

# REVIEW

NOVEMBER  
2025  
njea.org



*an education and advocacy resource*



## ***Buena Regional support staff settles major contract***

**16** BUENA REGIONAL SUPPORT STAFF OVERCOME MAJOR CHALLENGES TO SETTLE CONTRACT

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**28** THE GRANT EFFECT: TEN YEARS OF PARTNERSHIP TRANSFORMING NEW JERSEY'S SCHOOLS

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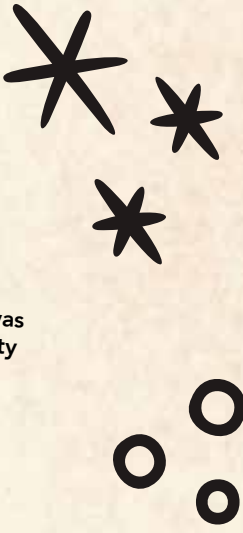
NJEA members and their families celebrating the Hispanic Heritage Month at NJEA headquarters.



Frankford Township EA at Branchville Day. From left: Tiffany Tavares, Lauren Geaney, Lexi Richards, Jessica Nolfi and Lori Eckert.



Thomas Harrington was elected as the Minority Representative for the NJREA Executive Committee.



# FEATURES

## 16 BUENA REGIONAL SUPPORT STAFF OVERCOME MAJOR CHALLENGES TO SETTLE CONTRACT

The Buena Regional Support Staff Association faced internal turmoil and the threat of losing its union status. With new leadership, strong organizing and guidance from NJEA staff, members negotiated a five-year contract that improves working conditions, strengthens protections and restores confidence in their union.

By Kathryn Coulibaly



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## 20 FROM CLASSROOMS TO COLLEGE HALLS: PLEASANTVILLE THIRD GRADERS LEAD THE WAY

In a first-of-its-kind partnership, Leed Avenue School third graders spent a day at Atlantic Cape Community College exploring nursing, STEM, culinary arts, esports and more. The experience connected hands-on learning to state standards while inspiring students to see themselves as future college students.

By Tamar LaSure-Owens



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## 22 MAKING MEANING OF THE MANDATES IN NJ CLASSROOMS

Explore how New Jersey educators are implementing the state's Holocaust and Genocide education mandates with support from Chhange and the NJEA Consortium. The article highlights professional development opportunities, survivor-led programs, student art projects, and strategies for integrating inclusive curricula that connect history to today's world.

By Francine Pfeffer and Stacy Schiller



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## 26 THE POWER OF VETERAN STAFF COLLABORATION

In the Mount Olive Township School District, the Veteran Staff Advisory Team (VSAT) has become a cornerstone of support for both new and experienced educators, creating a community that fosters collaboration, shared wisdom and strong professional relationships.

By Dr. Stephanie Brown Tarnowski



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## 28 THE GRANT EFFECT: TEN YEARS OF PARTNERSHIP TRANSFORMING NEW JERSEY'S SCHOOLS

For the past 10 years, NJEA's support of Sustainable Jersey for Schools has shown that even small seed grants can spark big change. From rain gardens to rooftop classrooms, these investments have helped nearly 370 schools statewide turn sustainability into a lasting part of school culture and student learning.

By Kristy Ranieri



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**The number  
1,392,913**

The number of students enrolled in New Jersey public schools during the 2024-25 school year.

Source: NJ Department of Education



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Buena Regional support staff overcome major challenges to settle a five-year contract that improves working conditions, strengthens protections and restores confidence in their union.

**PHOTO BY**  
Kathryn Coulibaly

# REVIEW



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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](http://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.

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# President's Message



## We are the POWER

We are living in a time that demands our attention—and more importantly—our action.

From Washington to Trenton, we see attacks on public institutions, social safety nets and the middle class. These outrages come so frequently that it's easy to get overwhelmed and feel powerless, asking ourselves 'what more can I do?'

But they are more than just headlines, and they cannot be allowed to pass without OUR action.

They pose direct threats to our schools, our communities and our fundamental human rights. We cannot afford to remain silent. Our profession and our students deserve better!

As NJEA members, we must remember that we are not alone. As part of a union for education professionals, we play a key role in the broader labor movement. Our union represents members in every community across our state. Together, we can—and must—protect our schools and, in doing so, protect the middle class and the democratic values we hold dear.

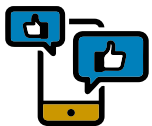
Because when we fight for fair contracts and fully funded schools, we are fighting for something bigger than ourselves. Standing up for what we deserve improves the lives of our students and sends a powerful message: All working people deserve dignity and respect.

As we continue to rise to the challenge, we must remember that all we need to persevere is each other. That's always been true, and it always will be. Solidarity has always formed the backbone of the union movement.

It's with this collective spirit that we commit to action in the face of any challenge—to talk with our colleagues, to attend rallies and meet with legislators, to do what it takes to protect and promote our values. As educators, we prepare our students for the future. As union members, we actively shape the world they will inherit.

And as we head into the "lame-duck" session in Trenton, we come together for Tier 1 pensions for everyone. We have within us the power to accomplish great change—let's use it.

Solidarity forever,



## officers online

### STEVE BEATTY

Facebook

@SteveBeattyNJEA: Joining my cohort of the "sweet sixteen" of new state presidents for on boarding and leadership development. A great group to be with as we train and work together!

On Oct. 6, NJEA President Steve Beatty shared as video expressing his excitement about attending his first day of new state presidents training at the National Education Association in Washington, D.C. Beatty was joined by 15 other new state presidents—whom he referred to as the "Sweet 16" cohort—along with veteran state presidents, NEA staff and other friends of education.

### PETAL ROBERTSON

Facebook

@PetalforNJEA: Here's a quick explanation of the Break in Service Bill. Thank you to every member that worked so hard to make this happen.

On Oct. 6, NJEA Vice President Petal Robertson shared a video explaining how educators will benefit from the Break in Service Bill. She noted that before the bill became law, members who returned to work after taking more than two years off to take care of children, family members, or other circumstances were bumped from their original pension tier and placed into Tier 5. She continued to explain that those affected returned to work expecting to retire at a specific point and learned the rules had changed for them. Robertson explained that the Break in Service law extends TPAF to 10 years, allowing educators to take a leave and still retain their original pension tier. The law also provides an extension for certain employees.

### TINA DARE

Facebook

@TinaDareforNJEA: Yesterday, I attended the State Board of Education meeting to celebrate excellence in New Jersey's public schools. Congratulations to our new New Jersey State Teacher of the Year, Gillian Ober! Gillian's dedication to her students and her profession represents the very best of what it means to be an educator. I'm proud to join the NJEA and educators across the state in celebrating her incredible achievement

On Oct. 9, NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Tina Dare shared photos from the State Board of Education meeting where the 2025-26 New Jersey State Teacher of the Year (NJSTOY) was announced and celebrated. Pictured in the photos were NJEA Vice President Petal Robertson, Monmouth County Education Association President Denise King, Union President of Freehold Borough School District Stephanie Cholak and a host of NJSTOYs who received the honor in previous years.

# The ADVOCATE

## RESOURCES FOR YOUR LOCAL ASSOCIATION

### Aligning our mission to our action

#### NJEA launches strategic planning process

NJEA President Steve Beatty notes that it has been a long time since NJEA has formally reviewed its mission. “Not in my memory have we developed and implemented a strategic plan with specific goals that would lead to the alignment of our work and purpose of action to our strategies and tactics,” Beatty told the NJEA Executive Committee at its Sept. 5 meeting.

Last February, as he prepared to become NJEA’s next president, Beatty spoke with Lisa Nentl-Bloom, the now-retired executive director of the National Council of State Education Association (NCSEA), about a strategic planning process. He asked Nentl-Bloom to help guide the NJEA through it.

Since then, a strategic planning steering committee has met multiple times in person virtually to move that work forward.

“The group has been phenomenal, engaging in thoughtful conversation throughout the process,” Beatty said.

The work soon expanded beyond the steering committee. At the NJEA Jack Bertolino Summer Leadership Conference last August, Nentl-Bloom facilitated a session with the NJEA Executive Committee, county association presidents, and NJREA and NJAEA leaders. NJEA staff were also part of the process, including NJEA’s directors and managers as well as representatives from the unions that represent all NJEA staff: the United Staff Association and the Professional Consultants Association.

In September, a number of local association presidents representing a large portion of NJEA’s membership, engaged in the strategic planning and leadership development process during in-person meetings at NJEA’s Trenton headquarters.

“Those conversations resulted in rich dialogue and valuable information to bring back to the steering committee,” Beatty said.

Individual steering committee members have been reporting about the process with the groups they represent, giving updates and soliciting feedback.

“This is an integral part of ensuring authentic member voice and establishing the legitimacy of the process and results toward a more perfect union,” Beatty said.

The process is following a clear timeline to ensure real results. The steering committee’s work will ultimately be shared with association leadership, committees, NJEA staff and managers to take back to their constituents and work together to align their specific work to the statewide strategic plan.

“Of course, the work is never done,” Beatty says. “We will continually reflect on the implementation of our strategic plan and be ready to adjust accordingly.”

### Huge pension justice win for NJEA members

In a major win for NJEA members, Gov. Phil Murphy has signed S2078/A1675 into law, restoring a large measure of pension justice to members who had career breaks of more than two years before returning to the profession—and were unfairly placed in inferior Tier 5 pensions.

Many of those affected were women who had taken time away from teaching to care for their children or other family members. Upon returning, despite previously earning credits in higher pension tiers, they were automatically placed into Tier 5, forcing them to work up to 10 additional years and accept significantly reduced pensions, upon retirement.

NJEA supported legislation to fix that injustice by extending to 10 years the amount of time school employees can be away before losing their original pension tier. Months of tireless advocacy—including many members sharing their personal stories with New Jersey legislators—led to overwhelming bipartisan passage last June, by a vote of 31-5 in the Senate and 69-9 in the Assembly. Murphy’s signature immediately restores those members’ rights to their original pension tiers.

NJEA’s officers President Steve Beatty, Vice President Petal Robertson and Secretary-Treasurer Tina Dare released the following statement:

“Today, we witnessed what union advocacy and solidarity can accomplish. Over the last year, our members spent countless hours fighting to overturn an unjust law—and we won. Like almost anything worth doing, it was hard



**Today, we witnessed what union advocacy and solidarity can accomplish.**

work. But our members never gave up and never took ‘no’ for an answer.

“This win is especially gratifying because that unjust law disproportionately punished women. We were proud that women and men in our membership came together to fight for worker justice, economic justice and gender justice. This is a landmark victory.

“This is just the beginning. Even with this important victory, the majority of our members remain in Tier 5—an inferior and unjust pension tier that forces newer members of our profession to work far longer before they can retire and to receive far less in retirement. That’s why we are ramping up our Tier 1 for Everyone campaign—to ensure that everyone who dedicates a career to public education in New Jersey can retire with the dignity and security they deserve.”

NJEA members can learn more about the Tier 1 for Everyone campaign by visiting [njea.org/tier1](http://njea.org/tier1).

### Convention Program updates

Since the printing of the 2025 Convention Program, the following corrections and updates have been received.

#### Sessions canceled: In-person

The workshop **Practicing Sex Ed with Cultural Humility** has been canceled. It had been scheduled for Thursday, Nov. 6 at 11:15 a.m.

The workshop **Learning Beyond the Classroom: Real-World Applications** has been canceled. It had been scheduled for Friday, Nov. 7 at 1:45 p.m.

#### Sessions canceled: Virtual

The workshop **Anti-Bullying in Schools** has been canceled. It had been scheduled for Thursday, Nov. 6 at 1:45 p.m.

The workshop **Dealing with Behavior on the School Bus** has been canceled. It had been scheduled for Friday, Nov. 7 at 11:15 a.m.

The workshop **Sexual Harassment in a School Environment** has been canceled. It had been scheduled for Friday, Nov. 7 at 1:45 p.m.

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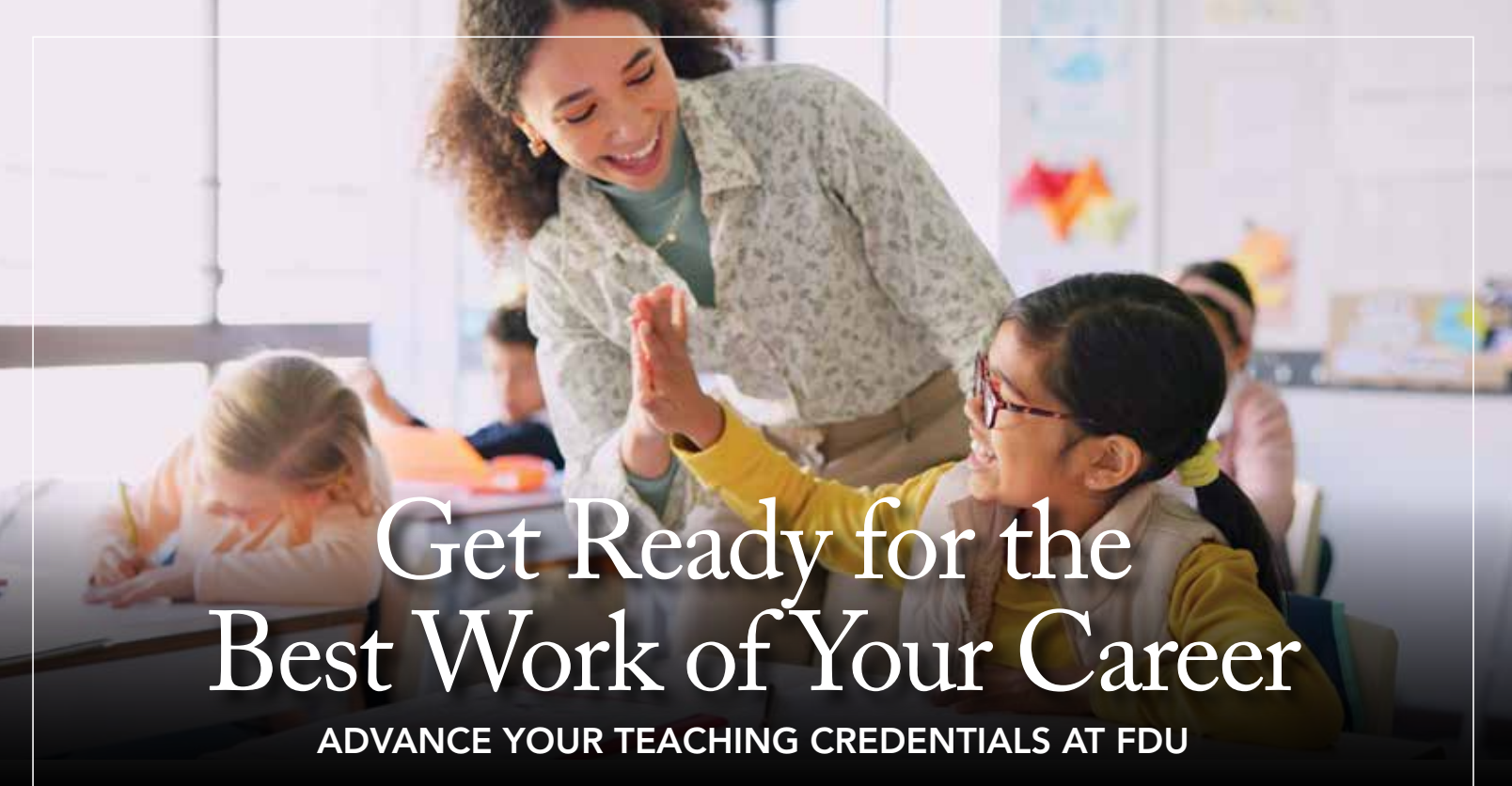
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## Someone students and staff can count on

### Meet Monmouth County ESP of the Year Dolan Williams

By Kathryn Coulibaly



For Dolan Williams, a custodian at Bradbury Elementary School in Asbury Park and the 2025-26 Monmouth County ESP of the Year, there is a different energy during the school year.

"When the students and staff come back into the building, there's a new bright light that's shining," Williams says.

Williams was born in Saint Kitts, a Caribbean island officially called Saint Christopher. Moving from St. Kitts to New Jersey was a culture shock of its own.

"I was 15 years old when I came to the United States," Williams recalls. "As a young teen, I didn't understand why I had to leave home and come here. I was frustrated and missing home. As I grew up, my awareness became brighter."

Williams relates to the many students who are immigrants, but he tries to connect with all of the students and staff.

"I like to get to know the students and learn their names. I try to spend time with the kids who stand out as troublemakers. I want to find out what the issue is and if I can be someone who helps them. Maybe I can help solve the problem, but even if I cannot, I try to make the day a little easier for them."

Williams got his professional start thanks to a now-defunct federal program, the Job Training Partnership Act.

"I participated in the program from 1992 to 1996," Williams says. "It helped students be responsible, earn money, learn how to manage their own money and maybe assist their families. It taught me a lot."

Williams graduated from high school in 1995 and began working. In 2013, a friend told him about the custodial position with the Asbury Park School District and he's been working in the district ever since.

"For the most part, my job is fun. I enjoy working with the students and staff and taking care of the facilities. During the summer, the work becomes even more intense. We're pulling out desks, furniture, wiping everything down, changing the lights, replacing ceiling tiles, and trying to bring the shine and cleanliness back to the school before students and staff come back."

Williams feels honored to have been named the Monmouth County ESP of the Year.

"I still cannot believe it," Williams says. "I'm humbled by it. I've been putting in the work, keeping my head down and focusing on the goal. I haven't been working to achieve any honors, I've been working to be a better individual. I want to be someone the kids and staff can count on."

Williams is eager to see more educational support professionals receive recognition for the work they do every day.

"Educational support professionals, particularly custodians, are the first in the building and the last to leave, and sometimes our contributions are overlooked," Williams says. "We are the forgotten ones. I like to see more attention paid to all of our efforts."

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*Kathryn Coulibaly writes the monthly ESP column. She is the associate editor of the Review and also provides content for njea.org.*

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# *the* NJEA REPORT

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## Manchester Township teacher flies with the Thunderbirds

By Ellie Hyland

The Manchester Township School District (MTSD) is unique as it directly neighbors the Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst. The close partnership between MTSD and JB-MDL has provided such wonderful opportunities for soldiers, students and staff alike to work together and learn from one another. That relationship opened the door for JB-MDL to consider MTSD when the Thunderbird Team expressed interest in honoring a Hometown Hero with a flight during the 2025 Air Show at the Joint Base. Specifically, the Thunderbird Team was looking for any 2024-25 Teachers of the Year interested in taking flight with them! I excitedly expressed my interest and began the application process.

I am a special education teacher to students ages 14 to 21 at the Regional Day School, which is part of MTSD. I am not only a dedicated special education teacher at Regional Day School but I was also awarded by my colleagues and have the honor of holding the title as Regional Day School Teacher of the Year for the 2024-25 school year. This honor is what made me eligible to apply for the flight with the Thunderbirds.

The application process was nerve-racking. I was told I was being considered for this opportunity along with hundreds of other applicants across the tri-state area. I shared information about my background, provided medical details for clearance, and explained not only my lifelong desire to become a special education teacher, but also how the philosophy of the Thunderbirds aligns with my classroom values and belief in treating each student as an individual with limitless possibilities.

That belief is visible in my classroom every day. I strive to make my students' school experience meaningful and joyful, instilling life lessons they can carry into the real world. The opportunity to fly with the Thunderbirds allowed me to show them, by direct example, that opportunities and experiences are not limited to anyone — not even "Miss Ellie." This same lesson is woven into my classroom philosophy for all my students every single day.

I was accepted to officially fly with the Thunderbirds the week after I celebrated my birthday. It was such wonderful

news to be gifted this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. The JB-MDL and Thunderbird Team not only welcomed me, but also my family and colleagues, to join in the experience. We reported to JB-MDL at 5 AM the day of the flight. I then began intense screenings, physical and mental training, preparedness, and fittings of the jumpsuit. The weather tried to threaten our experience, but when the 10 AM flight time finally arrived, the fog lifted and we took off.

I had the pleasure of being trained by and then flying alongside Maj. Brandon "Crime" Maxson, advanced pilot/narrator for the U.S Air Force Thunderbird Team. My flight lasted more than an hour and was truly indescribable experience. After we exceeded 9Gs in one of the fastest F-16s on Earth, the crew declared me one of the "fastest women in the world."

We performed countless maneuvers, including an aileron roll, loop, barrel roll, G turn and more. We flew over the JB-MDL Air Show's Open House multiple times, where MTSD students were able to see and wave to us. To my amazement, Maj. Maxson even let me fly the jet and complete a barrel roll myself, which was incredible. I am proud to say I never needed the baggies they provide in case of motion sickness during their flight.

After landing, I was awarded a 9G pin for joining the 9G club, an American flag that flew with us in the F-16, and an autographed, framed photo of the Thunderbirds from last year's Super Bowl with my name on it. However, the true reward is in the new friendships, partnership and memories from this once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Although my students were not able to be a part of the day, the USAF Thunderbird Team provided GoPro footage of my flight for us to share with them. They couldn't believe Miss Ellie went up in the fighter jet, drove a fighter jet and was even on the news! My students were very excited to see me on the news. They mimicked the motions I made during the turns, laughing and cheering. Later that day, as we were walking throughout the school, one of my students found a wooden plane. He picked it up and handed it to me, expressing his enthusiasm and curiosity about the whole experience.

To see photos of Ellie Hyland in action, visit [njea.org/thunderbirds](https://njea.org/thunderbirds).

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*Ellie Hyland is a special education teacher in Manchester Township.*



## NJEA Hipp Foundation awards more than \$97,000 in new grants

NJEA believes that educators' ingenuity should not be stifled by lack of funds. That's why the NJEA Frederick L. Hipp Foundation for Excellence in Education has awarded another 17 grants, including one continuation grant to support creative projects by public school educators totaling \$97,406. This total is possible thanks to an additional \$10,000 from Visions Federal Credit Union.

Continuation grants are additional grants for programs that had previously received funding within the previous 24 months.

Established in 1993, the Hipp Foundation is dedicated to supporting projects that will enhance and improve

the learning environment in schools. Since its creation, more than \$2.6 million dollars has been awarded by the foundation in support of 487 innovative educational projects that represent a bold, fresh approach by public school employees.

For information about a grant in your area, contact information for the Project Coordinator is provided at the end of each linked project description.

You can learn more about the history of the Hipp program at [njea.org/hipp-history](http://njea.org/hipp-history).

### 2025-26 Frederick L. Hipp Grants

#### Atlantic

Heather Haggerty-Woolslayer  
Children's Literacy, Part of Our  
School Culture – \$7,565  
Egg Harbor City Education  
Association

#### Burlington

Dr. Ryan Lafferty  
Middle School Robotics  
Club – \$4,030  
Northern Burlington County  
Regional Teachers Association

#### Camden

Jaime Cream  
Raku Pottery – \$8,000  
Cherry Hill Education Association

#### Essex

Ellen Fishter  
Arcade Reboot: Crafting with  
Cardboard – \$3,000  
Livingston Education Association

#### Hunterdon

Erin Evans  
Building Brighter Futures: LEGO  
SPIKE Innovation for K-2 – \$4,000  
Clinton Township Education  
Association

Deep in Sheep – \$7,840

Taryn Romanczak  
Hunterdon County PolyTechnical  
Education Association

Sharon Ernst  
Hydroponic Growing and Learning  
Systems – \$2,899  
East Amwell Education Association

#### Middlesex

Ashley Yanchuck  
KIDO Classroom – \$6,200  
Spotswood Education Association

#### Monmouth

Josh Langenberger  
Seed to Sanctuary – \$6,767  
Howell Township Education  
Association

Lauren Zodi  
Growing Environmental  
Activists – \$1,641  
Freehold Regional Education  
Association

#### Morris

Susan Charlton  
SEL LEGO Wall – \$1,216  
Mine Hill Teachers Association

Angela Klein  
Bringing Ideas to Life in 3D – \$5,963  
\*Jack Bertolino Grant  
East Hanover Education Association

#### Ocean

Penny Burr  
Inclusive Sensory Space – \$3,185  
Lacey Township Education  
Association

#### Sussex

Mary Houghtaling  
Sustain and Expand Holocaust  
& Genocide Research  
Center – \$10,000  
*Visions Grant for Social Justice*  
Kittatinny Education Association

Cathryn Weiss-Connors  
You, Me, and Robots: Coding  
through Collaboration – \$8,600  
Sussex Wantage Education  
Association

#### Union

Jennifer Barbera  
SEL Through Art in the Self  
Contained Classroom and Beyond  
– \$6,500  
\*Continuation Grant  
Clark Education Association

#### Warren

Faith Roncoroni  
Sequential Storytelling – \$10,000  
Phillipsburg Education Association



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# COOL STUFF



## 2026 ARETÉ SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM EXPANSION

The New Jersey Hall of Fame has renewed its Areté Scholarship Fund, expanding opportunities for high school seniors across the state. With support from a generous grant by ADP, six graduating seniors from the Class of 2026 will each receive an Areté Scholarship to help pursue their educational goals.

Applications, including an academic transcript and two letters of recommendation, must be submitted between Oct. 1, 2025, and March 1, 2026. Recipients will be notified by May 1, 2026.

Confidential recommendation letters and questions should be emailed to [arete@njhalloffame.org](mailto:arete@njhalloffame.org). Seniors can apply online at [NJHallofFame.org/Arete](http://NJHallofFame.org/Arete).



## MEET NJHOF AT THE NJEA CONVENTION

The New Jersey Hall of Fame invites educators to visit **Booth 935** at the NJEA convention to explore new educational resources.

Attendees can learn about 2025–26 field trips, free lesson plans, and professional development opportunities for schools and districts. The booth will also feature interactive activities and opportunities to connect with Hall of Fame staff to discover how students can “**meet their heroes.**”



## DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION: RESPECT NEWSLETTER FOR GRADES 6 AND UP

The New Jersey State Bar Foundation’s fall edition of *Respect*, a diversity and inclusion newsletter for students, is now available. This issue features articles on reverse discrimination, special education rulings from the U.S. Supreme Court and an update on abortion three years after the Court’s *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* decision.

Read the full edition or order free classroom copies at [publications.njsbf.org](http://publications.njsbf.org).



## REQUEST A FREE SPEAKER ON LAW-RELATED TOPICS

The New Jersey State Bar Foundation’s Speakers Bureau has volunteer attorney speakers who are available to address law-related topics for school assemblies, class discussions and on career days. There is no charge. Schedule using the online form.

To schedule a speaker using the online form, visit [speakers.njsbf.org](http://speakers.njsbf.org).



## We want to hear from you!

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# Buena Regional support staff overcome major challenges to settle contract

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*By Kathryn Coulibaly*

The Buena Regional Support Staff Association (BRSSA) faced an existential threat. After internal turmoil, including going without a local president for a while, the association was at risk of falling below the 50% threshold for union membership.

NJEA field representatives Crysty Jenkins and Stephanie Tarr organized extensively to help maintain the association's status. They tasked NJEA UniServ consultant Anthony Angelozzi—who also serves as the president of the Hammonton Education Association—with working alongside the association on negotiations.

The BRSSA's new leadership team quickly came together.

"I stepped up because I didn't want us to lose our union," says Doris Robinson, the new BRSSA president. Robinson, the district's head custodian, has served Buena's students for 18 years.

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*Kathryn Coulibaly is an associate director in the NJEA Communications Division.*

Annette Ralph volunteered to be vice president. After 34 years in the district "doing everything except teach," she now works as a mail courier.

Dawn Boyle, a special education secretary for 12 years, serves as the union's secretary.

"This was all of our first time with negotiations," Robinson said. "It was a little intimidating. We didn't want to let anyone down. We wanted to do a good job for all our members."

## **Implementing a best practices bargaining plan**

Angelozzi walked them through the process to ensure they felt comfortable and confident. Because all three leaders live in Buena, they are very well known in the schools and in the community. But because they were all new to union leadership positions, it was a fresh start in terms of the association's relationship with the board, which had been acrimonious in the past.

"I tried to take on as much of the stress as I could to make sure they felt secure throughout the process," Angelozzi recalls, "and to help protect their relationships with the board members."



**Anthony Angelozzi, standing, is the NJEA UniServ consultant who assisted the Buena team settle their contract. Seated from left: Annette Ralph, Doris Robinson and Dawn Boyle holding a copy of their new contract.**

Angelozzi was committed to helping the leaders through a best practice, “squeaky-clean” negotiation that would restore confidence in the association and strengthen the leaders’ skills.

“We spent a lot of time organizing in the local,” Angelozzi says. “We sent out surveys and gave the members plenty of time to express what they care about. That’s overlooked sometimes as teams rush to the table. We knew that if we were going to fight for something, it had to be what the members wanted.”

The team, with Robinson, Ralph and Boyle, worked closely with NJEA Associate Director of Research Greg Yordy and used NJEA’s resources. They prepared proposals, identified non-negotiables and practiced realistic compromise.

“In negotiations, you put together a proposal, but you’re almost never going to get everything in it,” Angelozzi explains. “We set our proposals and determined which proposal items we would fight to the end on. We also knew we had to be realistic, embrace compromise and provide counter proposals. It takes a lot of time.”

The team also invested effort in understanding the board’s proposals.

“We really tried to understand why they wanted what they were asking for,” Angelozzi says. “Because we put so much effort into understanding their position, they were more willing to listen to our perspective. There must be mutual respect and actual consideration of each other’s proposals.”

Angelozzi explained that saying yes to one of the board’s proposals often incentivized the board to agree to one of the association’s ideas.

“If you go in and say no to everything, you’re going to be met with the same spirit,” Angelozzi says.

“We used best practices to develop the salary guide,” Angelozzi says. “We explained what the increment costs meant. Not only was it good bargaining, but it was education for the team. By the time they do this again, even though it’s only their second time, they’re going to be really good negotiators because we did everything right the first time and took time to explain it.”



After facing many challenges as a union, the Buena team had to create a new map to success for themselves and their members.

## Sitting down at the bargaining table

The association began bargaining in early fall 2024 and reached a deal by February 2025.

Walking in for the first time was intimidating for the new team, but by the end, they all felt that the board viewed the team as equals.

“We presented a professional, united front at the bargaining table on behalf of our 102 members,” Robinson said. “We took the time to educate the board on why we wanted what we were proposing, and the board listened.”

The association reached a five-year deal with the Buena Board of Education. They settled on a 3.5% salary increase for all five years, which is comparable to the county average and matches the percentage negotiated by the teaching staff, who are in a separate union, the prior year.

One of the association’s biggest priorities was a vision plan. Every other union employee in the district has access to a vision plan. While the board did not agree to vision this round, the association secured a corrective lens reimbursement for members. They also negotiated a \$100 shoe reimbursement for buildings and grounds employees. In addition, members gained more flexibility in using a personal day. BRSSA members can now use a personal day without administrative approval for entertainment and recreation.

“That’s a quality-of-life proposal,” Angelozzi says. “It makes their life better. It doesn’t cost anything, but it’s something that the staff appreciates.”

The union also was able to increase the annual Black Seal license stipend for buildings and grounds employees to \$650. All buildings and grounds employees hold the license.

## Using all the tools

One of the association’s biggest incentives to settling a five-year deal was the protection against privatization it provides educational support members. Buena has a long, unfortunate history of privatizing educational support professional positions. Thanks to NJEA’s political action efforts, greater protections are now in place.

In 2020, Gov. Phil Murphy signed one of NJEA’s highest-priority bills. The law protects ESPs by prohibiting the privatization of their jobs while a collective bargaining agreement is in effect. In addition, it also requires employers to provide written notice and negotiate with the local association before entering a subcontracting agreement after a collective bargaining agreement expires. Finally, it ensures that any employee displaced by a subcontracting agreement retains seniority and recall rights.

“This took many years of political organizing, working to educate legislators on the importance of ESP positions, and electing pro-public education and pro-union candidates to the Legislature,” says Angelozzi. “Political action is an important way that unions fight for their members’ interests.”



Angelozzi confers with Annette Ralph on a member’s question about the contract.



Angelozzi, Robinson, Ralph and Boyle are already considering what they want to achieve for members in their next round of bargaining.

## Building a new cycle of success

“Even when we ratified, one of the things I was proudest of was that the members had a lot of questions and concerns, and we all took time to explain the proposal,” Angelozzi says. “The contract was ratified unanimously. I think that shows the team did a great job. We broke some cycles of bad relationships.”

Robinson, Ralph and Boyle are already taking notes on what they want to achieve in their next round of bargaining.

Ultimately, settling the contract helped bring an end to a difficult era in Buena Support Staff’s history. The union had long carried a reputation that serving as a president of the support staff put members’ jobs at risk, after several past presidents were fired.

“To get the deal done and have the whole team smiling at the end, feeling like they had done something good for their members is what makes it all worth it,” Angelozzi says. 🙌

# From classrooms to college halls: How a community partnership is shaping the future of third graders in Pleasantville

By Tamar LaSure-Owens

In a pioneering initiative that sets a new precedent for educational collaboration, third-grade students from Leeds Avenue School in Pleasantville recently made history as the first elementary school group to partner with Atlantic Cape Community College (ACCC) in Mays Landing. The experience launched a dynamic partnership centered on hands-on learning, career awareness and future readiness—all rooted in the 2023 New Jersey Student Learning Standards (NJSLS).

With about 100 students and nine Leeds Avenue educators—Mr. Benson, Ms. Pacentrilli, Ms. Barnard, Ms. Alexander, Ms. Moody-Butler, Ms. Luna, Ms. Martin, Ms. Mulino and me—this milestone was designed to spark curiosity, confidence and college awareness in young learners. Students rotated through immersive, college-hosted stations that included nursing, STEM and drone aviation, culinary arts, esports, scientific measurement, college history, library exploration and a design-focused session called Hidden Logos.

## The hidden meaning behind logos

One of the most thought-provoking stations was Hidden Logos, led by Professor Deana Kozlowski. Students were introduced to the world of visual symbolism, exploring the deeper meanings behind everyday logos. Kozlowski guided them through three core elements that make logos powerful:

- **History** – understanding a brand’s origins and evolution
- **Psychology** – recognizing how design choices appeal to emotions
- **Personal connection** – interpreting logos based on individual perspectives

Students were especially captivated by the idea of “negative space,” where hidden images appear in the unused portions of a logo. As they uncovered these visuals, they reflected on questions such as, “What am I seeing in myself that allows me to connect with this image?” The session encouraged design thinking, critical analysis and self-discovery—turning art into a reflective journey.

## College-level learning for elementary minds

Each station offered an unforgettable, age-appropriate introduction to real college learning environments:

- **Junior nurses in training:** Dr. Danielle Nicastro and Professor Joanna Johns led students in measuring their heart rates before and after physical activity. Students learned about the circulatory system and hygiene while practicing first aid techniques.
- **Soaring with STEM:** Professor Tim Cwik demonstrated drone aviation technology, then let students fly drones themselves—many for the first time. The combination of flight, exploration and STEM-based dialogue sparked wide-eyed wonder and joyful discovery.
- **Little Chefs:** Chef Wohlman and Chef Chellus guided students in preparing fruit and cheese kabobs while learning about portion sizes, nutrition and measurements. As they worked with real culinary tools and ingredients, students made cross-curricular connections between science, math, art and enjoyed eating their creations!
- **Welcome to the Game Zone:** Professor Michele Togashi introduced esports as both a pastime and a career pathway. Through Kahoot and discussion, students explored questions such as “What is esports?” and “Is esports only for young people?” The session highlighted teamwork, strategy and the rise of digital industries.
- **Mismatched measuring in the lab:** Dr. Terri-Lynn Hamby immersed students in hands-on scientific inquiry. Wearing goggles and gloves, they measured liquids using authentic lab tools and compared accuracy across instruments.
- **College history:** Students learned about the founding of ACCC in 1964 and its distinction as New Jersey’s first community college to offer a culinary program. They also heard stories from alumni, connecting past to present.

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*Tamar LaSure-Owens, an instructional trailblazer and NJEA Consortium Design Team Ambassador, is a teacher at Leeds Avenue School in Pleasantville. She represents Atlantic County on the NJEA Instruction Committee. She can be reached at [tlasure-owens@njea.org](mailto:tlasure-owens@njea.org).*



## A partnership with purpose

This collaboration is groundbreaking in its commitment to engaging elementary students in higher education. Traditionally, community college outreach has been reserved for high school and adult learners. This initiative boldly redefines that norm.

This partnership is about possibility. We want our students to see that college isn't just something to think about later—it's a part of their story now.

Each 20-minute session was intentionally structured to maximize impact while keeping students engaged. ACCC staff members escorted each team to their sessions, ensuring a smooth, supported and safe experience.

Afterward, students shared their excitement with classmates, teachers and families. Many expressed pride in being on a real college campus for the first time. Jubilant exclamations like, "I want to go here!" and "I can't wait to be a college student!" captured the energy of the day.

## Thanks to visionary leadership

This event was made possible by the support of Dr. Josette Katz, senior vice president of academic affairs, who approved the initiative in January 2025. I first championed the idea during the inaugural Atlantic County Council of Education Associations' Professional Development Day, held at ACCC on Jan. 25, 2025, and followed up with a formal proposal to the college.

A heartfelt thank you goes to the faculty and staff of ACCC for their creativity, hospitality and dedication to early college exposure. From custom name tags and colorful bookbags to personalized certificates marking students' projected college entrance year, the day was a meaningful experience for every elementary student.

## Why this visit matters

- First-ever ACCC partnership with an elementary school.
- Hands-on STEM, health, culinary and career exploration.
- Real-world academic connections to 2023 NJSLs.
- Logo literacy through design, psychology and identity.
- Student dialogue with ACCC alumni and faculty.
- Empowering third graders to see themselves as future college students.

This partnership is a model for bold, student-centered learning. Leeds Avenue School and Atlantic Cape Community College have proven that it's never too early to introduce young minds to higher education—and to inspire them to see college not just as a dream, but as a real possibility. 🌱



Third graders measure liquids under Dr. Terri-Lynn Hamby's guidance.



Jeyrian Figueroa-Diaz and other students portion and assemble foods in the kitchen with Chef Wohlman and Chef Chellus (pictured)



After mastering proper handwashing techniques, students learned to find their pulse and record their heart rate.

# TEACHING THE HUMAN STORY

## Making meaning of the mandates in NJ classrooms

By Francine Pfeffer and Stacy Schiller



Implementing New Jersey's multiple curricular mandates presents opportunities for educators to integrate curricula representative of our diverse student population and empower learners to reflect on today's world. Yet it also presents challenges. One particular roadblock is the lack of content knowledge of the mandates, whether Amistad (education about African Americans), Asian American and Pacific Islander Education, the contributions of LGBTQIA+ and people with disabilities, diversity and inclusion education, or Holocaust and genocide education.

The NJEA Consortium promotes the inclusion of all voices in our schools and communities and has developed a macro curriculum to help educators implement the mandates. Additional content and pedagogical opportunities are available through the Consortium's Learning Management System, with student-centered performance tasks and educator learning plans to be offered in the future.

According to the Consortium website, "This initiative goes beyond curriculum; it is about building strong community relationships, providing professional development and fostering conversations that will make New Jersey's diverse population see themselves in our schools' teachings."

The Consortium also partners with community organizations that help educators address the inclusive curriculum mandates.

Like the Consortium, Chchange, the Center for Holocaust, Human Rights and Genocide Education, offers programming and educational experiences to help educators teach difficult topics with empathy and respect.

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*Francine Pfeffer is an associate director in the Politics and Policy Office of the NJEA Government Relations Division. She can be reached at [fpfeffer@njea.org](mailto:fpfeffer@njea.org).*

*Stacy Schiller has nearly 30 years of experience teaching Holocaust, social justice and U.S. history. She serves as a Design Team Ambassador with the NJEA Consortium and teaches at Raritan High School, Hazlet.*

### Centering the human experience

Chchange was established in 1979 as an outgrowth of a local Lunch and Learn Series developed by NJEA members Professors Seymour "Sy" Siegler, Ed.D. and Jack Needle. Chchange started as the Center for Holocaust Studies and over time, expanded its mission beyond the Holocaust. Part of the campus of Brookdale Community College in Lincroft, Chchange serves staff and students at the college, as well as schools throughout Monmouth and Ocean counties and elsewhere in the state.

At the center of Chchange's educational work is its genocide exhibit, *Journeys Beyond Genocide: the Human Experience*. The exhibit takes its title from its focus on the human story of three genocides: the Armenian Genocide, the Holocaust and the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda.

Open since 2018, students, educators, the Brookdale community and the general public have the opportunity to engage with this exhibit to learn about the conditions, human choices and consequences of each of these catastrophic events. A vast collection of artifacts donated to Chchange by the Armenian, Holocaust and Rwandan survivors and family members fuels the exhibit's narrative. Despite the uniqueness of each genocide, the focus on the commonalities across genocides makes the exhibit powerful.

"We look into these three chapters of history in conjunction with one another rather than in isolation," says Dr. Asya Darbinyan, executive director at Chchange. "Chchange educates, inspires and empowers individuals to stand up to injustice."

All visitors to the exhibit, students and community members alike, are asked to apply the lessons learned to today as they become upstanders. Chchange's additional offerings include professional development, docent-led tours of the exhibit, survivor speakers and survivor suitcases, genocide commemoration events, an annual colloquium, a student art project and much more.



Crimoli with her students and Holocaust survivor Ruth Rosenfeld on a visit to Chhange

### Professional development with a larger purpose

Marissa Crimoli, a Holmdel Township middle and high school educator, participates in almost all Chhange's offerings. As an ELA-certified teacher with a master's in Holocaust and Genocide Studies from Kean University, Crimoli credits Chhange with impacting her teaching. She highlights the uniqueness and consistency of the professional development offerings, which allow her to continue refining her lessons, and she can give evidence of concrete professional learning she has incorporated into her classroom,

"The way they structure conversations and the dialogue that is infused between the participants and the presenters provides a really strong, authentic framework for how to organize, facilitate and guide students through a lot of really difficult conversations without ever shying away from the topic," Crimoli says.

Crimoli traces her excitement about teaching this heavy topic to Chhange's "constant infusion of energy and information" and its partnerships with organizations such as the New Jersey Council of Holocaust Educators and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Joe Nappi, a Monmouth Regional High School social studies teacher and New Jersey's 2023-24 State Teacher of the Year, says that Chhange was one of the local resources he used to build his Holocaust and Genocide elective. After his first workshop, he returned to the classroom and immediately applied his learning to his U.S. History II course, which he says is a consistent experience from Chhange's PD offerings. That was only the beginning.

Encouragement from Chhange staff led Nappi to become a U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum Fellow and eventually participate in writing lessons for Ken Burns' The "U.S. and the Holocaust" documentary. While not all teachers who work with Chhange will follow such a path, Nappi encourages the connection.

"If teachers are willing to seek that stuff out, Chhange is very supportive and will help you every step of the way

as you try to advance your teaching," Nappi says.

Chhange also offers an opportunity to tailor professional development and programming for individual schools or districts. Its Building Bridges initiative helps schools create welcoming, inclusive communities, particularly in schools with diverse socioeconomic communities. It can be a proactive way to establish a school culture focused on mutual respect by working through challenging conversations while giving students the opportunity to explore their own beliefs about topics that arise in New Jersey's curricular mandates. The program empowers students to create a school—and even a world—that strives to eliminate hatred and prejudice.

### Survivors as living history

One constant offering for many educators is Chhange's Survivors Speakers Bureau. Programs such as Lunch with a Survivor help make the Holocaust personal. Crimoli intentionally schedules different survivors and docents for each visit, many of whom are second generation—the children of genocide survivors. Several of their parents' stories are part of the exhibit.

Meeting these survivors and docents provides unique perspectives and connections to Crimoli's students, giving them shared, but individual, experiences and preparing them for authentic dialogues later in the classroom. Nappi notes that local connections help students to recognize that these stories aren't so far away and that real people in the community are impacted by these histories.

Survivor stories are meaningful not only for students but for educators as well. Both Crimoli and Nappi recall that the story of Eva Wiener, the youngest passenger on the SS St. Louis—the ship denied entry into Cuba and the United States and forced to return to Europe—was one of the first local survivor connections they incorporated into the classroom.

Nappi notes that his connection with Manny Lindenbaum has been a huge influence on his teaching. Before they met, Manny was almost a mythical figure. He is a

Holocaust survivor who escaped Nazi Germany on the Kindertransport, which brought children from Germany to Great Britain between 1938 and 1940.

As they met and forged a relationship, Lindenbaum helped Nappi return to his passion for service learning. Their conversations, and particularly Lindenbaum's question, "What are you doing to help others?" convinced Nappi that studying the Holocaust doesn't have to be purely a scholarly endeavor.

Nappi created a class that is academically challenging while also asking students how their learning applies to the world. His "Be the Change" project helps students connect lessons from the Holocaust to their own lives. Hearing directly from survivors has left a lasting impression on Crimoli as well.

"I can read about the Kindertransport, and have, from many sources," Crimoli says. "But learning about Manny's experiences just takes this invisible thread that makes everything weave together like a cohesive blanket."

Both educators agree that as opportunities to hear directly from Holocaust survivors, Chhange does an excellent job of keeping the stories alive through generational storytelling.

"Chhange encourages second- and third-generation descendants of genocide survivors to come forward, help us promote Holocaust and genocide education and awareness, and be the voice for those who cannot speak anymore," Dr. Darbinyan shares.

Chhange also works directly with several survivors of



**Nappi with Manny Lindenbaum at Chhange's 2025 Testimonial Dinner.**

the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, who often offer their unique voices and experiences to the annual commemorations for Genocide Awareness Month and other programs. Many of these past programs—including those from scholars and survivors, covering topics such as the history of human rights, LGBTQIA+ experiences in the Holocaust and racism and Reconstruction—are available on Chhange's YouTube channel, ChhangeBCC. (Visit [youtube.com/@ChhangeBCC](https://youtube.com/@ChhangeBCC).)

### **Inquiry and discovery**

Opportunities for student engagement and discussion abound through Chhange. If educators can't bring in a Holocaust survivor, Chhange offers Holocaust Survivor Curriculum Suitcases for educators to borrow. The suitcases include a personal narrative of the survivor presented in a family scrapbook, along with a video of the survivor sharing moments of their experiences. They also contain personal photographs, archival items and memorabilia, as well as a historical timeline and lesson plan.

Crimoli shares that the artifacts in the suitcases and the exhibit give students something tangible to remember. While the docents are excellent in helping students engage with this challenging material, Crimoli worked directly with Chhange to personalize the experience for her students, who have strong backgrounds on the genocide when they arrive at the exhibit. These unique experiences, which include student presentations, give students independence in their learning.

Another Chhange offering which also allows an opportunity for student autonomy is the annual Student Art Installation. Each year students can create artwork around a theme related to the year's colloquium. Importantly, these themes allow educators to engage with the curricular



**Dr. Asya Darbinyan with Sheryl Powers, granddaughter of an Armenian Genocide survivor, donating her family's original archive keepsake to use with the Journey Beyond Genocide exhibit.**

“

***NJEA Consortium supports educators with the resources and professional development needed to empower students as empathetic, engaged global citizens.” — Dr. Kim Pinckney, Associate Director, NJEA PDII***

mandates. Past themes have focused not only on genocide, but on empowering students to find their voice, address hate, confront propaganda and act as “historians of ourselves” as they shared their pandemic experiences. Each theme gives students and teachers the opportunity to explore history and current events through the lenses of diversity and inclusion.

Chhange prepares educators at a workshop by providing lesson plans, digital materials and other resources. Crimoli engages students with the art project through an after-school club.

“The art project gives students the opportunity to have their thoughts and feelings heard by an authentic audience,” Crimoli says. “These are people who are interested in what they have to say, and are listening with deeper interest.”

The art project also gives students a chance to engage with peers about topics they might not normally broach outside the classroom. Crimoli found their discussions to be rich and was impressed by how determined they were for their art to represent their conversations and learning.

Nappi’s students have participated in the art workshop for at least 10 years.

“It’s a great opportunity for interdisciplinary connection,” Nappi says.

He has worked with art and graphic arts teachers to support student work. They get excited about seeing their work with their families and other students at the art installation reception held at the Center for the Visual Arts on Brookdale’s campus. He loves that it’s a way to reach the students who may be less engaged with literature or historical readings.

### **A collaborative community**

Aside from professional development, Crimoli wishes more educators knew about the extensive library and resources available. As she was planning a unit on the Armenian genocide, Chhange’s library of Armenian genocide books, as well as discussions with Chhange’s director, Dr. Darbinyan, provided guidance, information and an opportunity to explore new pedagogical approaches, such as different ways to engage with the Armenian section of the exhibit. Dr. Darbinyan has also provided a Content Scholar talk about the Armenian genocide and intersectionality for the consortium.



**Student artwork and artist statements are compiled in these booklets each year.**

Nappi has been able to take what he has learned outside of Chhange and share with the community of educators, presenting his lessons from Ken Burns’ documentary, among other topics from additional partnerships. As his journey as a Holocaust educator began with Chhange, these presentations feel like full-circle moments for him.

“Any success I have had in the classroom, I want to see other teachers have that same success with their students,” Nappi says.

Yet he still returns to participate in programs and workshops.

“Every time I go to one of these workshops at Chhange, I leave invigorated,” Nappi says. “I have ideas of things that I’m going to take back and turnkey directly into my classroom. I encourage teachers to take advantage of Chhange’s programming because Chhange is really a phenomenal resource right in our backyard.” 🇺🇸

## **Explore Chhange program**

Chhange’s programs, whether in person or virtual, are open to all. For additional programming, visit [chhange.org](http://chhange.org). Middle and high school teachers who would like to schedule a visit to the exhibit, borrow a suitcase or to hear from a survivor can contact Chhange at [contact@chhange.org](mailto:contact@chhange.org) or 732-224-1889. A field trip itinerary to Chhange, created by the Consortium, will be published later this year.

# The power of veteran staff collaboration

## VSAT's commitment to supporting all school staff and strengthening school communities

By Stephanie Brown Tarnowski, Ph.D.

In the Mount Olive Township School District, the Veteran Staff Advisory Team (VSAT) has become a cornerstone of support for educators, educational support professionals (ESPs) and all district staff members. The group fosters collaboration, shared wisdom and strong professional relationships across schools. As a veteran educator and leader of VSAT, I spearheaded this initiative, which serves as a vital resource for staff throughout the district. With support from our superintendent, Dr. Sumit Bangia, VSAT has continued to grow and evolve since its creation in August 2023.

### Mentoring, professional development, and school culture

VSAT is composed of staff members with over 20 years of service in Mount Olive Township schools. The team's mission is to tap into the collective knowledge and experience of veteran staff while also supporting new members as they transition into the district. VSAT serves as a sounding board for concerns and a forum for collaboration focused on improving school culture, communication and instructional practices—all while fostering a strong sense of community.

One of the primary ways VSAT supports new staff is through two unique committees:

#### *The Marigold Buddy Committee*

This relationship-based program—separate from the district's official mentor program—pairs veteran staff members with newcomers. The goal is to offer guidance, share day-to-day tips, answer questions, provide regular check-ins and foster a welcoming environment. The "Marigold Effect," as coined by author Jennifer Gonzalez in *Find Your Marigold: The One Essential Rule for New Teachers*, represents being a supportive and nurturing presence in the school community—much like the marigold flower that helps nearby plants thrive.

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*Dr. Stephanie Brown Tarnowski is a teacher at Mount Olive Middle School. She can be reached at [stephanie.tarnowski@motsd.org](mailto:stephanie.tarnowski@motsd.org).*

#### *The Marigold Seed Committee*

This group focuses on behind-the-scenes communication and inspiration. It creates and distributes a monthly newsletter for all district staff that includes helpful tips, motivational quotes and ideas for building a positive culture.

Both committees share the same goals: to support all colleagues, build connections, share wisdom and grow together.

VSAT's influence extends beyond staff support and professional guidance. In the 2024-25 school year, the Districtwide Elementary Articulation Committee, a VSAT subgroup, worked to strengthen communication and collaboration between schools and grade levels. This committee organized meaningful grade-level meetings during professional development days, allowing teachers to address shared challenges, align curriculum and exchange effective classroom strategies. These sessions empowered teachers, encouraged professional growth and promoted a unified approach to teaching and learning across the district.

Beyond staff support and professional development, VSAT also plays a pivotal role in shaping district culture. The team helps organize social events such as retirement celebrations, dress-down days and holiday gatherings that bring staff together. Members also provide practical guidance on school procedures, classroom management and communication with parents—helping new staff feel confident and supported as they settle into their roles.

VSAT advocates for clear and consistent communication between staff and administrators, bridging gaps and amplifying staff voices through surveys and focus groups. These efforts have led to initiatives such as the development of buddy systems and improved transition support for new employees.

### Putting research into action

This work aligns with one of my personal goals, outlined in the "Implications for Future Research and Policy" section of my doctoral dissertation, completed in 2021. In that research, I examined the professional lives of veteran



**VSAT members Pamela Wilson, Christine Kratzel and Marlena Karipidis collaborate during district professional development time to plan initiatives supporting new staff.**

teachers over the course of three decades. One of the key findings was the remarkable dedication, resilience and expertise these educators demonstrated amid continual changes in education.

Through that work, I recognized that this dedication and wisdom are not limited to veteran teachers—they exist across all roles in our schools. The creation of VSAT reflects that belief and underscores the importance of providing opportunities for professionals to share and grow together.

VSAT's slogan, "Sharing Wisdom and Growing Together," captures its mission perfectly. It appears on team T-shirts, tote bags, notebooks, buttons, pens and magnets—symbols of the pride and unity that define our group.

The team currently includes 56 members and welcomes new members each August when they reach 20 years of service. VSAT is open to all veteran staff members who wish to contribute to collaboration and support efforts. Its members—teachers, paraprofessionals, secretaries, and child study team members—bring diverse skills and experiences that help our schools thrive. While administrators are not part of VSAT, the group has at times benefited from their support, enabling members to work together, share expertise, and foster a sense of community while making meaningful contributions across the district.

All VSAT planning and collaboration activities take place during the school day. This trust and investment have allowed VSAT members to plan, organize, and contribute meaningfully while being respected and treated as

professionals—a gesture that is both empowering and deeply appreciated.

### **Recognizing staff excellence**

In addition to its ongoing work within schools, the VSAT team has been honored to participate in district-wide events. For the past two years, VSAT members have been invited to speak and present at the first-day-of-school convocation, recognizing and congratulating staff members for their years of service and dedication. These presentations celebrate staff longevity, highlight the contributions of veteran employees and reinforce the culture of appreciation and community that VSAT works so hard to cultivate throughout the district.

### **The future of VSAT**

VSAT's work is just beginning. With growing membership and ongoing professional development, the team aims to expand opportunities for collaboration, connection and support. As VSAT continues to evolve, its impact on Mount Olive Township's schools is increasingly evident: teachers feel more supported, school culture is stronger and the entire district benefits from the collective expertise of its veteran staff.

Through its staff support initiatives, professional learning efforts and dedication to fostering a positive culture, the Veteran Staff Advisory Team demonstrates how collaboration and experience can elevate an entire district. Together, we are ensuring that Mount Olive's educational community remains strong, supportive and forward-thinking. 🏠

# THE GRANT EFFECT:

## Ten years of partnership transforming New Jersey's schools

*By Kristy Ranieri*

What is the magic formula to inspire schools to take action on sustainability?

For the past decade, Sustainable Jersey for Schools has been working to answer that question. The program offers schools a roadmap through its certification process, coupled with training and technical assistance, to support steady, measurable steps on the path to sustainability. Yet while expertise and guidance are critical, many educators and administrators say one catalyst makes all the difference: seed funding to start small.

Even modest grants give schools permission to test ideas—whether planting a school garden, launching an energy-efficiency project or piloting a recycling program. These visible, hands-on efforts generate excitement among students and staff. Early success creates momentum and often sparks partnerships that help schools leverage additional resources for bigger initiatives. In this way, a grant does much more than fund a project—it sets off a ripple effect that can transform a school's culture and inspire a long-term commitment to sustainability.

At the heart of this movement is the NJEA. As a founding partner of Sustainable Jersey for Schools, NJEA has provided leadership and financial support that has allowed the program to thrive. Since 2015, the Sustainable Jersey Grants Program has distributed more than \$3.6 million to fund over 800 sustainability projects in public schools. Of that, \$2.75 million has come directly from NJEA to support both grants and the certification process itself. More than half of participating districts have received at least one Sustainable Jersey grant.

These investments reflect NJEA's core priorities: safe and healthy learning environments; the social, emotional and physical well-being of students; and strengthening public education through innovation. NJEA's decade of support for diverse projects, from food waste solutions and outdoor classrooms to mindfulness spaces and arts

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programs, has nurtured a culture of sustainability that links student learning with community well-being.

To see the results, you don't need to look far. The stories of two very different districts—Delran Township School District, a small suburban community, and Jersey City Public Schools, one of the largest and most diverse districts in the state—demonstrate how long-term investment in sustainability can change outcomes for students and communities alike.

### **Delran Township school district: Grants cultivate a culture of sustainability**

At Millbridge Elementary School in Delran, a simple stormwater problem became the seed of a much bigger story. For years, rainwater pouring off the school roof would pool and flood the blacktop, leaving the playground muddy and unusable. Students were often stuck indoors.

In 2015, with a \$10,000 Sustainable Jersey grant funded by NJEA, Millbridge Elementary School created a 10,000-gallon rain garden to reduce the flooding. More than 800 students planted 1,900 native plants alongside the PTA, Rutgers Cooperative Extension, Burlington County Master Gardeners and the Delran High School Horticulture classes. When the project was complete, the school celebrated with a community-wide Earth Day event featuring 30 classroom presentations by sustainability experts.



**Over the last 10 years Delran Township School District has received \$46,000 in Sustainable Jersey for Schools grants.**

The results were immediate and measurable. Staff reported that students gained more than 20 additional days of outdoor playtime each year. Teachers observed that nearly two-thirds of students understood the purpose of the rain garden. More importantly, the project strengthened relationships across the district and with the municipal green team, laying the groundwork for ongoing collaboration.

Ten years later, the rain garden still adds certification points to Millbridge Elementary School's Sustainable Jersey application. It also stands as a symbol of how one project can promote a culture shift. In 2015, all four Delran Township schools achieved Sustainable Jersey certification— and have sustained it ever since.

Since the first rain garden, Delran Township Public Schools has secured \$46,000 in Sustainable Jersey grants, \$34,000 of which were funded by NJEA. The schools have used these funds to establish outdoor classrooms, expand gardens, implement water conservation projects, reduce waste and install bottle-filling stations. For a small suburban community, Delran Township Public Schools has demonstrated remarkable consistency and leadership in embedding sustainability into daily school life. The rain garden that once solved a drainage problem became the foundation of a districtwide culture of environmental stewardship.

### **Jersey City Public Schools: Grants grow capacity over time**

On the other end of the spectrum lies Jersey City Public Schools, a district of 39 schools and four early childhood centers serving one of New Jersey's largest and most diverse urban populations. Here, the path to sustainability looked different—longer, more incremental, but equally transformative.



***Sustainability becomes real when schools have the support to act.***

In 2015, just two schools—James J. Ferris High School and Renaissance Institute High School—received the district's first NJEA-funded Sustainable Jersey grants of \$2,000 each. Ferris High School used its grant for a STEAM-focused green energy project, which later inspired a new curriculum partnership between Jersey City Public Schools and Sustainable Jersey City. Renaissance Institute launched a greenhouse and farm-to-table program that gave students hands-on experience with food systems.

Other schools soon joined the effort. Dr. Michael Conti School No. 5 used a grant to develop hydroponic and aquaponic gardens that not only produced edible crops, but also engaged students in research on water filtration and urban gardening. Later, a \$10,000 Sustainable Jersey grant funded a music theater program that expanded arts access and culminated in a 2022 performance of *The Jungle Book* with student-built sets and costumes. Using a grant, seventh graders launched "Do Gooders," a program using tokens and an app to inspire and track acts of kindness while blending STEM with social-emotional learning. This grew into the Conti Kindness Initiative, uniting staff, parents and all students from Pre-K to eighth grade in lessons and activities that foster respect, empathy and a positive school culture.

Cornelia F. Bradford School No. 16 transformed an unused classroom into a mindfulness "Zen den," where students practice yoga and meditation to de-escalate conflict and improve focus. Ezra L. Nolan Middle School No. 40 created a safe space to support student well-being. At Charles P. DeFuccio School No. 39, a \$10,000 Sustainable Jersey grant helped develop the Panther Retreat, a green space and outdoor classroom designed as a calming and collaborative environment for students with autism and disabilities. "Gardening can help children with autism spectrum disorder stay relaxed and focused on



**A grant from Sustainable Jersey for Schools expanded access to the arts for students at Dr. Michael Conti School No. 5. Here students performed "The Jungle Book."**

a series of tasks," said Principal Dr. Chantel Perry, "and continued engagement with their school community strengthens their sense of belonging."

Frank R. Conwell Middle School No. 4 created a rooftop garden and renovated its atrium under the grant project "Falcons Take Over the Environment," giving students access to fresh produce and green space in a dense urban environment. At Charles E. Trefurt School No. 8, the grant funded a rooftop garden grows chickpea plants and serves as a teaching tool about climate change. "Climate change will be one of the big issues of their adult life," former principal Marisa Migliozi said. "The garden is a fun, educational way to get kids thinking about solutions."

Paul Rafalides School No. 33 used its funding to introduce students to green spaces and the impacts of climate change, while Dr. Maya Angelou School No. 20 launched "Going Green in Greenville," a project that integrated gardening and healthy eating into the curriculum. Students grew vegetables and flowers around the school grounds and on the rooftop, with community members joining in to help establish the gardens. Jersey City Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Norma Fernandez praised the project, noting, "The project allows young learners in a brick-and-mortar area of the city to enjoy the beauty, hope and benefits of gardening."

Over nearly a decade, these projects created a steady drumbeat of progress that built districtwide capacity. As a result, in 2024, Jersey City Public Schools was awarded a \$249,000 Trees for Schools grant through Sustainable Jersey for Schools to plant 84 trees across 11 school sites. This project will help increase the tree canopy in Jersey City, lowering temperatures while also reducing carbon dioxide emissions and pollution. Jersey City Public Schools reached a milestone: all 39 schools achieved Sustainable Jersey for Schools certification. In total, the district has received \$341,000 in Sustainable Jersey grants, \$60,000 of which came from NJEA funding. The journey illustrates how steady, sustained investment can empower even large, high-need districts to embrace sustainability as part of their culture and identity.

### **A decade of progress and a foundation for the future**

When Sustainable Jersey for Schools launched in 2015, the inaugural class included just 59 certified schools. Ten years later, that number has grown to 370 certified schools, with more than 1,223 schools registered to participate in the program.



Students and staff at Millbridge Elementary School celebrate the completion of a 10,000-gallon rain garden with a communitywide Earth Day event.

NJEA's sustained investment in projects like the rain garden in Delran Township School District and the Zen den in Jersey City Public Schools, has shaped the program's success. The Sustainable Jersey grants and certification process not only improve school facilities and learning environments, but also help students see themselves as problem solvers and leaders in their communities.

The formula for success turns out not to be so mysterious after all. It combines vision and leadership, technical support and guidance, and—critically—the ability to take first steps with the support of small grants. As the stories of Delran Township School District and Jersey City Public Schools demonstrate, small investments lead to big change. They unlock creativity and build lasting cultures of sustainability.

Sustainable Jersey for Schools and NJEA demonstrate that sustainability is not an extra for schools, it is a pathway to stronger schools, healthier communities and a more resilient future for New Jersey's students. 🌱

## **Sustainable Jersey for schools**

Grants and technical assistance help schools implement sustainability projects and move toward certification. The current NJEA-funded cycle offers \$180,000 in grants to public schools and districts. Applications are typically due each year in late October. Learn more at [sustainablejerseyschools.com/grants](https://sustainablejerseyschools.com/grants).

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# What's that smell?

Tackling odors and invisible hazards at work

By Dorothy Wigmore and Derek Shendell

Something stinks when you walk into school or your classroom, get on the school bus or go into a gym. Something in the washroom air makes your nose twinge. The person next to you must be using a perfume or cologne, or an “air freshener” is plugged in.

Well, maybe it's just a smell—an odor—you notice. Your eyes, nose or throat may start itching or a headache may occur.

People have different thresholds for what they can smell, from nothing to almost everything. You may be the only person to notice. Or you may be one of those people who cannot smell anything but still react to something in the air.

It's important to pay attention to these reactions or symptoms. They may be caused by an airborne hazard.

## What are common sources?

In school settings, odors can come from outside or inside buildings or buses. Besides body odors (e.g., in high-density situations, after recess or physical activity), sources include:

- 3-D printers
- “Air fresheners,” including bathroom urinal deodorizers
- Cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting products
- Construction or renovation materials
- Exhaust from diesel and other vehicles (especially idling vehicles)
- Lab or other chemicals used in classes, shops, etc.
- Moisture-damaged materials (e.g., ceiling tiles) with or without visible mold, mildew or fungi
- Personal care products (e.g., perfume, cologne, deodorant, skin care), including those in cosmetology classes (e.g., hairsprays)
- Sewage or sewer gases
- Smoking or vaping

The invisible vapors and small particles (aerosols) from these sources can spread in the air of a classroom, lab, office, or shop, and beyond. They can enter a space through open doors and windows or through mechanical ventilation (HVAC) systems, even with filtration of larger particles and dust.

Odors or smells are often considered unpleasant anywhere. But just because you can smell something doesn't mean it will cause immediate or long-term harm. Likewise, just because you can't smell something (e.g., carbon monoxide, radon) doesn't mean everything is okay.

For example, fragrances and perfumes are natural or synthetic substances intended to deliver a scent users consider pleasant or to mask an odor. Manufactured ones may include hundreds of individual chemicals simply labelled “fragrance.” Too often, their names don't appear on safety data sheets or are just called “trade secrets.”

Even worse, there is “minimal or no hazard data” for more than half the approximately 3,000 chemicals on the International Fragrance Association's Transparency List, according to a recent 2025 Campaign for Safe Cosmetics report. For chemicals with data, most can harm people and/or the environment. Reported effects include skin or eye irritation, endocrine disruption (which can lead to multiple health effects), reproductive harm and cancers.

Other things can also be harmful. For some, “clean” equals a “nice smell,” but pine or lemon scents usually come from harmful chemicals associated with asthma and other short- and long-term health effects. For more information, visit [njea.org/cleaning-to-fight-covid-19-in-schools-and-at-home](https://njea.org/cleaning-to-fight-covid-19-in-schools-and-at-home).

There are other sources. Vaping and cigarettes still are used in and around schools, despite smoke detectors. Roof tarring may be noticed, especially if it is done near HVAC

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*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 fix job-related hazards.*

*Derek G. Shendell, D.Env., MPH, is a professor at Rutgers School of Public Health and director of the New Jersey Safe Schools Program. He teaches and trains undergraduate and graduate students and K-12 staff on indoor air and environmental quality, drawing on 25 years of research and practical experience.*

air intakes. It also can get complicated when chemicals used indoors react with other substances in the air and/or on surfaces to form hazards.

### What prevents or reduces odors?

The best way to deal with any hazard is to eliminate it. Schools often have scent- or fragrance-free policies. These also protect those who are very sensitive to chemicals. There are non-toxic cleaning solutions. Asking “Is it necessary?” and taking inventory can lead to fewer and different chemicals or products.

The next best solution is fresh and filtered air. Inspect and check the HVAC system. Consider DIY or stand-alone filters for airborne particles and aerosols, including viruses. Ensure activated carbon filters are used to remove gases and vapors.

New Jersey’s unique Indoor Air Quality Standard applies to schools. (See the NJEA Health and Safety Manual for guidance on using it.) Districts must have a trained “designated person” responsible for implementation and responding to concerns.

Each year, The New Jersey Association of Designated Persons (NJADP), New Jersey Public Employees Occupational Safety and Health (PEOSH) and Rutgers School of Public Health’s Safe Schools Program offer a \$25 indoor air and environmental quality workshop for schools and administrative offices. Workshops are held once a month at 10 locations.

### What can health and safety committees do?

To identify indoor and outdoor airborne hazards:

- Inventory the chemicals (including product ingredients) used in the building(s) and check safety data sheets for their hazards, as part of walk-throughs or inspections (see [njea.org/whats-in-that-stuff](http://njea.org/whats-in-that-stuff)).
- Ask members what’s affecting them, using body maps, lunch discussions, surveys or the NJEA Health and Safety Manual.
- Work with the designated person to check ventilation systems and assess air quality (using monitors for carbon dioxide, an indicator of fresh air and airborne particles).
- Collate the information on a workplace map by visiting [njea.org/maps-reveal-the-invisible](http://njea.org/maps-reveal-the-invisible).

Use the maps and other information to decide priorities, investigate solutions and advocate for healthy air. In the process, work for solutions including:

- Scent- or fragrance-free policies
- Purchase and use of non-toxic and less-toxic chemicals and materials
- Air filters



## Resources



**Facts on fragrance: Woman's Voices for the Earth**



**Indoor air quality: Design Guidance for Education Facilities**



**Clean Air Crew, Schools**



**New Jersey Indoor Air Quality Standard**



**A Toolkit for Employers and Workers**



**Rutgers School of Public Health: New Jersey Safe Schools Program**



## Enjoy the holidays: Let NJEA Member Benefits do the shopping

The holiday season can be both a time of joy and stress for NJREA members. Let's talk about how we can spread more joy and experience less stress by using some of the benefits that come with NJREA membership.

Here are some NEA/NJEA Member Benefits programs that can help you through the holiday season.

### NJEA Access Discounts/My Deals App

NJEA Access Discounts, available through the My Deals app, is a free discount service for NJREA members. Through this program, you can purchase movie tickets, gift cards, and other retail items at discounted rates.

#### How to enroll:

1. Go to [njea.org](http://njea.org) and log in using your PIN or email and password to access members-only pages.
2. Click on "NJEA GO" in the top-left corner and select "Member Benefits."
3. On the Member Benefits site, go to the "Discounts" tab. Under the "Retail" category, select "ACCESS Discounts – Search Discounts."
4. You should now be on the ACCESS site.
5. First-time users must register with an email address and password.
6. If you have trouble logging in, check that your NJEA profile includes a valid email address. You can find your profile on [njea.org](http://njea.org).
7. For other questions, call 866-245-5292.

### Get the My Deals App

After registering your account using the steps above, download the "My Deals" app from your app store; or scroll to the bottom of the ACCESS website, and click "Get the APP."

### NEA Discount Marketplace powered by Rakuten

The NEA Discount Marketplace, powered by Rakuten, lets NJREA members shop top retailers at a discounted price while earning cash back. You can save at stores including Macy's, Nordstrom, Target, Kohl's, Ulta and more. NJREA members can sign up for a Rakuten account at [neamb.com/start](http://neamb.com/start) to access and enjoy additional cash back offers not available to general public.

### How to access the NEA Discount Marketplace:

8. Go to [neamb.com/marketplace](http://neamb.com/marketplace) to browse the NEA Discount Marketplace.
9. First-time user to the NEA Member Benefits website will be asked to register and verify your NEA membership.
10. Sign up for a Rakuten account through [neamb.com](http://neamb.com).
11. Earn cash back on qualifying purchases.
12. Get paid via PayPal or by quarterly check.

### Need support this season?

Sometimes other factors affect our holiday spirit. If you need a listening ear, AID-NJEA is here for you.

AID-NJEA is free, confidential helpline that provides phone counseling and resource referrals to help with nearly any issue. NJREA members can call 866-243-6352 (866-AID-NJEA) or email [helpline@njea.org](mailto:helpline@njea.org).

### Learn more

Join us for a Holiday Shopping and Identity Theft Tips webinar on Nov. 12 at 4:30 p.m. Register at [njea.org/mbwebinars](http://njea.org/mbwebinars).

## Around the counties 2025-26

*For questions and/or concerns, or if your county is not listed, please check your county newsletter, or reach out to your county REA for more information. For trip details, check your county newsletter.*

### Cumberland County REA

**Dec. 3:** Holiday luncheon meeting at The Millville Motorsports Park in Millville. To attend, contact Pam Garwood at 856-392-6909.

### Gloucester County REA

**Dec. 3:** Holiday luncheon at the Lakeside Professional Plaza (Suite 108) in Woodbury. Musical entertainment will be provided. Reservation deadline is TBA, and the cost is \$10 for members and \$20 for nonmembers.

### Hudson County REA

**Dec. 3:** Holiday Celebration at Chandelier Restaurant in Bayonne. Reservation deadline is Nov. 21, and the cost is \$60. To attend, contact Donna Middlebrooks at 973-610-7129.

### Hunterdon County REA

**Dec. 11:** Holiday brunch at Mountain View Chalet in Asbury. The entertainment will be provided by the North Hunterdon Choir. Reservation deadline is Dec. 1, and the cost is \$35. To attend, contact Maryann Sajor at 908-625-8911.

### Middlesex County REA

**Dec. 4:** Holiday luncheon meeting at The Grand Marquis in Old Bridge. Entertainment will be provided by the Sayreville Elementary 3rd Grade Holiday Chorus. Reservation deadline is Nov. 23, and the cost is \$46. To attend, contact Susan Jaysnovitch at 732-925-1606.

### Monmouth County REA

**Dec. 9:** Winter luncheon meeting at Gramercy at Lakeside Manor in Hazlet. Introduction of a new slate of officers and nominations from the floor. Reservation deadline is Nov. 28, and the cost is \$45. To attend, contact Debbie Adamchak at 848-459-2672.

### Morris County REA

**Dec. 10:** General luncheon meeting at the Birchwood Manor in Whippany. Entertainment will be provided by the Frelinhuysen Middle School Choir. Reservation deadline is Dec. 1, and the cost is \$35 for members and \$55 for guests. To attend, contact John Williams at 609-504-9681.

### Ocean County REA

**Dec. 4:** Winter luncheon meeting at The Clarion Hotel in Toms River. Holiday entertainment to be announced. Reservation deadline is Nov. 22, and the cost is \$32. To attend, contact Pam Raynor at 862-268-5210.

### Passaic County REA

**Dec. 10:** Winter luncheon meeting at The Brownstone in Paterson. The meeting is for members only. To attend, contact Karen Monaco at 201-317-6869.

### Salem County REA

**Dec. 8:** Christmas luncheon meeting at Woodstown Diner. The entertainment will be provided by the Woodstown High School Chamber Choir. Reservation deadline is Dec. 1, and the cost is \$20. To attend, contact Rosemma Ward at 856-467-4795.

### Somerset County REA

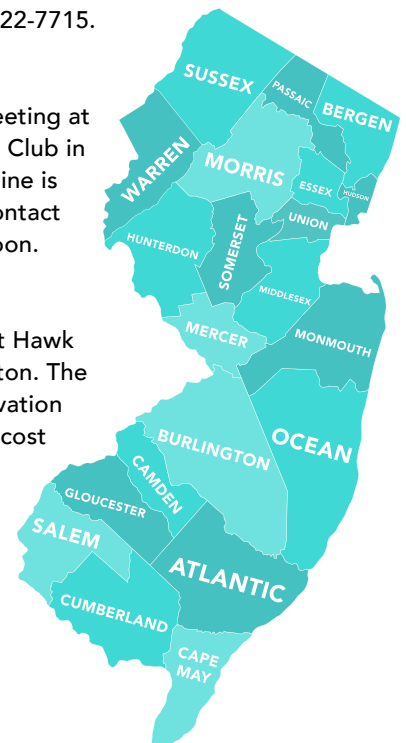
**Dec. 3:** General meeting and luncheon at Somerville Elks Lodge in Bridgewater. Reservation deadline is Nov. 26, and the cost is \$28. To attend, contact Kathy Kapp at 908-722-7715.

### Sussex County REA

**Dec. 1:** Holiday luncheon meeting at Farmstead Golf and Country Club in Lafayette. Reservation deadline is TBA, and the cost is TBA. Contact information will be shared soon.

### Warren County REA

**Dec. 3:** Luncheon meeting at Hawk Pointe Golf Club in Washington. The entertainment is TBA. Reservation deadline is Nov. 26, and the cost is \$33. To attend, contact Deb Polhemus at 908-328-8817 or register go to [warrencountyrea.org/meetings](http://warrencountyrea.org/meetings).





## Including all school staff in professional learning opportunities

By Dawn Howlen

Professional development has historically focused on classroom teachers, but schools function as interconnected ecosystems where teachers and educational support professionals (ESPs) such as paraprofessionals, nurses, counselors, bus drivers, custodians, cafeteria staff, secretaries and the entire school team—all contribute to student success. When professional development excludes these groups, it misses the chance to create a unified, schoolwide culture of learning and care, which in turn affects all stakeholders.

ESPs manage essential responsibilities around safety, behavior and social-emotional support, yet they are frequently underrepresented in professional learning opportunities. For example, paraprofessionals work closely with students with disabilities; however, they may not receive the same instructional training as teachers, leading to inconsistencies in support. By including these roles in professional development, schools can promote coherence and continuity in student experiences. Because ESPs play such a vital role in educating students, it is imperative that they have opportunities to grow and learn alongside their colleagues.

Our NJEA PDII Virtual Series for 2025–26 reflects an important step toward addressing this need. The inclusion of sessions specifically designed for ESPs, such as Intro to AI for ESPs, demonstrates a commitment to ensuring that professional learning opportunities are accessible to all staff. Other sessions on wellness, equity, mindfulness and navigating bias are broadly relevant and welcome participants across school roles, emphasizing the idea that everyone in a school community benefits from ongoing professional learning opportunities.

We are also hosting a book club for *The Anxious Generation* by Jonathan Haidt. This book club is open to all educators who wish to join a community focused on better understanding the impact of phones and social media on students. This is a universal issue, and the book club will help bridge the gap between what we think

we know and what the research actually shows. These conversations cannot happen without ESPs.

Another important session, Road to Wellness, provides tools and resources to help participants cope with today's ever-changing educational climate. While we often provide a safe space for students, we sometimes forget to address that need for ourselves. This workshop explores the importance of self-care and offers small, practical changes that can be incorporated into daily routines.

Expanding professional development in this way communicates that every role matters, building shared language, common expectations and a collective investment in student outcomes. Differentiated pathways within a shared professional development framework where ESPs and teachers alike can learn both alongside one another and in role-specific contexts strengthen schools as holistic learning communities.

ESPs are often the first adults students interact with in the morning and the last they see at the end of the day. They are an essential part of students' daily lives and are often residents of the communities in which they work. This gives them a unique and expansive perspective on the needs and strengths of the school community they serve.

Recognizing and elevating this perspective through professional learning not only honors the value of ESPs, but also fosters deeper collaboration across all school roles. When every staff member has access to growth opportunities, schools move closer to becoming truly inclusive, supportive environments where every adult feels empowered and every student benefits.

We invite you to explore the 2025–26 PDII Virtual Series and join us in creating a culture of professional learning that uplifts every role in education.

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*Dawn Howlen is an associate director in the NJEA Professional Development and Instructional Issues Division. She can be reached at [dhowlen@njea.org](mailto:dhowlen@njea.org).*



### NJEA PDII Virtual Series

Join us as we delve into topics for all members.

Scan this QR code for a comprehensive listing of virtual workshop programs for the 2025-26 year.



## FUTURE EDUCATORS ASSOCIATION BACK IN ACTION AT MONTCLAIR STATE

After six years of inactivity brought on by the pandemic, Montclair State University has reactivated its Future Educators Association (FEA) chapter, launching with an impressive turnout at its Welcome Back Bash. The revival was spearheaded by Abigail Rodriguez, a senior majoring in political science with a minor in psychology.

Rodriguez's passion for advocacy was strengthened at the Garden State Equality Conference this past April, where she connected with NJEA representative Eda Ferrante and was inspired by her leadership and commitment to education. Drawing on her experience as former Student Government Association president at the County College of Morris, Rodriguez has brought that same energy and vision to Montclair as president of the FEA and NJAEA chapter ambassador.

Rodriguez leads alongside a dedicated executive board: Tyla Morin (psychology), Amanda Fleischer (elementary education), Carlos Aguilar (child advocacy), Gabe Vaquez (elementary education), Morgan Beatty (elementary education) and Shannon Dimondas (biology).

Together, they have worked to build a club focused on empowering future educators and addressing issues across the spectrum of education. Already this fall, the FEA has planned several initiatives, including Motivational Mondays, a psychoeducational program, a bake sale to fund student scholarships, a Scholastic book fair, a



Montclair FEA President Abigail Rodriguez with students at the Montclair Welcome Back Bash.

school supply drive and a therapy dog event. In addition, the NJAEA launched its new podcast on Oct. 11, with Rodriguez contributing fresh ideas and energy to the project.

The rapid growth and success of Montclair's FEA demonstrates the dedication and vision of these student leaders. With a strong foundation in advocacy, education and service, the chapter is poised to inspire, uplift and prepare the next generation of educators while promoting both personal and professional growth across the campus community.

## CONTACT YOUR LEGISLATORS TO SUPPORT ASPIRING EDUCATORS

New Jersey is experiencing a shortage of teaching staff, resulting in a staffing crisis in its public schools. The costs students incur to become teachers serve as a disincentive for some and a barrier for others. We need to help students and families afford the costs of the college education required to teach, making the profession more attractive.

A2362, sponsored by Assemblyman Chris Tully (D-Bergen) and Michelle Drulis (D-Hunterdon/Somerset), establishes the New Jersey Student Teacher Scholarship Program. Under the bill, the program would provide scholarships to students completing required clinical practice through a certificate of eligibility with an advanced standing educator preparation program at an institution of higher education in the state. A student is eligible to receive a scholarship of up to \$7,200 for

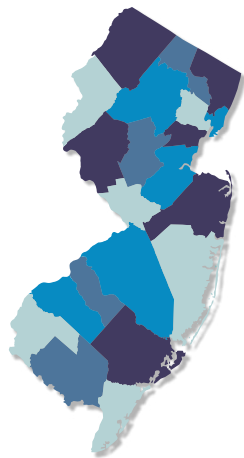
each semester of full-time clinical practice completed in a school in the state.

### Act now

Send a message to your legislators to let them know that we support those aspiring to enter the profession. Ask them to co-sponsor the bill and place it on the agenda as soon as the Legislature returns to session.



Scan the QR code or visit [actioncenter.njea.org](https://actioncenter.njea.org) to contact your state legislators.



# SUSSEX TO CAPE MAY

Workshops and  
conferences

## highlights

Math, Science  
and History

## SHOWCASE

Showcase experiences have been endorsed by NJEA's Professional Development Institute and are also posted on [njea.org](http://njea.org). Those seeking endorsement of a professional development experience they will provide should email Dawn Howlen at [dhowlen@njea.org](mailto:dhowlen@njea.org) and Tamanyka Booker at [tbooker@njea.org](mailto:tbooker@njea.org) in NJEA's Professional Development Division.

## MATH, SCIENCE, COMPUTER EDUCATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE

### Professional development opportunities from Rutgers CMSCE

The Center for Mathematics, Science, and Computer Education (CMSCE) was established at Rutgers University in 1984. Its mission is to improve math, science and computer education programs in New Jersey and nationwide. CMSCE provides professional development in these subject areas and in cross-disciplinary climate change education for grades K–12. For the remainder of the 2025-26 academic year, CMSCE is offering over 20 workshops within these categories:

- Climate Change Learning Collaborative
- Math
- Design Thinking
- OpenSciEd

Fees for various workshops vary as listed on CMSCE's website. For workshops associated with the Climate Change Learning Collaborative, New Jersey public school teachers are eligible for stipends, with amounts that vary by workshop, if the program is offered outside the teacher's contracted hours. Substitute coverage pays, up to a specified amount, is provided for teachers attending sessions during contracted hours. The grants are funded

through an New Jersey Department of Education Climate Change Grant. Teachers must complete a post-event survey to receive compensation for the eligible climate change sessions. Location: All registrants will receive an email the week prior to the scheduled workshop to inform them of the session location. Please don't follow the location given at the time of registration because that may change due to ability to book a room.

Registration and details: For workshop listings, fees and more information, visit [cmsce.rutgers.edu/pd-teachers](http://cmsce.rutgers.edu/pd-teachers).

## MORE TO LEARN

### NJCHE TO HOST 31ST ANNUAL HISTORY CONFERENCE AT PRINCETON

The New Jersey Council for History Education (NJCHE) will host its 31st annual History Conference on Friday, Dec. 5, 2025, at Princeton University.

The program will open with Janet Chen, professor of history at Princeton University, who will present *The Search for Modern China: Writing History in the Xi Jinping Era*.

The second session will feature Columbia University Professor Eric Foner, who will discuss *The Second Founding: How the Civil War and Reconstruction Remade the Constitution*.

The final session will be led by Manisha Sinha, American history chair at the University of Connecticut. Her talk will focus on *The Rise and Fall of the Second American Republic: Reconstruction, 1860-1920*.

In addition to the presentations, several exhibitors will display instructional resources, and Labyrinth Books will offer titles from the featured speakers.

NJCHE is a registered professional development provider with the New Jersey Department of Education (Provider No. 489). Attendees will receive certificates for five hours of professional development credit.

The cost of the conference is \$95, with a reduced rate of \$50 for retired educators. A continental breakfast will be served at East Pyne Hall, and participants will find many lunch options along Nassau Street.

Advance registration is recommended, as past conferences have drawn more than 400 participants. Registration is due by Nov. 21, 2025. For details, including online registration and credit card payment, visit [njche.org/fallconference](http://njche.org/fallconference).

Questions may be directed to [njcheconference@gmail.com](mailto:njcheconference@gmail.com).



## Highland Park Labor-Management team tackles school hours

### Student arrival and dismissal times adjusted to reflect research

By Kimberly Crane

It is a virtual inevitability that Labor Management Collaborative (LMC) founders and members will eventually move out of their roles. Stakeholder job changes, retirements or other personnel shifts can make an LMC vulnerable to losing momentum and support or dissolving altogether.

However, role changes can also infuse new perspectives and ideas into an already robust LMC modality. Whether the reach of an LMC expands or contracts during member transitions depends on the district norms already in place.

#### Preparing for change

Cherry Hill Education Association (CHEA) Past President Steve Redfearn spent countless hours building the district's LMC structures in collaboration with CHEA members, Cherry Hill Public Schools (CHPS) administration and the CHPS Board of Education.

When Redfearn accepted a position as an NJEA UniServ representative in region 2, he wanted to ensure that the CHPS LMC didn't lose momentum due to his absence.

#### What must be in place?

Redfearn credits the structure of CHPS LMC meetings and teams—already in place in the calendar—as a crucial element to the program's continued productivity and growth.

"The biggest piece of sustainability lies in district norms and structures," says Redfearn. "In Cherry Hill, we have a district group that meets once a month, and every school has their own LMC team."

CHPS association leadership and members also sit on interview committees for new administrative hires. This practice provides a forum where professionals coming into the district can share their knowledge on the LMC process.

"It becomes obvious through the interview process which candidates have a collaborative philosophy, and possibly even have LMC experience," says Redfearn. "It is an important part of the district's vetting process of both administrative and new member hires."

The CHPS Board of Education also regularly reports

out to the public on the progress and goals being achieved through LMC work. Having board members on a districtwide LMC team maximizes the potential for positive outcomes for the district, staff and students.

#### Creative content and visuals

Each school building in Cherry Hill has a large illustration of a tree with cut out cherries. The visuals were constructed by the LMC teams as a reminder of what has been achieved through collaboration. Staff members can see the goals reached and write new goals on the cherries.

The CHPS board room also has a cherry tree on the wall that community members can view as a continuing visual reminder of the work accomplished through the power of collaboration.

#### New leadership is up to the challenge

Redfearn feels that CHEA's new president, Waleska Batista Arias, will not only continue to sustain the LMC culture and climate in CHPS, but will also help the district surpass current milestones.

"The hope is always that the next leader will be even better than you were," says Redfearn, "I'm confident that will be the case with Waleska Batista Arias taking over as president."

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*Kimberly Crane is an NJEA Communications Consultant and former president of the Highland Park Education Association. She can be reached at [kcrane@njea.org](mailto:kcrane@njea.org).*

*For more information on the New Jersey Labor Management Collaborative email Mike Ritzius, NJEA liaison to the New Jersey LMC at [Mike@lmcpartnerships.org](mailto:Mike@lmcpartnerships.org).*



Read more about  
the CHEA LMC



LMC Results

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*Rosemarie Blumenstein  
current CASA / lifelong advocate*

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Monmouth County – [CASAOFMONMOUTH.ORG](http://CASAOFMONMOUTH.ORG)  
Ocean County – [CASAOFCEANCOUNTY.ORG](http://CASAOFCEANCOUNTY.ORG)  
Passaic and Union Counties – [CASAPASSAICUNION.ORG](http://CASAPASSAICUNION.ORG)  
South Central NJ – [CASASNJ.ORG](http://CASASNJ.ORG)  
(Burlington, Cumberland, Gloucester, Mercer and Salem Counties)

# TWO-SPIRIT HISTORIES AND PRESENT-DAY ERASURES

By Amy Moran, Ph.D.

It's Indigenous Peoples' Month, and we acknowledge and honor the existence of trans, nonbinary and Two-Spirit people who have existed throughout history in the U.S. and around the globe.

Adopted in 1990 at a First Nations conference in Winnipeg, the term "Two-Spirit" is an umbrella term for myriad manifestations of gender identity and expression. Along with social roles and community responsibilities, Two-Spirit people exist within North American Indigenous communities and outside of masculine male and feminine female identities. Two-Spirit people are acknowledged and honored by Aleut, Choctaw, Illinois, Inuit, Lakota, Ojibwa, Omaha, Paiute, Shoshone and Zuni and dozens of other First Nations peoples. Globally, other Indigenous groups also have documented transgender and nonbinary people across history to the present, including peoples in India, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, South Africa, Thailand and Uganda.

Despite what the current U.S. federal government promotes, sex and gender are not the same thing. There are three "sex" categories—female, intersex and male—based on a combination of one's genetic code, physical anatomy and endocrine/hormonal makeup. And there are untold variations on gender identity and expression, which are not anatomical at all. The spectrum of gender from feminine to masculine is wide, and not all people identify with or experience gender along a spectrum.

Unfortunately, the schism in our nation between "liberty and justice for all" and current ideals held by White House personnel and lawmakers promoting biological inaccuracies about sex and gender—long debunked by decades of social science—works to force people to exist only in the "feminine female" and "masculine male" binary. That is neither liberty nor justice for queer people and our expansive communities.

Currently, according to the FBI website, gender identity is a listed demographic protected against hate crimes, but recently an FBI trainee was fired because of the Progress Pride rainbow flag on their desk that included trans pride colors. Moreover, the authors of Project 2025, the



Two-spirit flag

playbook for the current federal administration's agenda, are pressuring the FBI to categorize transgender people as "nihilistic violent extremists." This characterization does not match the reality of mass gun violence. Of the 5,000 mass shootings tracked by The Gun Violence Archive between Jan. 1, 2013 and Sept. 15, 2025, the number of suspects confirmed as transgender is five.

Although endangered lives of transgender, nonbinary and Two-Spirit people are too-often reduced to "identity politics," we would do well to recognize that harms to minority communities are often indicators of how much fascist authoritarianism a country's people will tolerate.

While harms are coming to queer, immigrant, and Black and brown communities—independent from and intersecting with each other—they serve to distract from the many other unpopular and unconstitutional actions of the Trump administration. Not least among these is the announcement by Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth that the long-deceased U.S. soldiers who massacred hundreds of Lakota people at Wounded Knee in 1890 would retain Medals of Honor, affirming the nation's racist, genocidal past and those soldiers' roles in it.

Some good news, however, is that Gov. Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan, where the Ojibwe nation hails from, proclaimed October 2025 as Transgender Empowerment Month and New Jersey remains steadfast in its principles of inclusive education practices. As such, let's continue to affirm all students in our classes, regardless of gender identity/expression and sexual orientation, and stay mindful of oppression in our midst.

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*Amy Moran, Ph. D. (she/her) is an out queer educator, advocate and activist working to make education inclusive and affirming for all students and colleagues. She is a 31-year middle school teacher, was a high school GSA advisor for 16 years, served on NJEA's Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Committee and received NJEA's Equality Champion Award.*



Scan the QR code for resources and share how you're acknowledging and honoring Two-Spirit people during Indigenous Peoples' Month at [rainbowconnectionnjea@gmail.com](mailto:rainbowconnectionnjea@gmail.com).



## From the margins to the classroom: Turning experience into equitable practice

By Beverley Senior and Dr. DaQuan Bashir

Equity and inclusion in education shouldn't just exist in theory—they should exist in practice, by connecting content to learners' lived experiences. They should also involve actively working with the learner (and their community) to ensure they have what they need to succeed in the academic space. Too often, what happens in schools is shaped by the culture, biases and blind spots of the dominant narrative, leaving some learners unseen or unheard. In this piece, NJEA Justice and Equity Fellowship alumna Beverley Senior reflects on her own experiences as a student and highlights practical ways educators can transform moments of exclusion into practice that foster belonging, respect and cultural relevance for all learners.

### School culture and climate

**Experience:** My elementary school experience in Catholic schools was bland for the most part. I never really identified with the overarching culture or heritage of the dominant white population. My earliest primary years were more fun since I attended a neighborhood public school until the age of 6. There were more students who looked like me and although culturally we were not the same, I appreciated the familiar skin tones of peers I would also see on the weekends. Soon after first grade, I would be 'the only one' of color in my educational settings on more occasions than I would have liked. While it might not have seemed as bad in some instances, I didn't really understand the implications of race until I entered high school. There is some truth to ignorance being blissful.

**Practice:** To counter Senior's experience, a facilitator of learning should consider the diverse identities and perspectives that exist within an academic space. Even if said space is predominantly or completely made up of learners from one specific racial group. There are still unique lived experiences and perspectives within that group. It is up to us to create opportunities for learners to explore, highlight and discuss things that matter to them.

---

*Beverley Senior is president of the Educational Secretaries Association, a New Jersey-based organization for paraprofessionals.*

*Dr. DaQuan Bashir is NJEA's Associate Director of Human and Civil Rights, Equity and Governance, coordinator of the Fellowship Program.*



Beverley Senior



Dr. DaQuan Bashir

By doing this, our space and lessons become more culturally relevant as it connects the learning to a learner's lived experience. Visual representations are needed to reflect the diversity of the learners (and of the world) in the academic space. But we shouldn't stop there. Just posting Women or Black or Brown faces up on walls isn't the end of it. We must make sure we are truthfully telling their stories as well as it relates to the context and content of the academic space.

### Loss of cultural heritage:

**Experience:** I have no memories of being 'seen' during my primary school experience. I remember learning Black History during Black History Month but never identified with it as my history. We didn't talk about what we knew individually about Black history or what it meant to us as students, rather we were supplied with a menu of Black persons to research.

The standard collection of reserved Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth to name a few. Book reports and cookie cutter type presentations are what I remember most. No Bob Marley, Miss Lou Bennet Coverley or Marcus Garvey for me.

**Practice:** To counter Senior's experience, it is essential in planning to actively integrate varying truthful narratives year-round. This does not mean a facilitator of learning needs to include every single heritage or culture, but we must start somewhere. Black history should not be relegated to just February, just as Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) history should not be highlighted only in May.

While acknowledging that these months of cultural heritage celebration are important, we must also recognize that people exist outside of these months as well. Furthermore, it is our

responsibility to encourage research on—and highlight—lesser-known figures who have had an impact on our society and the world, as related to the content and context of the academic space.

## Bullying

**Experience:** Looking back, I can see how microaggressions and stereotypes associated with Black people were applied to me. Although I identified as West Indian, my white schoolmates made no distinction. My hair was long but clearly not of a similar texture to theirs which prompted comments like, “you have nice hair for a Black girl.” On an occasion or two my long ponytails were tugged at to see if they were “real.” My skin tone was brown with a reddish hue for which I often heard that I had pretty skin for a Black girl, followed by “Are you mixed?” This was familiar to me since it was also my experience in my neighborhood.

**Practice:** To counter Senior’s experience, an academic space that is grounded in community and inclusion is what needs to be built. Occurrence of microaggressions can be reduced by setting the tone of the academic space. That

starts with establishing norms or community agreements that are codeveloped with learners. Codeveloping these goes a long way toward gaining buy-in of observance of said norms. Include them in the process and discussion of setting these norms/community agreements.

During development, educators should lead exercises around what learners envision the academic space to be. How should it operate for all learners. These discussions shouldn’t be “one and done,” but rather an ongoing conversation or reminder of what these norms/community agreements are and why they exist. This is particularly vital when microaggressions arise. The committing of microaggressions should be addressed in the moment with care and intention.

The decision to address everyone in the space or the individual is a determination that should be made by the educator while relying on knowledge of learners and culture of the academic space. To emphasize, these conversations should not be dismissed. They should be handled as they arise. Ongoing professional development is critical to having the necessary language, knowledge and courage to engage in these types of conversation without causing further harm.



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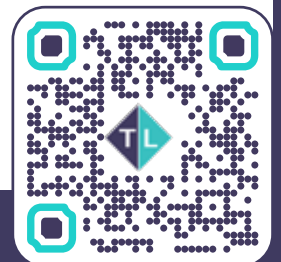
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### Webinars

#### Holiday Hacks

Maximize your NJEA membership and attend the upcoming webinar, "Holiday Hacks, Car Buying and Identity Theft Tips," on Nov. 12, 2025, at 4:30 p.m. Register at [njea.org/mbwebinars](http://njea.org/mbwebinars).

For even more information, resources, and discounts: [memberbenefits.njea.org](http://memberbenefits.njea.org)

Questions? Email Beth Buonsante at [bbuonsante@njea.org](mailto:bbuonsante@njea.org).

# NJEA Delegate Assembly

## A note about the minutes

On pages 46-51, you will find the minutes for three meetings of the NJEA Delegate Assembly (D.A.): May 17, 2025 and Sept. 9 and Nov. 11, 2023. You may have noticed recently that some rather dated minutes have been published.

The D.A. formulates NJEA policy. It includes more than 120 representatives proportionally elected from each county and unit (e.g., Higher Education, NJREA, NJAEA, non-classroom teacher). You can find your county or unit's representatives by logging on to [njea.org](http://njea.org) and clicking on "Committees" from the website dashboard.

The *NJEA Review* is constitutionally required to print D.A. minutes when they become available for publication. Due to a backlog in publication, the D.A. passed a New Business Item (NBI) establishing a timeline for publication of minutes. You can find that NBI near the end of the minutes for the May 17 meeting below.

Going forward the *NJEA Review* will publish the most recent minutes available, followed by older minutes.

## May 17, 2025

The NJEA Delegate Assembly met at the Hyatt Regency, New Brunswick, 2 Albany Street, New Brunswick, N.J., on May 17, 2025, at 9:30 a.m.

The roll call and the seating of delegates was taken by Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson. There were 112 members present and a quorum was met. Alternates were seated as follows: A. Policastro for Lota (Bergen); M. Ryan for Mendelson (Bergen); A. Rapetti for Warren (Bergen); S. Stinson for Brown (Camden); J. Long for Campisi (Camden); M. Byock for Lobasso (Essex); R. Geissler for Mooney (Hudson); K. Beggiano for Rocha (Hunterdon); T. Taylor for Siegel (Mercer); N. Coy-Bush for Vistein (Monmouth); M. Eckert for Leitzel (Morris); N. Jubert for Pizzuto (Ocean); T. Johnson for Gentchos (Passaic); T. Pipkin for Sarti (Passaic); A. Tighe for Castiglione (Salem); R. Childers for Espinoza (Somerset); and P. Trentanelli for Bakker (Sussex).

Absent without alternates were the following: Houk (Atlantic); Del Popolo (Middlesex); Montanti (Monmouth); Ryan (Ocean); Fields (Passaic); Kebrdle (Passaic); Klikus (Union); and Nicolescu (NJAEA).

John Zurka, NJREA, Union County, gave the inspirational message and along with President Spiller, led the delegation in the flag salute.

### President's report

Spiller highlighted the following:

#### *Legislative advocacy*

- NJEA is actively pushing for increased public education funding and stronger protections for educators.
- The organization is monitoring and opposing charter school expansion legislation that could divert resources from public school districts.

#### *Budget priorities*

- Emphasis on mental health support, school safety, and educator recruitment and retention.
- NJEA is advocating for fair compensation and benefits for all education professionals.

#### *Political engagement*

- Encouraged members to stay engaged in local and state elections.
- Highlighted the importance of grassroots organizing and member mobilization to influence policy.

#### *Member empowerment*

- Reinforced NJEA's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion.
- Promoted the development of affinity groups and leadership pipelines for underrepresented members.

#### *Reflection and gratitude*

- As this was his final D.A. as president, Spiller expressed deep appreciation for the support and collaboration of NJEA members.
- He reflected on the progress made during his tenure and the importance of continuing the fight for public education.

### Vice president's report

Vice President Steve Beatty highlighted the following:

#### *Budget priorities*

- Beatty emphasized NJEA's commitment to fiscal responsibility while ensuring member needs are met.
- He highlighted investments in member engagement, professional development, and advocacy efforts.

#### *Member support and outreach*

- Focused on expanding support systems for educators, especially those in under-resourced districts.

- Promoted initiatives to increase member participation in union activities and leadership development.

#### *Legislative and political action*

- Reinforced the importance of member involvement in legislative advocacy.
- Encouraged delegates to stay informed and active in local and state-level political efforts.

#### *Gratitude and collaboration*

- Beatty expressed appreciation for the collaborative work of NJEA staff, officers and members.

### **Secretary-treasurer's report**

Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson delivered the NJEA fiscal report.

Robertson highlighted the following:

#### *ESP Dues Subcommittee Update*

- Robertson shared progress on the Education Support Professionals (ESP) dues structure review.
- The subcommittee is working to ensure equity and fairness in dues for ESP members, recognizing their vital role in schools.

#### *Delegate Assembly Rules Committee*

- Described three proposed rule changes (See "Reports with Recommendations" below).

#### *Member engagement and representation*

- Emphasized the importance of inclusive representation and member voice in NJEA governance.
- Acknowledged feedback from members about UniServ turnover and the need for consistent support.

#### *Advocacy and Organizing*

- Encouraged members to stay active in local organizing efforts and policy advocacy.
- Reinforced NJEA's commitment to grassroots empowerment and community partnerships.

### **Executive Director's report**

Executive Director Kevin Kelleher highlighted the following:

- **Staff Recognition:** Celebrated NJEA staff milestones and retirements, honoring their years of service and contributions.
- **Affirmative Action Report:** Presented the report, reaffirming NJEA's commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion.
- **Collaboration and unity:** Emphasized the importance of teamwork between staff and members in advancing NJEA's mission.
- **Appreciation:** Expressed gratitude for the dedication and hard work of NJEA staff in supporting educators and public education.

### **Nondelegate speakers**

Isaac Lin (Mercer County) voiced concerns about NJEA's engagement with novice educators, noting that the union's messaging leans too heavily on political endorsements and is not relevant to the challenges educators face.

Jeremiah Kleckner (Middlesex County) raised concerns about NJEA's overall messaging and its ability to resonate with members across the state and called for greater transparency and responsiveness from leadership.

Lori Lalama (Passaic County) addressed concerns about the high turnover of UniServ field representatives in her region, noting that the frequent changes have disrupted continuity and weakened member support.

Eileen Healey (Gloucester County) raised concerns about the instability caused by frequent UniServ staff turnover in her region.

Kelleyann Morris (NJREA) spoke about the importance of maintaining strong local representation and continuity within NJEA's support structures. She highlighted challenges faced by her district due to frequent changes in UniServ field staff.

### **Reports of committees without recommendations**

#### **Human and Civil Rights Committee (HCR)**

The HCR Committee reaffirmed its commitment to fostering equity, inclusion, and social justice within NJEA and across New Jersey schools. The report highlighted recent events and initiatives aimed at promoting cultural awareness and supporting marginalized communities, including workshops and recognition programs. The committee emphasized collaboration with other NJEA bodies and external partners to advance human rights advocacy. Members were encouraged to engage with HCR efforts and bring forward issues affecting underrepresented groups, as the committee outlined strategic goals focused on education, outreach, and systemic change.

### **Reports of committees without recommendations**

#### **Budget Committee**

The Budget Committee report presented by NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson outlined a budget for the 2025-26 fiscal year

Peter Helff (Higher Education) moved the five recommendations of the Budget Committee in block.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 1:** that the New Jersey Education Association operating budget for the 2025-26 fiscal year in the amount of \$147,242,400 as listed in the 2025-26 budget proposal Appendix A be adopted.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 2:** that the New Jersey Education Association Pride public relations budget for the 2025-26 fiscal year in the amount of \$14,021,800 as listed in the 2025-26 budget proposal Appendix A be adopted.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 3:** that the New Jersey Education Association Capital Fund budget for the 2025-26 fiscal year in the amount of \$7,235,100 as listed in the 2025-26 budget proposal Appendix A be adopted.

**RECOMMENDATION NO. 4:** that staying with the practice of NJEA, 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. 5:** 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. 12

The five recommendations were adopted unanimously in block.

#### Delegate Assembly Rules Committee

The Delegate Assembly Rules Committee presented three recommendations aimed at improving transparency, efficiency, and informed decision-making within NJEA's governance process. Those recommendations were:

**RULE RECOMMENDATION NO. 1:** that NJEA Delegate Assembly Rule A 14b and Rule A 15a., be amended as follows: Rule 14b.

New Business forms are available [at the Rules Committee table] electronically on the NJEA website and via email upon request.

All New Business submissions must include the following information and should not exceed one page:

- viii. Date of meeting
- ix. Topic
- x. Name of individual submitting item
- xi. Individual's county or other unit of representation
- xii. Individual's home and mobile phone numbers and e-mail address
- xiii. The draft text of the motion
- xiv. A brief rationale
- x. Budgetary impact – indicating the following:
  - 1) Does the proposal require a monetary expenditure in excess of the current budget - Yes or No
  - 2) If "yes," (a) state the money amount to be expended  
(b) state the budget line item to which expenses are to be charged.

Rule 15a.

New Business must be submitted [in writing to the Delegate Assembly Rules Committee] **electronically via email to the D.A. Rules Committee staff contact or via the NJEA website** no later than [one and a half (1½) hours after the opening of the Delegate Assembly meeting for in-person meetings.] **the Thursday preceding the D.A. meeting.**

#### B. PUBLICATION OF D.A. MEETING MINUTES

For recommendations 2 and 3, listed below, which clarify Rule 24, the D.A. Rules Committee summarized NJEA bylaws

concerning the publication of D.A. minutes in the association's official publication, the NJEA Review. The committee noted the long delays, some as long as two years, between meetings and publication. The recommendations seek to more closely align with the rule to print a record of D.A. proceedings "as soon as possible after the meeting."

**RULE RECOMMENDATION NO. 2:** that the Executive Director shall establish a schedule for the publication and posting of all past D.A. meeting minutes.

**RULE RECOMMENDATION NO. 3:** that all future D.A. meeting minutes shall be published and posted on the NJEA website within six (6) months of the D.A. meeting and that D.A. Rule A 24 be amended as follows:

Rule A 24.

A Stenographic record of each meeting will be on file, with copies available for inspection by any member of the Association, in the office of the Association. Minutes of the meeting, prepared by the Executive Director and based on said record, shall be printed in the official publication of the Association [as soon as possible] within six (6) months after the meeting.

John Zurka, Chair of the D.A. Rules Committee, moved all three recommendations.

Motions for approvals:

Howard Lipoff (Bergen County) requested that the three recommendations be voted on separately, which was accepted without objection.

Barbara Rheault (Atlantic County) moved to refer Recommendation No. 1 back to the Rules Committee for further review, and the motion was seconded by James Frazier, Union County. The motion to refer was defeated. Recommendation No. 1 was not adopted.

Recommendation No. 2 was adopted.

April Stevenson-Kinder (Cumberland County) moved to amend Recommendation No. 3 to change the publication timeline for minutes from six months to three months, and the motion was seconded by Tiffanie ThrBak (Cumberland County).

The amendment was adopted.

The text would thus read as follows:

A Stenographic record of each meeting will be on file, with copies available for inspection by any member of the Association, in the office of the Association. Minutes of the meeting, prepared by the Executive Director and based on said record, shall be printed in the official publication of the Association [as soon as possible] within three (3) months after the meeting.

Recommendation No. 3 was adopted as amended.

#### New Business

##### New Business Item #1

John Coniglio (Morris County) moved that NJEA "shall create and promote a "Campaign Hub" on www.njea.org, where all candidates can post their campaign materials for NJEA members

to view during each election cycle as long as it does not conflict with the NJEA Elections Rules.”

Gene Woods (Hudson County) moved to refer the NBI to the Elections Committee. Sandra Herrington (Mercer County) seconded.

The motion to refer was adopted.

#### **New Business Item #2**

Stephen Whitehead (Gloucester County) moved that “NJEA will conduct a feasibility study to determine the cost, logistics, and implementation framework for providing qualified American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters and/or captioning services at all official NJEA meetings, conventions, and professional development events where members are present, including but not limited to regional, statewide, and representative assembly gatherings.”

Salvatore Randazzo (Gloucester County) seconded the motion.

NBI #2 was adopted.

#### **For the Good of the Order**

NJEA President Sean Spiller recognized all D.A. members who were terming out as this was their last D.A. meeting and asked for a round of applause for them.

Spiller and several members reflected on the significance of the moment as Spiller chaired his final D.A. meeting. Spiller expressed gratitude to the members, officers, and staff for their support throughout his tenure, highlighting key accomplishments such as Chapter 78 relief, ESP Job Justice, and pension funding. Vice President Steve Beatty and Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson honored Spiller’s leadership and legacy, with Robertson noting the historic milestone of Spiller being the first Black man to serve as NJEA secretary-treasurer, vice president, and president.

Aiat Oraby (Passaic County) urged NJEA leadership to reconsider the decision to remove the overnight format of the MLR Equity Alliance Conference from the budget. Oraby suggested exploring creative or phased approaches to restore the overnight experience without compromising equity or consistency across other NJEA programs.

Anthony Rizzo (Burlington County) announced a \$5,000 donation from his county’s members to the NJEA Member Benefits Disaster Relief Fund.

Spiller asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting, which was moved and seconded by members of the Delegate Assembly. The motion carried. The meeting was adjourned at 1:18 p.m.

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## **Sept. 9, 2025**

The NJEA Delegate Assembly met at the Doubletree, Somerset, 200 Atrium Drive, Somerset, N.J. on Sept. 9, 2023, at 9:30 a.m.

The meeting was called to order by President Sean M. Spiller.

The roll call and the seating of delegates was taken by Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson. There were 122 members

present and a quorum was met. Alternates were seated as follows: J. Clemen for Salazar, (Bergen); Williams for Foremny (Burlington); Dedalonis for Giannotti (Essex); Aregood for Moore-Suggs (Gloucester); Barilka for Scott (Monmouth); Jubert for Morgan (Ocean); Fields for Wilson (Passaic); Trentanelli for Smith (Sussex); Elliott for Durkin (Warren); Farhat for Ferlise (Higher Ed); and Nicolescu for Yuro (Pre-Service NJEA).

Absent without alternates were the following: Mungro (Camden).

Sandra Herrington from Mercer County, gave the Inspirational Message and along with President Spiller, led the delegation in the Flag Salute.

#### **President’s report**

Spiller remembered former NJEA President, Barbara Keshishian who passed away on August 19, 2023 and asked for a moment of silence to remember her.

Spiller highlighted the following:

- Maui Wildfire Relief
- Summer Leadership
- Government Relations Update & Welcome to new Lt. Governor – Tahesha Way
- Legislative Elections
- Local Elections
- Legislative Work
- Culture Wars
- State Board of Education Meeting

Spiller introduced the 2023-24 New Jersey County Teachers of the Year and asked for a round of applause for them.

#### **Vice president’s report**

Vice President Steve Beatty highlighted the following:

- NJEA Preservice and educator identification, recruitment, mentoring and retention
- Center for Future Educators
- Organizing for Education (O4Ed)
- Higher Education
- Department of Education and State Board of Education
- Affiliated Special Interest Groups
- NJ Department of Education Holocaust Commission Seminar
- NJ State Teacher of the Year
- Social-Emotional Learning 4 NJ (SEL4NJ)
- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)

#### **Secretary-Treasurer’s report**

Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson delivered the NJEA fiscal report.

- Robertson highlighted the following:
- Good News
- NEA Bylaw 3-1(g)
- Back to School
- Unions Supporting Unions
- Hispanic Heritage Month
- NJREA Executive Director’s report

**Executive Director Kevin Kelleher highlighted the following:**

- Chapter 44 Savings Update
- California Casualty Update
- SEHBP Active and Retired Rate Update
- SEHBP Final Active Rates for 2024
- SEHBP Final Retiree Rates For 2024
- PAC By the Numbers 2022-2023
- Membership
- New Jersey Center for Teaching and Learning

**Nondelegate speakers**

Maria Caratini, Hudson County, a paraprofessional discussed concerns about the leadership of the Jersey City Paraprofessional Association (JCPPA).

Melissa Barnes, Hudson County, discussed concerns about the current leadership of JCPPA.

JCCPA President Keith Olkewicz, Hudson County discussed his leadership of the local association.

Gilbert Moore, Hudson County, discussed his support for JCPPA leadership.

**Reports of committees without recommendations****Elections Committee**

Spiller asked the D.A. to review the report from the Elections Committee, which was formally moved by Diane McKay, Hudson County, a member of the D.A. to move the report. The report was accepted unanimously.

**Reports of committees with recommendations****Affiliation Committee**

Gerard Campione, Middlesex County, chair of the Affiliation Committee presented the committee's report recommending affiliation the local associations listed below.

Timoty Simonitis, Middlesex County, moved the recommendation. It was duly seconded.

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

- Union Township Transportation Association (Union County)
- Cumberland Regional Paraprofessional Association (Cumberland County)

The recommendation was adopted.

**For the Good of the Order**

Lisa Simone, Ocean County, spoke to the D.A. in regarding to Heidi Brache, a dear friend to many, and who is currently in the end stages of her cancer, and the Go Fund Me page has been created to help her out.

Scott Elliott, Warren County, thanked NJEA and shared the positive outcome from a grievance filed by the Phillipsburg Education Association.

June Camizzi, Cape May County, presented a check for the NJEA Disaster Relief Fund on behalf of the Cape May County members.

Rich D'Avanzo, Union County, reminded delegates and Executive Committee members of their responsibility to attend sessions with the Commissioner of Education and the State Board of Education during the NJEA Convention.

John Sassi, Bergen County, thanked Esther Fletcher, Bergen County for her advocacy and echoed her concerns, reinforcing the urgency of political engagement and the consequences of school board elections.

Jacqui Greadington, NJREA, spoke about the importance of political action and union solidarity.

Annice Benamy, Union County, shared that this was her first time attending the NJEA Delegate Assembly. She thanked her county president for encouraging her to run and expressed excitement about being involved at multiple levels of NJEA.

A motion to adjourn was made by Peter Helff, Higher Ed, and the motion was duly seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 12:27 p.m.

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**Nov. 11, 2025**

The NJEA Delegate Assembly met at the Atlantic City Convention Center, Atlantic City, N.J. on Nov. 11, 2023, at 9:00 a.m.

The meeting was called to order by President Sean M. Spiller.

The roll call and the seating of delegates was taken by Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson. There were 119 members present and a quorum was met. Alternates were seated as follows: J. Clemen for Murphy, (Bergen); A. Policastro for Yannone (Bergen); Hewitt for Pope (Burlington); Kinsey for Carminati (Cumberland); Marques for Curry (Hudson); Fields for Paprota (Middlesex); Barilka for Montanti (Monmouth); Bliem for Ryan (Ocean); Jubert for Wiemken (Ocean); Esquivel for Shannon (Union); Elliott for Durkin (Warren); and Farhat for Ferlise (Higher Ed).

Absent without alternates were the following: Rheault (Atlantic); Robinson Taylor (Camden).

John Coniglio, Morris County, gave the Inspirational Message and along with President Spiller, led the delegation in the Flag Salute.

**President's report**

Spiller celebrated the success of the NJEA Convention and acknowledged the hard work of organizers.

Spiller acknowledged Veterans Day during the meeting and took a moment to honor veterans in attendance. He asked all veterans present to stand and be recognized, and led the room in giving them a big round of applause, expressing gratitude for their service and sacrifice.

Spiller highlighted the following:

- SBOE Meeting
- GR Update
- Member Organizing
- Partnerships
- Messaging
- Policy
- Lame Duck Agenda

Spiller introduced the 2023-24 New Jersey County Teachers of the Year and asked for a round of applause for them.

#### Vice president's report

Vice President Steve Beatty highlighted the following:

- NJEA Preservice and educator identification, recruitment, mentoring and retention
- NJEA Convention
- State Preservice Leadership Team
- Affiliated Local College Chapters
- Unaffiliated Local College Chapters
- Center for Future Educators
- William Paterson University
- Montclair State University – Registered Apprentice Program
- NJ Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (NJACTE)
- Organizing for Education (O4Ed)
- NJEA 2023 Convention
- Higher Education
- Department of Education and State Board of Education
- Affiliated Special Interest Groups (ASIG)
- NJ Department of Education Holocaust Commission Seminar
- NJ State Teacher of the Year program

#### Secretary-Treasurer's report

Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson delivered the NJEA fiscal report.

- Robertson highlighted the following:
- Good News
- Budget Committee
- Milken Educator of the Year Awards
- Gloucester County Welcome Back Luncheon
- Cape May County Dems
- Rutgers Center for Women and Work
- Pride/FAST
- Celebration of Women
- NJREA

#### Executive Director's report

Executive Director Kevin Kelleher highlighted the following:

- PAC by the Numbers
- Membership
- Communications
- Research and Economic Services

#### Nondelegate speakers

Veronica Kriegl, Ocean County, spoke on behalf of Mitchell Gartner, who could not attend due to religious observance of the Sabbath. She requested that the NJEA consider amending its bylaws to allow at least one Delegate Assembly meeting be held on a day other than Saturday.

#### Election of Members to Hearing Committee on Censure, Suspension, Expulsion and Reinstatement of Members

Five members were elected to the Hearing Committee on Censure, Suspension, Expulsion, and Reinstatement of Members. One seat was designated for a non-classroom professional and was filled by Taysha Gateau-Barrera (Somerset). Four seats for classroom teachers were filled by Lori Lalama (Passaic), Jarrett Lampkin (Middlesex), Sharon Ortiz (Essex), and Ron Donnerstag (Ocean), who won a runoff election against Karol Ball (Atlantic).

#### Reports of committees without recommendations

##### Editorial Committee

Spiller asked the D.A. to review the report from the Editorial Committee. The motion to accept the report was made by Lauren Greenfield of Essex County and was approved without objection.

##### Elections Committee

The Elections Committee presented its report without recommendations. The motion to accept the report was made by John Coniglio of Morris County and was approved unanimously without discussion.

#### Reports of committees with recommendations

##### Budget Committee

The Budget Committee proposed and discussed a budget transfer.

Christine Candarella, Essex County moved the recommendation below:

**RECOMMENDATION:** that the sum of \$100,000 be transferred from the NJEA Disaster Relief Fund to the NJEA Member Benefits Fund to support the relief grants provided by the Hardship Relief Program

Delegates adopted the recommendation.

#### New Business

##### New Business Item #1

Trina Jenkins, Atlantic County, moved a New Business Item requesting "that NJEA contact New Jersey's senators and representatives to urge President Biden to call for a ceasefire in the Israel-Gaza conflict." The motion sparked extensive debate, with members expressing both support and opposition.

The motion failed.

#### For the Good of the Order

Anthony Rizzo, Burlington County, thanked Kathy Mathews, a long-serving NJEA staff member, and wished her well in her upcoming retirement, recognizing her dedication and kindness.

John Sassi of Bergen County reported that the Westwood Board of Education had been flipped to pro-public education majority in recent elections.

A motion to adjourn was made by Rocio Lopez, Essex County, the motion was duly seconded, and the meeting was adjourned.

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# NOVEMBER & *beyond*

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|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
|  <p><b>WEDNESDAY</b><br/>Executive Committee meeting</p> |  <p><b>SATURDAY</b><br/>Delegate Assembly</p>            |  <p><b>SATURDAY</b><br/>Delegate Assembly</p>                        |
|  <p><b>WED &amp; THURS</b><br/>NJREA Convention</p>      |  <p><b>WEDNESDAY</b><br/>Executive Committee meeting</p> |  <p><b>SATURDAY</b><br/>MLK Jr. Human Rights Celebration</p>         |
|  <p><b>THURS &amp; FRI</b><br/>NJEA Convention</p>      |  <p><b>FRIDAY</b><br/>Executive Committee meeting</p>   |  <p><b>FRI &amp; SAT</b><br/>Winter Leadership Conference South</p> |

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



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# A 40-YEAR-OLD LAW THAT'S STILL RELEVANT

## \$18,500 changed the trajectory of NJ's teacher salaries

By Patrick Rumaker

Wednesday, Sept. 4, 1985, was my first day in the classroom as a salaried teacher. My anticipated annual salary for the 1985-86 school year was around \$13,800.

Like many first-year teachers, I was overwhelmed as I tried to navigate my first days with my own students—at least if the journal I kept at the time is to be believed. In the anxiety-ridden pages of my now 40-year-old journal, there's only one reference to something that should have been a big deal for me.

"Incidentally," I wrote in early September 1985—and in much better cursive writing than I have now—the state approved a minimum salary bill. I now make \$18,500 a year."

I learned of my "incidental" good fortune earlier that same day when a teacher with many more years of experience came into my room and said, in a tone I took as sarcasm, "Well, the governor must love you! He just gave you a \$4,000 raise!"

I quickly learned from other first-year colleagues in my school that my experience was not unique. What should have been a great day for us all was made awkward by the jealousy-tinged reactions of some of our veteran colleagues. To be fair, many others, despite their years in the classroom, were glad that something was being done to make teaching more attractive financially.

Whatever anyone felt at the time, the law was a game changer. At the time, 80% of New Jersey school districts had starting salaries below \$18,500—some as low as \$10,600.

When Republican Gov. Tom Kean Sr., signed the Teacher Quality Employment Act (TQEA), which included the \$18,500 minimum salary provision, NJEA hailed him as a hero.

### NJEA at the forefront

Credit for that law goes to NJEA leaders and staff who understood the long-term implications of boosting the bottom of the guide. "Every teacher should be proud of NJEA and what it has done," Kean said as he signed the bill.

Once TQEA was passed, NJEA quickly moved on to its next goal—a minimum starting teacher salary of \$40,000. Then \$50,000. Then more. Today, 62% of districts have



Then NJEA President Dennis Giordano thanks Gov. Thomas Kean Sr. at the bill signing ceremony in 1985. From left: Dolores Corona, then Government Relations director; James Connerton, then NJEA executive director; Giordano; Sen. Matthew Feldman; Asm. John Rocco and Gov. Kean.

negotiated starting salaries of \$60,000 or more. Freehold Regional leads the way, with first-year teachers there slated to earn \$80,780 starting in 2029.

A 40-year-old minimum starting salary law may not seem relevant today, but its significance should not be understated. In 1983, New Jersey's average teacher salary—not just for first year teachers—ranked 14th in the nation. The impact of higher starting salaries in the state since 1985 consistently ranks us among the top three states in average teacher salary, which means it didn't just benefit me, but also those same colleagues who had a hard time accepting my good fortune back in 1985.

NJEA is currently in the midst of another major effort to make our profession more economically sustainable for those early in their careers. The Tier 1 for Everyone pension justice campaign aims to eliminate inequity in the pension system and give new employees the same pension security their senior colleagues enjoy. And as with raising starting salaries four decades ago, it will benefit every member by making the entire system more sustainable in the long run.

I did go on to become a more confident teacher than I was in that first year. And thanks to the efforts of my local association bargaining teams and NJEA, teaching remained a sustainable career choice. Let's stay united and keep it that way. 🏡

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*Patrick Rumaker is an associate director in the NJEA Communications Division.*



## SOUTH

**JAN. 30-31, 2026**  
HARRAH'S - ATLANTIC CITY  
Registration Deadline: DEC. 8

## NORTH

**FEB. 20-21, 2026**  
SHERATON - PARSIPPANY  
Registration Deadline: JAN. 12

## CENTRAL

**MAR. 6-7, 2026**  
DOUBLETREE - SOMERSET  
Registration Deadline: FEB. 2

# Workshops

1. Presidents' Roundtable
2. AR: Key to a Strong Organization
3. Legal Issues Affecting School Employees
4. Grieve, Don't Gripe: Contract Enforcement
5. Preparing for Negotiations: Collective Bargaining
6. Salary Guides and School Budgets: What Members Should Know **(NEW CONTENT)**
7. Bargaining Health Benefits Post Ch.44 **(NEW)**
8. Leadership Development 101: A Beginner's Guide for Association Leaders
9. When Life Throws You Curveballs **(NEW)**
10. Advanced Membership Chair Training
11. Power, Policy, and Storytelling **(NEW)**
12. Thriving in High Pressure Environments **(NEW)**
13. Bridging the Member Involvement Gap
14. From Timbuktu to Timbuctoo, New Jersey **(NEW)**
15. Inspiring Advocacy for Aspiring and Early Career Educators **(NEW)**

 [njea.org/WLC](https://njea.org/WLC)

For more information and registration materials, see your local president or visit the website.

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