.

For TPAF or PERS members, changes to the life insurance and pension beneficiary can be made through MBOS. Click the “Designation of Beneficiary” button to make changes.

For ABP and DCRP, you can change your life insurance beneficiary by completing the form found at bit.ly/abp-dcrp-beneficiary.

Beneficiaries for the retirement savings account must be made through the defined contribution plan provider. 🏠

The NJEA Pension Policy Committee

The NJEA Pension Policy Committee studies public employee retirement pension and benefit programs and makes recommendations to improve and protect public employee pensions. The committee reviews legislative proposals related to changes in the Teachers' Pension and Annuity Fund (TPAF) and the Public Employees' Retirement System (PERS). The committee also monitors the actions of the state's pension systems' boards of trustees.

The current committee members are:

Atlantic: Karol E. Ball

Bergen: Howard D. Lipoff

Camden: David M. Regn

Essex: Lauren B. Greenfield

Gloucester: Michael Acchione

Hudson: Mark C. Azzarello

Mercer: Daniel A. Siegel

Middlesex: Kenneth J. Veres

Monmouth: Casey A. Barilka

Morris: Kathleen L. Paterek

NJREA: Irene Savicky

Passaic: Pamela B. Fadden

Somerset: Theresa L. Fuller

Union: Linda A. Cortinas

Staff contact: Sarah Favinger

Associate staff contact: Roxie Muhsin

Drinking water is improving ...but PFASs aren't disappearing

by Dorothy Wigmore

The December 2019 and January 2020 editions of the *NJEA Review* featured articles about lead and PFAS chemicals in school drinking water. It's time for an update.

Most drinking water across the U.S. will be a bit healthier soon, if the federal government has its way.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) made several announcements this year as part of its 2021-24 PFAS Strategic Roadmap. Updated health advisories were followed by funding and proposed rules for reporting, monitoring and reducing the presence in drinking water of a group of up to 12,000-plus toxic chemicals. It also may change its Lead and Copper Rule to require lead-containing water service lines (LSLs) be replaced.

PFAS chemicals are getting more attention, and action

Globally, headlines are sounding alarms about poly- and perfluoroalkyl substances, or PFASs for short.

These poly- and perfluoroalkyl chemicals are everywhere—look for a poly or per and fluoro in the name, such as poly-tetra-fluoro-ethylene, the name for Teflon. They end up in drinking water and our bodies, through industrial waste water and common consumer products. Nicknamed “forever chemicals,” they rarely, if ever, break down or disappear.

The chemicals are used to grease-proof or water-proof everything from food containers, cookware and carpets to dental floss, cosmetics and firefighting foam. A 2022 study found them in children's clothes, especially cotton school uniforms.

Artificial turf—already a concern for crumb rubber infill, lead and other hazards (see sidebar)—is the latest product on the list.

Why the fuss?

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

PFASs in drinking water, consumer products and firefighting foam make their way into blood, breast milk and semen. The resulting harm includes cancers, pregnancy and fertility problems, and high blood pressure. Recent studies also found immune system effects, including reduced vaccine responses and possible increases in COVID-19 severity.

We still need better information about what happens if and when they're inhaled or get on or through skin.

Worse still, while companies have long known about these hazards, they don't have to disclose their presence, and the harm occurs at very low levels.

Then there are the costs. Using European data, a 2021 study estimated U.S. health-related costs alone are \$37 to \$59 billion a year—none of which the companies pay. Indirect social costs—like shortened lives, lost wages, and their effects on families and communities—have not been calculated.

The alarms are getting responses.

3M announced in December that it would stop making and using PFASs by 2025. (Like other major PFAS producers, it faces lawsuits.)

In February, five countries proposed that Europe ban all PFASs. At the same time, the European Chemicals Agency proposed a gradual ban on the chemicals in firefighting foams. They already ban or seriously restrict a few PFASs.

Closer to home, the New Jersey Drinking Water Quality Institute's February report recommended following EPA's updated guidelines, about one-third of the state's current limits.

Where can you find PFAS?

- Rain clothes, textiles and surface treatments.
- Nonstick coating for frying pans and pots, food packaging.
- Firefighting foams and fire protective clothing.
- Chrome plating, paints and construction materials.

On March 14, the EPA put those numbers into proposed first-ever limits to some PFASs in drinking water and updated water system rules. Legal challenges are expected once it's finalized. The EPA's April 4 funding to upgrade drinking water infrastructure gave New Jersey \$142.7 million, partly for PFASs.

It's just a start.

"We're running on a toxic treadmill. There are literally thousands of other PFASs that are coming at us," Erik Olson, senior strategic director for the Natural Resources Defense Council told the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in March. "Until the EPA phases out the whole class, we're going to be stuck on this treadmill, and we're never going to get a handle on the problem."

Lead water pipes are on their way out too

The April funds also go to replacing LSLs, complementing the state's 2031 deadline to replace an estimated 349,357 lines.

Those lines affect schools' drinking water. Environment America's 2023 report about lead in school water gave the state only a B-. The reason: "fairly weak" test and fix rules use the EPA's 15 parts per billion (ppb) action level. Districts only have to test every three years, posting results online and taking action if they exceed the action level.

There is no safe level of lead for children, or adults.

The National Resources Defense Council wants EPA to overhaul its Lead and Copper Rule, implementing an enforceable maximum of 5 ppb lead at the tap with a "filter first, then test" approach.

That would have a huge effect in New Jersey. In 2021-22, 3,268 state public school water outlets topped the 15 ppb mark. East Windsor Regional had 150, followed by Bridgeton City with 83, and Ewing Township at 81. Environment New Jersey Research & Policy Center and the Black Church Center for Justice and Equality found 92% of Atlantic County schools had lead in at least one tap water system. 🌊

What can health and safety committees do?

Reread and use previous Review articles (see Resources sidebar)

PFASs:

- Use the resources listed with this article to inform demands for procurement policies, find alternatives and stay up-to-date.
- Get local water provider's test results—push for temporary fixes if they're problematic.

Lead:

- Check the district's test results and use the resources listed with this article to respond.
- Advocate for "filter first, then test" approaches.

Resources

PFAS

City of Ann Arbor

Environmentally preferable procurement (endorsed by the Ecology Center)
bit.ly/3MweK8T

Environmental Protection Agency

PFAS Strategic Roadmap: EPA's Commitments to Action 2021-2024
bit.ly/3MxZlom

Environmental Working Group

PFAS map of New Jersey
bit.ly/40uLCIC

NJ Department of

Environmental Protection

PFAS page (includes List of PFAS violations in New Jersey)
nj.gov/dep/pfas

PFAS Exchange

pfas-exchange.org/news-events

PFAS Central

(Green Science Policy)

PFAS-free
pfascentral.org/pfas-free-products

LEAD

Environment America

Get the Lead Out Toolkit: Ensuring Safe Drinking Water at School
bit.ly/3LBwnmV

National Resources Defense Council

EPA's Chance Is Now to Finally Fix The Broken Lead & Copper Rule
on.nrdc.org/3Mw0MDF

New Jersey Dept. of Health

Lead in Drinking Water at Schools and Child Care Centers
bit.ly/41yCBjr

NJEA REVIEW

"What's in Your Water? Part 1: Identifying Hazards," December 2019
njea.org/water-hazards

"What's in Your Water? Part 2: Getting Things Fixed, Reducing Toxins," January 2020
njea.org/water-fixes

"Artificial Turf: Use It or Ban It?" October 2019
njea.org/artificial-turf



NJREA

PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

NJREA LEADERSHIP ELECTED

The current NJREA leadership team—President Joan Wright, First Vice President Harriet “Kitty” Sausa, Second Vice President Ron Burd, Secretary Mary Clements and Treasurer Doriann Dodulik-Swern—ran uncontested and was elected by acclamation. This is the second term for each officer. Their new terms begin on Sept. 1, 2023 and conclude on Aug. 31, 2025.

After 44 years in education, Wright retired in 2010 from Conackamack Middle School, where she taught sixth grade math and served as president of the Piscataway Township Education Association. She has also served as the president of the Middlesex County Retired Educators’ Association.

“I am honored to be serving a second term as NJREA president,” said Wright. “We may have retired from our positions in the classroom and schools, but that does not mean that we have retired from our profession. We have the best schools in the nation, and that’s because of the work we do in the school house and the Statehouse. Protecting our earned benefits is priority one.”

In 2007, Sausa retired after 35 years in education from North Haledon, where she taught middle school health and physical education. She also currently serves as first vice president of the Passaic County Retired Education Association.

“It is imperative that we maintain our rights and protections as retirees,” said Sausa. “We have worked hard for them. I am looking forward to continuing in this position, and I am grateful to the membership for the opportunity.”

In 2015, Burd retired after 42 years in education from the Lebanon Township School District, where he taught middle school science. He currently serves on NJREA Government Relations and Planning committees and the chair of the NJEA Frederick L. Hipp Advisory Committee. He is also the president of the Hunterdon County Retired Educators Association (HCREA).

“The work we do on behalf of our retired members, active members and students is rewarding work,” said Burd. “It is a privilege to serve again in this position.”

Clements retired in 2014 from Hamilton Township in Mercer County, where she was a high school English teacher and an English as a second language (ESL) teacher.

She has served as the Camden County Retirees’ Education Association’s (CCREA) corresponding secretary, spent two summers on NJEA’s Fellowship Program, sat on the county’s Legislative Action Team (LAT), and was a delegate to the 2020 Democratic National Convention.

“I’m looking forward to serving our dedicated and passionate membership for another term,” said Clements. “I am so thankful for your continued support.”

Dodulik-Swern retired in 2016 from the Burlington County Special Services School District, where she was a special education teacher throughout her 40-year career. Using her long-time experience as an association treasurer, Dodulik-Swern has served as the BCREA treasurer since 2018, while also serving as the organization’s special events chairperson. She is a member of the NJREA Planning Committee and currently serves as the NJEA Convention Committee’s retiree representative.

“Serving as NJREA treasurer is an honor,” said Dodulik-Swern. “Not only am I entrusted to maintain our finances and bookkeeping, but I’m also stewarding our organization into sound and healthy financial practices. Our reputation as an organization continues to stand on solid ground.”

For all other election results, including representatives and alternates to the NJEA Delegate Assembly and the NEA-R/NEA RA, visit njea.org/njrea.

NJREA FALL LUNCHEON SET FOR SEPT. 28

Are you looking to make the most of your NJREA membership? Want to hear the latest on pensions and benefits news? Then, mark your calendars and join NJREA on Thursday, Sept. 28 for its annual Fall Luncheon.

This popular member event will be held at the Nottingham Ballroom in Hamilton. Because the deadline to reserve your space at the luncheon is Sept. 8, the luncheon will not be advertised in the September 2023 NJREA Newsletter. Any members wishing to attend this event must use the coupon inserted into the June 2023 NJREA Newsletter that NJREA members received with this edition of the NJEA Review.

The day’s activities will begin at 10 a.m. with the Delegate Council meeting, where officers and representatives

attend to the business of the organization. Any member wishing to bring forward business to the Delegate Council should indicate their intention in the speaker's book upon arrival.

Attendees may choose to arrive in time for the "Member Information Session," which begins at 11 a.m. At this session you'll hear important updates and the latest news affecting our union and its members. There is also time for questions and answers.

Doors will open at 9:15 a.m. A light breakfast with coffee service will be available at 9:30 a.m.

Reserve your spot now

The cost of the fall luncheon is \$32 per person, which includes breakfast, lunch and all taxes and gratuities. Members still have the option to come for breakfast only, for a cost of just \$5.

As per NJREA policy, any individuals who are eligible for NJREA membership and have elected not to join are not permitted to attend as guests. Only NJREA members and NJREA-invited guests may attend luncheons, business meetings and workshops throughout the year.

Please remember that attendees will no longer be allowed to reserve tables upon arrival. Any member wishing to sit with their county should indicate this intention on the coupon form. Reserved seating requests will be honored only if received on or before the registration deadline.

To register, mail the coupon found in the June 2023 NJREA Newsletter with your check (payable to NJREA) to NJREA Treasurer Dorian Dodulik-Swern, by Sept. 8. Be sure to include your meal choice: chicken marsala, salmon, or vegetable lasagna.

Fall Luncheon agenda:

- 9:30 a.m. Breakfast
- 10 a.m. Delegate Council meeting
- 11 a.m. Member Information Session
- Noon: Lunch
- 2 p.m. Delegate Council reconvenes (if necessary)

The Nottingham Ballroom is located at 200 Mercer Street, in Hamilton, Mercer County. For directions, visit the NJREA webpage at njea.org/njrea or call Cathy Raffaele at 609-599-4561, ext. 2300.

Around the counties

For questions, call your county REA. For trip details, check your county newsletter.

MIDDLESEX COUNTY REA

June 8: End-of-year luncheon and scholarship awards ceremony at the Grand Marquis in Old Bridge. Cost is \$43. To attend, contact Susan Jaysnovitch at teachtheinternet@aol.com or 732-925-1606 by June 1.

MONMOUTH COUNTY REA

June 13: June meeting/luncheon at Doolan's Shore Club in Spring Lake. Cost is \$35. Topic: Philanthropic recipients. To attend, contact Lois Lyons at MCREAinformation@gmail.com by June 2.

MORRIS COUNTY REA

June 7: Scholarship awards meeting and luncheon at Birchwood Manor in Whippany. Cost is \$35 for members, \$53 for guests. The scholarship awards ceremony will take place. To attend, call John Beekman at 973-514-1080 by June 1.

June 10: General membership meeting at Madison Community House in Madison. Cost is \$35. Guest speaker is Debra DeRosa, a psychic/medium. To attend, call Cheryl Doltz at 973-818-1353 by June 9.

PASSAIC COUNTY REA

June 7: Luncheon/meeting at The Brownstone House in Paterson. Cost is \$35. To attend, call Kitty Sausa at 201-410-1325.

SUSSEX COUNTY REA

June 12: General meeting/luncheon at the Farmstead Golf and Country Club in Lafayette. Cost is \$34. To attend, call Sharon Mullen at 908-852-1221.

WARREN COUNTY REA

Sept. 6: Meeting/luncheon at Hawk Pointe Golf Club in Washington. Meeting begins at 10:30 a.m., followed by a special event and luncheon at noon. Registration required by Aug. 28. Luncheon is \$30. To register, go to warrencountyrea.org/meetings.

Your summer reading and listening list

From the NJEA Professional Development and Instructional Issues Division

The summer reading list is a long-time tradition in most public schools in New Jersey—a collection of recommended titles for students to attack over the course of the summer, when there is a little leisure time to be able to reflect on what they are reading. In that tradition, the Professional Development and Instructional Issues Division (PDII) offers our version for school employees.

Our expanded edition includes traditional professional texts, personal reads, audio books and podcasts. We hope you find something in this list that sparks your interest and helps you enjoy the summer just a little bit more.

As a division who works closely with members, we have focused many of our workshops this year on personal healing. In that vein, we begin our list with a recommendation from Elisabeth Yucis, ***Real Self-Care: A Transformative Program for Redefining Wellness*** by Pooja Lakshmin, M.D. Battling against the marketing of “self-care” as an excuse to sell “cures” to the public, Lakshmin lays out a four-step method of true self-care: being true to yourself as a strategy to claim and use your power for the greater good. Reading this book will give you a sense of hope for what’s possible.

In the same wellness space, Dawn Howlen suggests the podcast, ***“On Purpose”*** with Jay Shetty. This podcast offers new ways to think about our multifaceted world. From matters of the heart to healthy living, Shetty gives practical guidance and steps to being a better person. His guests vary from Trevor Noah to Dax Shepard, all sharing their journey with mental health and living a life of purpose.

Lizandaa Alburg suggest a novel, ***Behold the Dreamers*** by Imbolo Mbue, in which the reader joins Cameroonian

immigrants Jende Jonga, his wife Neni and their family as they experience the glitter of the American dream—and the disappointing reality of the American illusion in NYC during the Great Recession. Themes of marriage, family, class, gender, race and immigration are woven together into a complex, yet entertaining story filled with the challenges of freedom, dignity and citizenship, and the reminder that we are all connected. Lizandaa recommends listening to the audiobook where the accents and personalities come to life!

Another novel is on the mind of Camy Kobylinski as she has been reading Toni Morrison’s first novel, ***The Bluest Eye***. The novel, which has been the subject of several challenges in New Jersey public schools this year, is set in depression era Ohio and tells the story of a young girl and her struggle with identity that results in her desire for the bluest eyes, which she equates with whiteness. Once again, Camy recommends the audio version, this time because it is read by Toni Morrison herself.

Moving to another genre, Amanda Adams suggests a book of poetry, ***The Breakbeat Poets: New American Poetry in the Age of Hip-Hop***, edited by Kevin Coval, Quraysh Ali Lansana and Nate Marshall. This anthology features the works of 78 poets, born between 1961 and 1999, creating a book of poetry by and for the hip-hop generation. The anthology expands the definition of who a poet is, and what a poem is for.

True crime, combined with the twist of examining our approach to domestic violence, brings a recommendation from PDII’s newest associate director and NJEA Convention Coordinator, Vicki Serreino. The

“We hope you find something in this list that sparks your interest and helps you enjoy the summer just a little bit more.

“Believe Her” podcast by Lemonada Media is a powerful six-part podcast that explores the tragic case of Nikki Addimado, a survivor of domestic abuse who fatally shot her partner and was convicted of murder and sentenced to 19 years in prison. The podcast pieces together the puzzle of this case, revealing the dangerous consequences of misguided assumptions about domestic violence. It raises important questions about the impact of trauma and the criminalization of survival.

Tell Me So I Can Hear You is the recommendation of PDII Division Director Dr. Chrissi Miles. She sees it as excellent reading for developing leaders to provide constructive feedback that supports the growth of their teams. The book, co-authored by Dr. Eleanor Drago-Severson and Dr. Jessica Blum-DeStefano, asserts that feedback is a critical component of professional growth and fostering an open, trusting team culture. The authors

provide practical strategies for feedback, with an emphasis on the importance of addressing emotional reactions to feedback and creating a psychologically safe space for vulnerability and honesty.

Anna Muessig was also thinking of ways to motivate people at work, recommending a classic, **Drive**, by Daniel Pink. In what is probably his most well-known work, Pink explores the key elements of motivation based on decades of scientific research in an approachable, relevant way. He also provides practical techniques for implementing these strategies.

If you are looking for something completely different, Rich Wilson suggests **Queer Ducks (and Other Animals): The Natural World of Animal Sexuality**, written by Eliot Schrefer with delightful illustrations by Jules Zuckerberg. In a highly entertaining style, Schrefer, who was the keynote speaker at the NJEA Professional Development Transform Conference in April, shares stories of the thousands of documented cases of same-sex attraction and gender diversity in the animal kingdom, challenging the notion of what is “natural” and making the case for the need for a diverse scientific community.

Whether you simply want to be in the sun getting lost in a good story, or want to be challenged, or even provoked to think in new ways, we hope there is something here that will help you enjoy your summer just a little more. 🌞



STAFF NEWS

HIRES AND PROMOTIONS



NJEA congratulates **BRENDA PABON-GUADARRAMA** on her promotion to associate director in the Accounting Office of the Business Division. After briefly working at NJEA through a temporary agency, Pabon-Guadarrama first joined full-

time NJEA staff on Jan. 3, 2013, as a chief-business services in the Accounting Office. She holds a bachelor's degree in accounting from Rutgers-Camden and a master's degree in accounting from Thomas Edison State University. Pabon-Guadarrama lives in Eastampton with her husband, Yesu, and their children.



NJEA welcomed **JENNIFER PIERCE** to NJEA staff on April 3 as a principal clerk-bookkeeper in the Membership Office of the Business Division. Prior to joining NJEA staff, Pierce was employed by ECI Comfort where she worked as office manager

and service coordinator. Prior to ECI, she worked at Silvi Concrete as a senior credit clerk, working alongside the sales team. Pierce is an associate member of the Morrisville Volunteer Fire Company. She studied horticultural science at Bucks County Tech School and attended Bucks County Community College where she majored in criminal justice. Pierce lives in Levittown, Pennsylvania, with her husband, Carl, and their daughters, Savannah and Karleigh.



NJEA welcomed **CHRISTINA ALEXANDER** to NJEA staff on April 3 as a secretary in the Office of Member and Political Organizing of the Government Relations Division. Prior to joining NJEA staff, Alexander worked as office manager for the

Gloucester County Education Association. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Elementary Education from Rowan University. Alexander lives in Williamstown with her husband, Dennis, and their dog, Sissy.



NJEA welcomed **GREGORY BABBITT** to full-time NJEA staff on April 17 as a UniServ field rep in the Region 13 office in Flemington. Previously, Babbitt had been a part-time UniServ consultant since 2014 in the Region 28 office in Stanhope. For

nearly 20 years, Babbitt taught agriculture at Phillipsburg High School in Warren County. He was president of the Phillipsburg Education Association. He holds a bachelor's degree in agricultural education from the University of Minnesota. Babbitt lives in Lower Nazareth Township, Pennsylvania, with his wife, Jessica, daughter, Audrey, and son, Caden.



NJEA welcomed **DONNA REAVER** to full-time NJEA staff on April 17 as a UniServ field rep in the Region 13 office in Flemington. Previously, Reaver had been a part-time UniServ consultant in the Region 27 office in Wayne. She taught for 18 years

in Wayne Township—15 years as a first-grade teacher and three years in basic skills. In 2018, she received the Governor's Educator of the Year Award. Reaver was first vice president of the Wayne Education Association, represented Passaic County on the NJEA Delegate Assembly, chaired the NJEA Public Relations Committee, and served on the Passaic County Education Association Executive Board. Reaver holds a bachelor's degree in psychology and elementary education from William Paterson University and a master's degree in teacher leadership. She lives in West Milford with her husband, Brian, and her daughter, Noelle.



NJEA welcomed **BRIAN HALBING** to NJEA staff on April 3 as a principal clerk-bookkeeper in the Membership Office of the Business Division. Prior to joining NJEA staff, Halbing worked as finance and accounting manager at New Flag USA, LLC. He holds a

bachelor's degree in computer science from Stockton University in Pomona. He lives in Monroe Township, Middlesex County, with his wife, Lauren, and two children, Brandon and Liliana.

Be an advocate for your profession and your students

By Samantha Shane

I recently was asked by someone for what seemed like the millionth time, "Why did you become a teacher?" I can categorize the responses with three phrases:

- Wow, that's not for me.
- What do you think of this new initiative?
- Thank you so much for your dedication.

The answer most teachers give is rooted in wanting to help students. But recently, the outlook for educators in New Jersey has grown bleak. Educators face numerous challenges, exposed and exacerbated by the pandemic, such as changes to curricula, teacher shortages and inflation. In a 2020 report, the U.S. Department of Education noted that seven years ago almost five people in New Jersey completed teacher preparation programs for every 1,000 students in the state. Today, however, barely two students in 1,000 complete such a program.

So, while the question "Why did you become a teacher?" is still inspiring, I began to reflect on why we stay in teaching. This led me on a journey to become a teacher advocate. Advocacy is defined as "any action that recommends, supports, acts or defends on behalf of others." As a teacher, I thought "I do this every single day, and I see my colleagues do this."

The knowledge, dedication and emotion teachers have is the secret weapon to being a great advocate. What does it mean to be a teacher advocate, and how do you become one?

Research and define your goal

The first step is to identify the issues that are most meaningful to you. Next, research your topic. Are legislators currently proposing bills around these issues? What research supports the need for a change in this area? Spend time exploring the state's Department of Education website to see what regulations have been proposed. Read studies centered on your topic to see what the data are currently revealing.

Samantha Shane is an English teacher in the Morris County Vocational School District. She can be reached at shanesamantha22@gmail.com.

Go on a listening tour

Talk to others in your school, district and community about the issue. Reach out to local colleges, tutoring centers and parents. Listen to their take on the issue: what are the concerns and what are the missing pieces? Consider who else this issue impacts and listen to their thoughts. This information is key to better understanding the issue and to creating effective solutions. What are the emerging takeaways and themes that can give you the tools to make a difference?

Take Action

1. Write letters to your local legislators to provide important information they need from teachers. This can lead to bills being supported and written testimony that can make a difference. You can find your local legislator through the New Jersey Legislature website at njleg.state.nj.us.
2. Join advocacy groups and organizations that are focused on the topics you are interested in. There are small and large organizations to be part of in making changes.
3. Attend board of education meetings for at the district and state level (nj.gov/education/sboe). You may also want to consider the vocational and special services district boards. These meetings will provide insight into happenings in your district, county or state and provide a platform for the board to listen carefully to the key issues residents bring to them.
3. Get involved with NJEA, which is a leader in protecting the rights of all members of the education family. Opportunities at the local, county, and at the state levels provide a way to make a difference.

So, ask yourself "How am I going to show up for my future students?" The journey I started when I changed the questions I ask, has restored a sense of hope and love for the field we all work so hard to make better.

Next time someone asks you why you became a teacher, share how they can help change education, and tell them how dedicated and committed teachers are to helping students succeed. 📚

CELEBRATING QUEER PRIDE

...at the NJEA Carol Watchler LGBTQIA+ Advocacy Conference

By Amy Moran, Ph. D. and Kate Okeson

The Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) Committee's first overnight conference last month was a smash hit!

Friday night's welcome session included the NJEA leadership team—NJEA President Sean M. Spiller, NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty and NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson—sharing words of encouragement and inspiration. Carol Watchler was honored for her decades of LGBTQIA+ advocacy and other justice work. Tom Tamburello, former SOGI chairperson and Equality Champion award winner for 2021, was also recognized. After that, we heard from SOGI members who are gay, bisexual, transgender and asexual in the heart-warming panel **Out at Work: Queer Voices In and Out of the Classroom**. The evening came to a close after vocal music entertainment from SOGI member Terron Singletary and an unforgettable drag performance by New Jersey's own Harmonica Sunbeam!

On Saturday, conference attendees attended fabulous workshops.

Advocating for Queer Professional Learning, with Rich Wilson: Set in the format of a World Cafe conversation, members in this workshop engaged in conversation to imagine the best possibilities for queer professional development. The group identified barriers to reaching that goal and developed strategies on overcoming those barriers. An overriding theme that came from those conversations was the importance of relationships in helping to move forward to advocate for queer professional learning.



For additional resources as we enter LGBTQIA+ Pride Month, scan this Q-R code.

LGBTQIA+ Inclusive Language, with Stephanie Tarr and Chris Canella: This session focused 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. Cannella, the SOGI Committee chairperson said, "It was great to see so many members who had never participated in an NJEA conference. They gained valuable knowledge of the work our union does."

The conference took place immediately before press time. Selected photos from the conference will be published in the September NJEA Review and online at [flickr.com/njea/albums](https://www.flickr.com/photos/njea/albums).

Black, Brown, and Queer, with Terron Singletary: This workshop focused on navigating 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. In this empowering workshop, Singletary said, "Educators came together to share ideas, grow together and love each other. As a pianist, I see this collective work the same way I see music. One finger can only play a melody; however, when we put all of our fingers together, we can create a masterpiece."

LGBTQIA+ Politics, with Eloy Delgado: This workshop provided members—especially those who are historically marginalized—with an understanding of how political power works in New Jersey and with insights for empowering themselves. The workshop aimed to demystify political structures and introduced tools that enable folks to advance both individual and collective good.

NJEA and You: Creating a More Perfect (and Queer) Union, with Kate Okeson: Participants engaged in facilitated conversation about experiences as LGBTQIA+ members and allies, and identified gaps and potential impacts around visibility, access, support, education, and rights at the local level and statewide. Discussions centered on early service, experienced, ESP and retired members' needs. The groups engaged in the discussion generated a document to guide all levels of NJEA to empower and sustain LGBTQIA+ voices as means to improve the professional and educational lives of all members.

Gender and Sexuality Alliances Roundtable with Steven Koumoulis and Sofia Capinha: The facilitators created a safe space for everyone to share their thoughts and experiences on topics including LGBTQIA+ identities, allyship, and strategies for creating inclusive environments in GSAs and overall school culture. The discussions were thought-provoking and insightful, and the practical exercises modeled how to support LGBTQIA+ students in an era where instances of harassment, intimidation and bullying are more prevalent than ever.

If you attended the conference and would like to share your feedback, connect with us at rainbowconnectionnjea@gmail.com! Happy PRIDE everyone!



How to *write* for the NJEA Review

What can I submit for publication?

Feature article

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

Letter to the editor

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

Speak out

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

I Am NJEA

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

Proud moments

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

Toolbox

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

How do I submit for publication?

Submitting content

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

The review process

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

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

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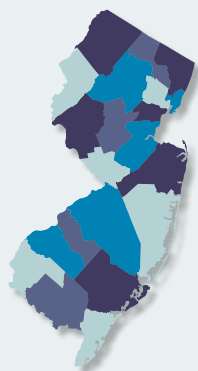
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SUSSEX TO CAPE MAY

Workshops and conferences

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.

NEW JERSEY COMPUTER SCIENCE WEEK

Professional development opportunity Aug. 7-10

The Computer Science Teachers Association of New Jersey (CSTANJ) is, once again, offering professional development for K-12 teachers from Aug. 7-10. New Jersey Computer Science Professional Development (CSPD) Week

includes one day in-person (Aug. 7) at The College of New Jersey and three days of virtual professional development.

A full set of student learning standards for Computer Science and Design Thinking was adopted in June 2020 requiring that all K-8 students meet or exceed the standards and that all high schools must offer a course in computer science beginning September 2022.

CSPDWeek will include professional development offerings across all grade bands and emphasize the need to prepare K-8 teachers to teach computer science and adopt the new standards implemented September 2022. This week will equip K-12 teachers to incorporate the standards in any subject area classroom.

No computer science knowledge or experience required.

Location and date:

Aug. 7: The College of New Jersey, Ewing

Aug. 8-10: Virtual

8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

Registration fee: \$30 (includes a T-shirt, breakfast, and lunch on Aug. 7)

Early-bird registration ends May 25.

\$35.00 after May 25

Registration ends Aug. 4

Visit bit.ly/cspdweek2023 to register and for details.

For more information, email newjersey@csteachers.org.

MORE TO LEARN

The Holocaust in the Former Soviet Union:

A Focus on Ukraine, Past and Present

Free professional development seminar
for teachers

June 26-28

Rutgers University is hosting its annual Master Teacher Institute in Holocaust Education (MTI) on June 26-28 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. each day. **Held virtually, with an in-person option on the third day**, this free seminar on the history of the Holocaust in the former Soviet Union, is open to middle and high school teachers. The program, which includes educational materials and professional development credits, is sponsored by the University's Herbert and Leonard Littman Families Holocaust Resource Center.

Ukraine has been in the news a great deal because of the ongoing war. Russian President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly justified his invasion of Ukraine citing the need for "denazification." This seminar will tackle the complex questions of how to ensure that Holocaust history is not distorted, and how to impart accurate information to students about the Holocaust in the Soviet Union and in Ukraine.

Experts will examine why so few of the three million Jews who lived in parts of today's Ukraine survived the Holocaust. What happened to the 1.5 million Jews who were murdered and how is this history remembered?

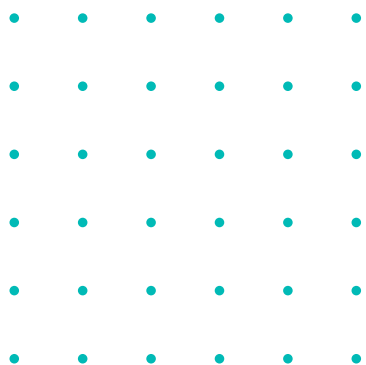
Advance registration and application are required. Applicants should have at least one year of teaching experience and at least one year of involvement with Holocaust/genocide education or be pursuing a master's degree in education.

Visit bit.ly/mti-23 for details and to apply to attend. The deadline is June 15.

Questions? Email Sarah Portilla at Sarah.Portilla@rutgers.edu.

The Littman Families HRC at the Rutgers Bildner Center teaches future generations about the Holocaust through teacher training. Free professional development programs for middle and high school teachers are available throughout the year. The Allen and Joan Bildner Center for the Study of Jewish Life connects Rutgers University with the community through public lectures, symposia, Jewish communal initiatives, cultural events, and teacher training in Holocaust education.

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

IT'S BEEN A STRESSFUL YEAR

Tips to destress

BY HALLIE MEISTER



We all know that we work stressful jobs. Staying on top of the curricula, student behaviors, assessments, administrative protocols, observations, SGOs—the list goes on and on. Then we add on all the stressors at home such as death of a family member or friend, personal injury, pregnancy, changes in residence, and so many others.

Strategies to cope with stress

The Early Career Network held an event on March 2 at Wood Stack in Metuchen where they discussed stressors in our everyday lives and ways to manage that stress. The event also hosted Member Benefits and retirement program representatives who were available to talk to members and help relieve stress in other aspects of your life.

In work and in our everyday lives, we often end up feeling burdened, worn out and even burnt out. So how do you manage this stress? We all have our own ways to unwind at the end of the day and to de-stress. Try your best to engage in healthy stress relieving activities. Below are some positive tips that we learned at Wood Stack to manage our stress.

- Seek out friends for support and conversation.
- Engage in physical exercise—anything that gets you moving.
- Make time for yourself to relax and unwind.
- Determine what your source of stress is and work to change it.
- Try to change your perspective on the problem(s).
- Involve yourself in a hobby that you enjoy.
- Focus on the aspects of your life that you can control.

Be sure to follow @njea_earlycareernetwork on Instagram or the NJEA Early Career Network on Facebook to check out future Early Career Network events! 🏠

Hallie Meister is a first grade teacher and a member of the East Brunswick Education Association. She is a Team Central leader for the NJEA Early Career Network. To learn more, visit njea.org/ecn.



Top: Members discuss their responses to stress. From left: Jersey City Paraprofessional Marquisha Reynolds, Woodbridge Teacher Jamie Figliolino, UniServ Field Rep Mike Mannion, and Jersey City Teachers Elena Vizcarrondo and Jocelyn Martinez.

Bottom: Trenton Teacher Jonathan Grom and Trenton EA President and UniServ Consultant Talithe Duncan take a stress inventory.



njea

Frederick L. Hipp
Foundation for Excellence
in Education

Got a great idea?

Get it funded, just like these NJEA members!

Liberty, Literacy, My Ancestry and Me – Fifth graders at Olivet Elementary School in Pittsgrove Township unveiled their ancestry books during a Young Writers' Celebration. The young authors learn the role Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty played in the lives of millions of immigrants. Thanks to a Hipp grant, the students visited the sites and took photos and video of their trip. They interviewed relatives, created a family tree and presented it to their class. Their stories were turned into hard-cover books.

The NJEA Frederick L. Hipp Grant for Excellence in Education provides \$500 to \$10,000 grants for educators just like YOU and projects like this one!

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

Applications are due by March 1 each year. Applications are closed at this time, but learn more and start thinking about your grant ideas and explore previous grants at njea.org/hipp.



NJEA Delegate Assembly

The NJEA Delegate Assembly met virtually on the Zoom platform on May 15, 2021 at 9:30 a.m.

Roll call was taken. There were 125 out of 127 present. Alternates were seated as follows: Hewitt (Burlington) for MacManiman; Brown (Camden) for Casey; Battist-Rock (Essex) for Hinton; Picca (Hudson) for Bove; Kieffer (Hudson) for DeScala; Carpenter (Mercer) for Siegel; Bloom (Middlesex) for Del Popolo; McGowan (Middlesex) for vacancy; Pellicone (Somerset) for Epstein; Reilly (Preservice) for Cacciato.

Absent was representative Bowman (Burlington), Clark (Camden), Herrick (Middlesex).

Donna Reaver (Passaic) gave the Inspirational Message and then led delegation in the Flag Salute.

President Marie Blistan asked if there was objection to adopting the D.A. Rules of Procedure. There was no objection. Agenda was adopted with flexibility.

President's report

Blistan paid tribute to former NJEA President Betty Kraemer who passed. She noted that one of President Kraemer's proudest achievements was the creation of the Fredrick L. Hipp Foundation for Excellence in Education.

Blistan called on Michael Cohan, Director of the NJEA PDII Division. He remarked that President Kraemer gave him his first opportunity to step up to leadership at NJEA.

President Blistan asked for a Moment of Silence.

President Blistan introduced New Jersey State Teacher of the Year Angel Santiago, a fifth grade elementary teacher in Gloucester Township, Camden County.

Santiago commented on his mentor by stating, "My mentor, the late Mr. Mark Melamed, showed me that students have a powerful voice and, through community service, his Gabriel Project allowed me to feel like I was someone bigger than just the four walls of the classroom."

D.A. Rules Committee report

Kathy Paterek, chair of the D.A. Rules Committee outlined the rules and determining factors of the need to add or not to add seats to the delegation for ethnic minority and ESP members. Paterek reported that the need for seats was not necessary due to the percentage being reached.

Vice president's report

Vice President Sean M. Spiller reported on the State Board of Education's selected student representative for the next year from West Orange. The Board distributed

its calendar for the 2021-22 academic year. The board presented committee reports from the Career and Technical Education Committee, the Policy Committee, the Assessment Committee. He reported on the Standards of Assessment, which are under a 60-day comment period.

He reported that the Higher Education Committee plans to discuss the American Rescue Plan.

Secretary-treasurer's report

Secretary-Treasurer Steve Beatty gave the fiscal report of the NJEA.

He also spoke about prospective educator identification, recruitment, mentoring and retention by forming an "Academy" to offer professional development opportunities to education students.

He reported on the work of the NJEA Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Taskforce. The FEA pilot continues in 26 schools, the 200,000 Conversations "core group" meeting to present the work to NEA G27, the New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA) Task Force on Post Pandemic Academic and Social Support, Preservice elections, post-pandemic meetings with legislators and stakeholders, and social and emotional Learning.

Beatty presented the Budget Report to the delegation and took questions.

The six budget recommendations were moved in block. The motion was seconded.

Recommendation No. 1: that the New Jersey Education Association operating budget for the 2021-2022 fiscal year in the amount of \$133,283,500 as listed in the 2021-22 budget proposal Appendix A be adopted.

Recommendation No. 2: that the New Jersey Education Association Pride public relations budget for the 2021-22 fiscal year in the amount of \$12,348,500 as listed in the 2021-22 budget proposal Appendix A be adopted.

Recommendation No. 3: that the New Jersey Education Association Capital Fund budget for the 2021-22 fiscal year in the amount of \$2,424,700 as listed in the 2021-22 budget proposal Appendix A be adopted.

Recommendation No. 4: that that the New Jersey Education Association Disaster Relief Fund budget for the 2021-22 fiscal year in the amount of \$325,000 as listed in the 2021-2022 budget proposal Appendix A be adopted.

Recommendation No. 5: that that no cost center be overspent without a review by the Budget Committee and action by the Delegate Assembly at its regularly scheduled meetings or by the Executive Committee during the months of June, July, and August, as provided for in the Constitution and Bylaws.

Recommendation No. 6: that the Secretary-Treasurer notify the Budget Committee of any over-budget lines in the audit as soon as possible, but no later than prior to the presentation of the audit at the December Budget Committee meeting with explanation of those items over budget.

The motion was carried.

Executive director's report

NJEA Executive Director Steve Swetsky congratulated Jaime Valente on becoming the new manager of the NJEA Membership Office.

Swetsky spoke of the gains NJEA is making in the work of human and civil rights, race, and equity as evidenced by there not being a need to elect provisional at-large ethnic minorities or ESP members to Executive Committee or Delegate Assembly and achieving NEA Bylaw 3-1(g) goals.

He noted that this is the last D.A. meeting that Marie Blistan will chair.

Swetsky introduced Steve Baker, Director of the NJEA Communications Division to present new Pride in Public Education advertisements.

Committee reports without recommendations

Membership Committee

Anita Kober (Hudson) answered questions concerning report.

Pandemic Relief Fund Subcommittee

Deanna Nicosia-Jones (Cumberland) answered questions concerning the report.

Public Relations Committee

Edwinta Rhue (Hudson) presented an informational report

Committee reports with recommendations

Affiliations Committee

Gerard Campione (Middlesex) spoke to the report.

Heidi Brache (Monmouth) moved the recommendation.

Recommendation: that the affiliation of the following associations be approved:

- Pompton Lakes Applied Behavioral Analysis

Therapists Association (Passaic Co.)

- Burch Charter Education Association (Essex Co.)
- Marion P. Thomas Charter High School Education Association (Essex Co.)

The motion was carried.

Joint report: Human and Civil Rights (HCR) and Public Relations committees

HCR Chair Kim Scott (Essex) spoke to the report.

Edwinta Rhue (Hudson) moved the recommendation.

Melissa Tomlinson (Atlantic) offered an amendment.

Amendment was deemed friendly. (Amendment in bold.)

Recommendation: that NJEA believes that students should be encouraged to read books that depict and celebrate the broad diversity of our students and our state. As part of the future celebration of Read Across America/Read Across New Jersey, NJEA will select and promote books each year that are designed to kindle a love of reading and literature in our students while reflecting the diversity of our students, our schools, and New Jersey statewide.

Additionally, NJEA will encourage members to work with their local library media specialists to increase the diversity of their reading materials with the assistance of NJEA as well as curate a list of bookstores that are privately owned by African American and Hispanic Latin women as suggested places for educators to acquire resources.

Motion was carried as amended.

New Business Items

New Business Item 1: that NJEA shall promote the federal "Protecting the Right to Organize Act".

Theresa Fuller (Somerset) moved the NBI. Duly seconded. NBI was referred to the Congressional Contact Committee

For the Good of the Order

Ron Greco (Hudson): Remarks honoring Marie Blistan in her last D.A. Meeting. Sue Clark (Gloucester): Remarks honoring Marie Blistan in her last D.A. Meeting. Sean M. Spiller (NJEA President-Elect): Remarks honoring Marie Blistan in her last D.A. Meeting. Petal Robertson (NJEA Secretary-Treasurer-elect): Remarks honoring Marie Blistan in her last D.A. Meeting. Kathleen Arlin (Bergen): Remarks honoring Marie Blistan in her last D.A. Meeting. Steve Beatty (NJEA Vice President-elect): Remarks honoring Marie Blistan in her last D.A. Meeting. Peter Moran (NEA Director): Remarks honoring Marie Blistan in her last D.A. Meeting. Eric Jones (NJEA Staff): Remarks honoring Marie Blistan in her last D.A. Meeting

Motion to Adjourn

Barbara Rheault (Atlantic).



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For more information, contact Cross County Connection's SRTS Coordinator,
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In Central and North NJ, contact your local TMA for information. Scan QR tag at right for details. →



JUNE & *beyond*

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

JUN
09

FRIDAY

Executive
Committee

JUL
07

FRIDAY

Delegates depart
from NEA RA

AUG
05

FRIDAY

Executive
Committee

JUN
10

SATURDAY

NEA RA
Statewide Caucus

JUL
12

WEDNESDAY

Impact
Conference (PDII)

AUG
05-09

SAT TO WED

Summer Leadership
Conference

JUL
01

SATURDAY

Delegates arrive
at NEA RA

JUL
13

THURSDAY

Radical Imagination
Summit for Educators

SEP
08

FRIDAY

Executive
Committee

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

SAVE THE DATE



On the heels of the successful NJEA Transform Conference in April, the Impact Conference will offer even more professional learning opportunities and programs designed for all members around wellness, professional practice, and more.

For more information, and to register, visit njea.org/impact.



Employment Opportunities at NJEA

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

NJEA is an equal opportunity employer. Visit njea.org/jobs.

LGBTQIA+ YOUTH NEED YOUR SUPPORT

On May 12-13, the NJEA Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Committee held its first Carol Watchler LGBTQIA+ Advocacy Conference. As described in the Rainbow Connection column of this edition of the *Review*, the two-day event was both a celebration and an opportunity for advocacy and professional development.

The conference comes at a challenging time for educators here in New Jersey and across the nation. Hardly a day passes without news that somewhere in the nation—and even here in New Jersey—books that reflect students' lived experiences and curricula that prepare them to live and work in diverse communities are being challenged. Rainbow flag support stickers have been removed in some schools under the bizarre justification that they show favoritism toward LGBTQIA+ students.

Far from "favoritism," attacks on LGBTQIA+ books and curricula are attempts to abandon LGBTQIA+ students to the closet, bully their friends and allies into silence, and intimidate educators.

Every year, the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom compiles a list of the top 10 most challenged books in libraries and schools. The "Top 10" list for 2022 had 13 books because there were several ties: two books "earned" fifth place and three landed in 10th place. Of those 13 books, seven were challenged for their LGBTQIA+ content.

And these challenges don't happen silently. Students see them happening in their own school districts or they read about them in news coverage that appears on their phones or on television.

And the consequences can be deadly. According to the Trevor Project's 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health, "45% of LGBTQ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year, including more than half of transgender and nonbinary youth."

The Trevor Project estimates that of the 1.8 million LGBTQIA+ youth who contemplate suicide each year,



at least one attempts suicide every 45 seconds. (thetrevorproject.org)

We have a responsibility to make sure that all students, including LGBTQIA+ students, feel seen and supported in our schools and classrooms. Acting together with other educators and involving our local associations, we can strengthen our advocacy for welcoming classrooms, affirming school policies, inclusive curricula and supportive language in collective bargaining agreements.

The work of our union is to be inclusive. When we're together, we're united through our common commitment to what's best for schools, students, educators and public education. To do that, we must create a safe space where decisions are being made for every member's perspective and lived experience.

But while we are working for a more inclusive future, others are working just as hard to spread disinformation and sow fear. And they are also vying to take space in the places where decisions are made—particularly school boards. In the past year, we've seen what's happened in communities where intolerance holds sway because of school board members who either promote anti-LGBTQIA+ rhetoric or who are too intimidated to oppose it.

Pay close attention to those who are running in local school board elections this year. If board candidates speak at candidate forums, ask questions. Read their literature carefully. Take note of what they say—and what they don't say. And most importantly, work to help elect candidates who align with your values and who uphold the rights of LGBTQIA+ students and other marginalized groups.

Finally, consider running for the board of education in the community where you live. For the Nov. 7, 2023 election, nominating petitions are due in your county clerk's office by July 31. Talk to your local association president who can put you in touch with your county's legislative action team where you can learn more about how to become a candidate. 🌈

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*certificates lead to NJ Certification
†certificate can be completed virtually

NJEA Convention

Nov. 9-10, 2023



Book your hotel room for a discount rate

Want to reserve a room in Atlantic City for the NJEA Convention at a great rate? These seven hotels are offering member-only rates to help you save money while you enjoy the convenience of being close to everything the NJEA Convention and Atlantic City have to offer.

- Borgata (limited availability)
- Caesars
- Golden Nugget
- Hard Rock
- Harrah's
- Resorts
- Tropicana

Shuttle service will be available from the hotels listed here.

Go to njeaconvention.org/hotels to check out the discount rates and to make your reservations.

You'll need to log in as a member to continue. Use your member PIN (found on your membership card) or the email address you've previously given NJEA and your password (the last four digits of your Social Security number, unless you've changed your password). Guaranteed shuttle service will be available to these hotels only.