

# REVIEW

MARCH  
2026

njea.org



*an education and advocacy resource*

## HUDSON COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE



**26** A COMMITMENT TO COLLABORATION

**30** PATIENCE AND PERSEVERANCE  
ON PENSION JUSTICE

**32** LIVING THE REVOLUTION

**36** NJEA ADOPTS NEW STRATEGIC  
PURPOSE, MISSION AND VISION

# A Commitment to Collaboration

REVIEW  
MARCH 2026

# FIXING A STUFFY NOSE — AND — SNORING



**QUESTION:** My nose is always stuffy, worse on one side. And not only that... I am told by my spouse that I snore loudly! What can I do?

**ANSWER:** Your best bet is a full evaluation by an ENT specialist who can determine what is causing your nasal obstruction and the most effective treatment. Often, once the nasal breathing is restored, the loud snoring is then diminished or even eliminated. There are several steps necessary for a thorough exam:

**HISTORY:** Questioning the patient about previous trauma to the nose and also anything that may cause chronic swelling inside the nasal cavity, like recurrent sinus infections, allergies, and overuse of intranasal sprays such as Afrin.

**EXAM:** Fiberoptic scope of the nose and throat to look for septal deviations, polyps, abnormal enlargements of other intranasal structures, and draining secretions which can be cultured. Check the external nasal structure for cartilage collapse that can result in a valve obstruction. Also allergy tests, home sleep studies and CT scans may be performed if indicated.

**TREATMENT:** Customized to the patient's cause of obstruction. Can be as simple as a regimen of intranasal and oral medications or more complex involving surgical procedures.

**ADVANCED SURGICAL TREATMENT:** The latest techniques allow for quick recovery, no bruising, more precise repairs, and open breathing immediately after surgery. Technology has improved with the use of 4K camera/monitors and microscopic visualization, laser-guided infrared navigation, and new methods and instrumentation for septum repair, turbinate reduction, valve collapse reconstruction and sinus blockage. Rhinoplasty techniques have also advanced and can often be performed at the same time if there are external nasal cosmetic concerns.



**Frank J Scaccia, MD FACS**  
**RIVERSIDE**  
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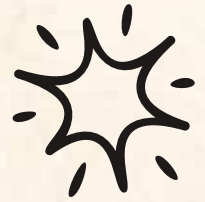


These pictures are actual patients of Dr. Scaccia who underwent septal and nasal reconstruction.

Accepts most out of network insurance plans including Horizon Blue Cross, Cigna, Aetna, UnitedHealthcare and others. Please call our office for details. We are here to help make your health insurance work for you.



On Jan. 19, NJEA members joined representatives from other organizations at the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. March of Resistance in Newark, organized by the People's Organization for Progress.



The 2025-26 NJEA County Educational Support Professionals of the Year were honored at the Jan. 10 Delegate Assembly meeting.



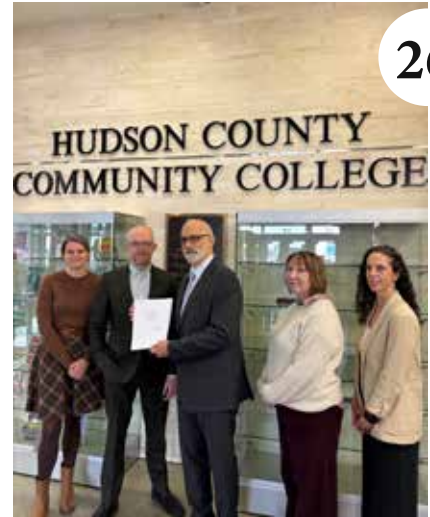
The members of the Southampton Township Education Association used NJEA PEP grant funds to feed families in their community. The association helped provide 40 families with food over the December break.



# FEATURES

**26 A COMMITMENT TO COLLABORATION**  
*The Hudson County Community College Professional Association secured an award-winning contract through collaborative, non-adversarial negotiations with a reform-minded administration and overcoming political uncertainty and internal challenges to deliver substantial salary gains, expanded faculty inclusion and a strengthened culture of shared problem-solving.*

*By Michael J. Ferlisse*



26

**30 PATIENCE AND PERSEVERANCE WILL BRING PENSION JUSTICE**  
*NJEA members pushed for Tier 1 pension justice through lobbying, petitions and legislative outreach. Despite major wins during the lame duck session, the pension bills stalled. The pension justice campaign moves forward as we continue to advocate, educate and fight for fairness in the next legislative session.*

*By Marybeth Beichert*



30

**32 LIVING THE REVOLUTION**  
*New Jersey's Revolutionary Schools initiative helps students examine the American Revolution as an ongoing struggle for liberty, equality, justice, representation and tolerance. Through primary sources and civic projects, students connect 18th century ideals to modern challenges and define their role in sustaining democracy.*

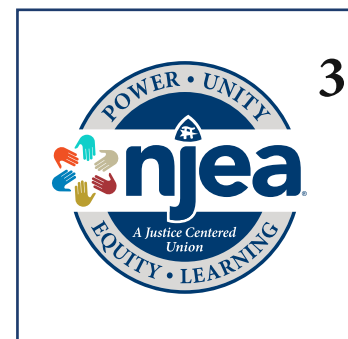
*By Theresa Maughan*



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**36 NJEA ADOPTS NEW STRATEGIC PURPOSE, MISSION AND VISION**  
*NJEA has adopted a new Strategic Purpose, Mission and Vision to align the union's work with a justice-centered approach. Developed through a yearlong, member-driven process, the framework will guide advocacy, organizing and decision-making to strengthen educators, schools and communities.*

*By Steve Baker*



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*Legislation doesn't determine who is a professional*



The number  
**482,000**

The number of women in N.J. who are members of a labor union. NJEA is the largest labor union in the state.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023.



## Did you know? Free travel benefits



★ As an NEA/NJEA member, you've got free travel benefits waiting for you! Sign up for the NEA Travel Program at [neamb.com/start](https://neamb.com/start) and score \$500 in Travel Dollars to use on hotels, cruises, car rentals, resorts and more for spring break or other vacation planning.



The Hudson County Community College Professional Association's bargaining team won the 2025 NJEA Jim George Collective Bargaining Award.

PHOTO BY  
Kathryn Coulibaly

# REVIEW



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

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Trenton, NJ 08607-1211

**Organizational Directory****NJEA headquarters, Trenton**

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

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

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

**Communications Division:** responsible for all aspects of the association's communications efforts, both internal and external. The division produces the NJEA Review and [njea.org](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.

**UniServ regional offices**

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

**UniServ South**

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

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

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

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

**UniServ Central**

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

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

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

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

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

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

**UniServ Northeast**

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

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

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

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

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

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

**UniServ Northwest**

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

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

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

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

**MEMBERSHIP**

Active professional: \$1,127 (full time); \$225.40 (full time \*low-earner); \$563.50 (part time); \$563.50 (on leave); \$225.40 (part time \*low-earner). Active supportive: \$534 (full time); \$106.80 (full time \*low-earner); \$267 (part time); \$106.80 (part time \*low-earner); \$267 (on leave). Retired professional: \$97; \$1,850 (retired life). Retired ESP: \$50; \$905 (retired ESP life); NJAEA \$32. General professional (outside N.J. public education employment): \$250. Subscribing \$250. Only those in education positions in N.J. public schools and colleges are eligible for active membership. Payment of annual dues entitles a member to receive the Review for one year, from January through December. Dues include \$5 for the NJEA Review. \*Low-earner threshold 2025-26 is \$23,800.



# President's Message



## Renewing our commitment

By the time you read this, spring will be just around the corner. If you're like me, you welcome the sense of rejuvenation the warm air carries and, with it, spring cleaning. In my house, spring cleaning involves taking inventory of my things and getting rid of what I no longer need to make space for new things that better reflect who I am right now.

Our union is going through a similar process with our newly minted strategic plan. We've taken the time to evaluate our mission, vision and purpose and articulate the foundations upon which rests the work of our union.

Like cleaning out our closets in the spring, we've removed what we've outgrown and have written fresh, new ideas into these seminal documents. These new ideas, built on our long-standing principles, are more aligned to the union we are in 2026. It's an honor to have spearheaded this work that will guide what we do for years to come. And it was driven by NJEA members and staff.

Throughout the process, the Strategic Plan Steering Committee talked with members and staff from every corner of the state and from every job category and committee and incorporated member survey data. Together, we listened, talked and learned. Then, we got to work. NJEA members like you helped to write these powerful statements poised to help us evolve to meet the demands of our time. You can read the new Strategic Plan

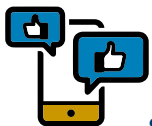
Mission, Vision and Purpose, and about the entire process to rewrite them, in this issue of the *Review*.

You'll also find stories about our new path toward pension justice. While we did not achieve everything we wanted this last legislative cycle, we did make major strides on a number of issues that matter to our members. The campaign for meaningful reform for our members will continue into the new administration, and we are engaged in dialogue with Gov. Sherrill's team and the Legislature.

This issue also celebrates the members of the Hudson County Community College Professional Association, winners of the 2025 NJEA Jim George Collective Bargaining Award, for their perseverance in winning an outstanding contract for their members. As a high school history teacher, I must give a shout-out to former New Jersey State Teacher of the Year Theresa Maughan, a social studies teacher at STEM Academy in East Orange, who penned a wonderful article about the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution and its relevance today.

With a new season upon us, we remain committed to our core values of supporting the labor movement and pushing our best-in-the-nation public schools to even greater heights. The work starts with you.

In Solidarity,



## officers online

### STEVE BEATTY

Facebook

@SteveBeattyNJEA: Winter Leadership Conference South in the books! Over 500 dedicated advocates from locals big and small - all coming together to hone their skills and bring back what they've learned from our fantastic staff. Thanks to all the members who came out - and so many first timers. And thanks to all the staff and the incredible work of the leadership committee.

On Feb. 1, NJEA President Steve Beatty shared a reel of images from the NJEA Winter Leadership Conference South that took place on Jan. 30-31 at Harrah's in Atlantic City. Learn about the NJEA Winter Leadership Conference at [njea.org/wlc](http://njea.org/wlc).

### PETAL ROBERTSON

Facebook

@PetalforNJEA: What a joy it was to spend the weekend with our education support professionals. The NJEA ESP + Health & Safety Conference not only strengthened our skills but served as a reminder that our ESPs are ESSENTIAL! Congratulations to all of our NJEA County ESPs of the Year with special recognition to our state winner, Angela Feliciano. Thank you to the committee members and staff that made this weekend possible.

On Feb. 9, NJEA Vice President Petal Robertson shared a reel of images highlighting moments with members at the NJEA ESP + Health and Safety Conference and ESP Awards Dinner that occurred during the weekend of Feb. 6-8.

### TINA DARE

Facebook

@TinaDareforNJEA: Ready to represent your colleagues in public education as a part of a national decision-making body? Self-nominate to be a state delegate to the 2026 NEA Representative Assembly in Denver, July 3-7. The self-nomination portal is open Feb. 1-27 for any NJEA member. Step up and be heard. Learn more and submit your self-nomination.

On Feb. 1, NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Tina Dare reshared a post from the New Jersey Education Association Facebook page to promote self-nomination as a state delegate to the NEA RA, the world's largest democratic deliberative assembly. Although state nominations ended on Feb. 27, you may still be able to self-nominate to run as a local delegate by contacting your local president for RA Delegate election information. After local elections are held, the local president must submit a Local Delegate Election Form to NJEA by the April 10 deadline.

# The ADVOCATE

## RESOURCES FOR YOUR LOCAL ASSOCIATION

### NJEA elections slated for April

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

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

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

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

For complete elections rules and procedures, visit [njea.org/njeaelections](http://njea.org/njeaelections).

### NJEA stands with Morristown and with students

NJEA's officers, President Steve Beatty, Vice President Petal Robertson and Secretary-Treasurer Tina Dare, released this statement following news of ICE raids in New Jersey that resulted in the arrest and detention of a Morristown High School student:

"We stand in solidarity with the Morristown community, particularly our members and students in the Morristown Public Schools. We share their outrage over the unannounced ICE raid on Jan. 11 that resulted in the arrest of a Morristown High School senior who was taken into custody while doing laundry.

"We are deeply disturbed that this talented and hardworking student has been detained by the federal government despite following the legal process and attending scheduled immigration hearings. This cruel

arrest sends a chilling message to all students and families that our streets are not safe because of the presence of unaccountable federal agents. It creates fear and insecurity in our schools and communities. Yesterday's action undermines trust in government and in due process while inflicting immeasurable personal harm on a young person striving to do everything right. We call on ICE to release this student immediately.

"Terrorizing raids like this tear at the social fabric of our schools and communities, and they must stop. We also call on Gov. Murphy and Gov.-elect Sherrill, legislative leaders, and local officials to act swiftly and decisively to protect our students, our schools and our communities from such attacks.

"Along with our fellow NJEA members, we continue to support every student, regardless of immigration status. We will not tolerate tactics that target children, terrorize communities and endanger our democracy."

### Thinking about retirement?

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

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

For more information about planning for your retirement, go to [njea.org](http://njea.org), log in using your NJEA PIN and password, click "For Members" and choose "Retirement Planning."

## Learn from Minnesota educators

Educators across the country are grappling with the impact of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) operations in their communities but nowhere has been as affected as Minneapolis-St. Paul. People have watched in horror as children have been used as bait to lure family members, citizens have been abducted, protestors have been gassed and two Americans were shot in the street while defending Constitutional rights.

At the same time, we have also witnessed breathtaking displays of humanity, compassion and determination. NEA has reported on what is going on in the Twin Cities' streets and schools. Scan the QR code to learn more about what Education Minnesota members are facing and why they say every educator must be ready as ICE moves into more communities.



## RIF resources for NJEA members

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

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

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

NJEA has additional resources online at [njea.org/rif-resources](http://njea.org/rif-resources) about health benefits, pensions, and other questions you may have.

## Clearing the record

The January edition of the *NJEA Review* included the association's organizational directory, a listing of all NJEA committees and county offices. Sean M. Spiller, as the immediate past president of the NJEA, should have been listed as a member of the NJEA Executive Committee. The county office information for Burlington and Camden counties was also incorrect.

**Burlington County**  
**Christopher Bowman,**  
**President**  
 200 Campbell Drive  
 Suite 102  
 Willingboro, NJ 08046  
 (609) 871-2232

**Camden County**  
**Dianna Morris, President**  
 5 Split Rock Drive  
 Cherry Hill, NJ 08003-1818  
 (856) 489-1267

## Interested in presenting at the 2026 NJEA Convention?

### Presenting at convention

The Professional Development and Instructional Issues Division (PDII) of NJEA is accepting presenter proposals for the 2026 NJEA Convention to be held Nov. 5-6, 2026. All proposals to present at the NJEA Convention must be submitted electronically. The deadline for submission is April 25.

### Here are a few things to keep in mind:

- Each room is equipped with standard equipment, which includes two handheld microphones, a projector and a screen. Presenters are responsible for providing their own laptop or other presentation device. NJEA does not provide computers.
- NJEA does not reproduce any program materials and will not reimburse you for reproductions costs.
- If you are a member, please have your PIN and password ready.

### Submit your proposal

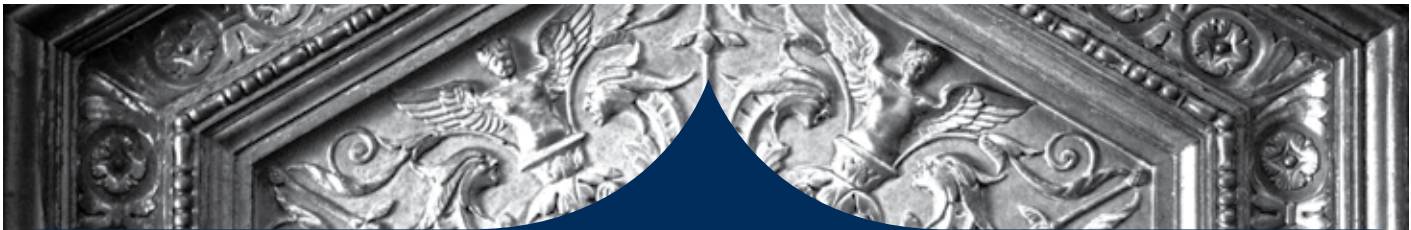
NJEA has implemented a new proposal submission system. Information about the system, including deadlines, how to access the new system and submission instructions, is available at [njea.org/conventionproposal](http://njea.org/conventionproposal). For questions or additional information, email [convention@njea.org](mailto:convention@njea.org).

## Save the date for Healthy Schools Now conference

Healthy Schools Now will hold a conference on May 30 at the Contemporary, located at 176 West State St. in Trenton. The conference, "Building Our Future Together: Funding Schools Construction for the Next Generation" will run from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Registration and a light breakfast will begin at 9:30 a.m.

The Building Our Future Together conference will focus on the urgent need for increased state funding to support school construction and facilities improvements in New Jersey's most in-need school districts. The conference will bring together education leaders, policymakers, advocates and community members to highlight the conditions students and education professionals face in aging and deteriorating school buildings and to discuss strategies for securing sustainable state investments. Key topics include modernizing learning environments, addressing health and safety issues in older facilities, strengthening funding mechanisms, and ensuring that all students have access to safe, healthy, and 21st-century educational spaces. These challenges demand action—and investing in our school facilities is how we strengthen communities and deliver real opportunity for the next generation. Scan the QR code to register.





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- Autism 
- Autism + Applied Behavior Analysis 
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- Teacher of Students with Disabilities 

### Leadership

- Principal, School Administrator 
- Supervisor 
- Educational Leadership (EdD)



## Explore Our Programs!



# MONMOUTH UNIVERSITY



## Attend the NJEA Higher Education Conference and Collective Bargaining Summit



The 2026 NJEA Higher Education Conference and Collective Bargaining Summit will be held March 27-29 at the DoubleTree by Hilton in Monroe Township Cranbury, 390 Forsgate Dr., Monroe.

### Higher Education Conference – March 27-28

The conference begins with registration at 2 p.m. on Friday followed by workshops, dinner and a keynote address. On Saturday, the conference continues with more workshops and concludes with lunch.

#### Workshops will address the following topics:

- Comparative Financial Audit Analysis: Interpreting Community College Financial Condition
- Courageous Conversations
- Leaves of Absence
- Member Engagement
- Progressive Discipline
- Replaced by a Bot: The Future is Now
- Vision and Goals
- Your Voice is Your Power

### Higher Education Collective Bargaining Summit – March 28-29

The summit will immediately follow the conference beginning with registration at 3 p.m. on Saturday followed by workshops and dinner. The summit will continue Sunday and conclude with lunch.

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

The costs to attend are:

#### Conference only

Single: \$325; Double: \$255; Commuter: \$180

#### Summit only

Single: \$145; Double: \$75; Commuter: \$0

#### Conference and Summit

Single: \$465; Double: \$325; Commuter: \$180

For more information, go to [njea.org/higheredconf](http://njea.org/higheredconf).

#### Registration must be completed by March 12.

Members must register themselves for the conference. There is no group registration using the online platform. Payment will be required by credit card only. When registering, members will need to know their NJEA PIN. For questions, and if you need help with your NJEA PIN, call the Region 29-Higher Education office at 609-689-9580.

## NEA offers professional growth opportunities for ESP members

To ensure a great public education for every student, education support professionals (ESPs) want and deserve high-quality professional development and supports at every stage of their careers. NEA offers a variety of resources, trainings and opportunities for ESP members. To learn more, scan the QR code.



## Applications are open now for the 2026 NEA Foundation Global Learning Fellows

Through the NEA Foundation Global Learning Fellowship, public school educators develop the knowledge and skills to integrate global competency into their daily classroom instruction, advocate for global competency in their schools and districts and help students to thrive in our increasingly interconnected world. Fellows transform their classrooms to give students a global perspective. Applications are being accepted until Apr. 12. To learn more, scan the QR code.



# COOL STUFF



## NJ HALL OF FAME SPRINGS INTO LEARNING

The New Jersey Hall of Fame at American Dream offers a variety of resources and opportunities for educators.

### Educator Preview Day

Join the NJHOF on March 14 at 10 a.m. to explore how the NJHOF can support curriculum development, student engagement and professional growth at exclusive Educator Preview Days. The event is free, but an RSVP is required at [bit.ly/NJHOFedu](https://bit.ly/NJHOFedu).

### Curriculum compliant field trips

Inspire your students with exhibits that motivate them to achieve their highest potential. School groups can bundle a visit to the NJHOF with other interactive American Dream attractions for a full day of fun and learning. Preview the experience at [NJHall-ofFame.org/Learn](https://NJHall-ofFame.org/Learn).

### Professional development

NJHOF is currently developing its spring PD schedule. To be the first to receive updates on upcoming events and exclusive experiences for educators, administrators and counselors, including Teacher Appreciation Week, please subscribe to the *NJ Educator Newsletter* at [bit.ly/NJHOFeducator](https://bit.ly/NJHOFeducator).

Remember, if you can't join NJHOF for a scheduled event, you can make a visit during its regular hours of operation, for free admission to educators with a valid ID. For more information about educational programming opportunities at the New Jersey Hall of Fame, email Alexandra at [learning@njhalloffame.org](mailto:learning@njhalloffame.org).



## NJ STATE BAR FOUNDATION RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS

### Respect newsletter for elementary, middle and high school students

The New Jersey State Bar Foundation's winter 2026 issue of *Respect* features articles on the right to protest, the history of Native American/U.S. treaties and on the U.S. Supreme Court decision allowing parents to opt their kids out of LGBTQ+ lessons for religious reasons. A PDF of the issue can be downloaded. Free copies can be ordered for classroom use. Individual articles can be downloaded from the *Respect Rundown*. Educators can subscribe to receive future issues at [publications.njsbf.org](https://publications.njsbf.org).



## REGISTER FOR FREE EVENT IN MAY – LAW FAIR/LAW ADVENTURE – YOU BE THE JURY!

You and your students can experience what it is like to serve as jurors at the New Jersey State Bar Foundation's free You Be the Jury events this May. Hear cases performed by winners of this year's competitions (Law Fair for Grades 3-6 and Law Adventure for Grades 7-8), then you and your students will deliberate and render verdicts. Events will be held at the New Jersey Law Center in New Brunswick. Multiple days and sessions in the morning and afternoon are available. See Law Fair or Law Adventure pages for more information, but space is limited. Register to attend at [mocktrial.njsbf.org](https://mocktrial.njsbf.org).

Law Fair and Law Adventure help to fulfill new state-mandated civics education requirements. Learn more at [mocktrial.njsbf.org](https://mocktrial.njsbf.org).



## REQUEST A FREE SPEAKER FOR LAW-RELATED TOPICS

The New Jersey State Bar Foundation's Speakers Bureau has volunteer attorney speakers who are available to address law-related topics for school assemblies, class discussions and on career days. There is no charge. Schedule using the online form available at [speakers.njsbf.org](https://speakers.njsbf.org).



## REVOLUTIONNJ OFFERS RESOURCES FOR THE SEMIQUINCENTENNIAL

RevolutionNJ, New Jersey's official 250th committee, has a wealth of free resources for educators. For those working with students in grades K-5, the Foundations of Democracy toolkit provides guidebooks and activities to make abstract concepts like democracy and rights accessible and engaging for younger audiences.

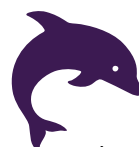
At the secondary school level, RevolutionNJ offers History Happened Here, a flexible program that empowers students in grades 5-12 to choose their own topics from 250 years of local history. New Jersey schools that have registered with the Revolutionary Schools program can borrow the Revolutionary Lives traveling exhibit at no cost and access its accompanying lesson plans tiered for grades 3-12.

All of the RevolutionNJ's educational offerings were developed in partnership with the NJDOE and meet the 2020 New Jersey Student Learning Standards. Learn more about these offerings at [RevNJ.org](http://RevNJ.org).



## NEA RESOURCES FOR READERS

Need help finding books to put into the hands of readers? Check out these free resources and bring print and online books to qualifying schools and students.



## MARINE MAMMAL STRANDING CENTER

The Marine Mammal Stranding Center, located in Brigantine, offers educational opportunities for elementary through high school. Dedicated to encouraging the next generation of environmentalists, biologists and marine biologists, you can learn more about the unique tools and activities that the center offers. Learn more at [mmsc.org/future-marine-biologists](http://mmsc.org/future-marine-biologists).

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## Building community one student at a time

### Meet Passaic County ESP of the Year Sharrieff Bugg

By Kathryn Coulibaly



For more than two decades, Sharrieff Bugg has been a steady, compassionate force in Paterson, inside the classroom and far beyond it. Born and raised in the city, Bugg's journey to becoming the 2025-26 Passaic County ESP of the Year is rooted in a lifelong passion for helping children, building community and being of service.

Bugg grew up as one of 12 siblings, surrounded by the noise, energy and responsibility that come with a big family.

"There are so many dreams you have as a child," he reflects. "But early childhood education was always one of mine."

He began his career in early childhood settings, spending five years helping young learners build the foundations they would carry for life. "They're innocent, and they give you the platform to build them up correctly," Bugg says.

Life's practical realities eventually pushed him toward more stable benefits and income, leading him to work in private Christian schools and later at a charter school. When that school faced financial challenges and Paterson Public Schools took over, Bugg officially became a paraprofessional in the district—a role he has now held for 23 years.

Growing up, school was not always easy for Bugg. His hearing impairment and a speech impediment made him a target for bullying. Those experiences shaped his calling.

"Because of what I went through, I became an advocate for kids who struggle or don't fit in," he explains. Today, he works at Paterson's STARS/TIES Academy with high school students who have autism and other special needs, helping them build academic, social and independent-living skills. His days are spent reinforcing lessons, accompanying students to classes and supporting them as they learn to navigate the world.

But Bugg's impact doesn't end when the school day does.

He is the driving force behind multiple community initiatives, including the Growing in Grace Counseling Group, which focuses on mental health and special-needs advocacy, and the Bugg Foundation, a family-run organization dedicated to beautifying Paterson. After his niece, Nazerah Bugg, was killed by gun violence while playing basketball, the family adopted five parks, transforming them into safe, welcoming spaces for children. Their work recently earned a grant to expand gardens and revitalize Amistad Park.

Every summer, Bugg hosts one of Paterson's most beloved National Night Out events—designed especially for children with autism. Through grassroots fundraising, raffles and garage sales, he raises around \$10,000 to bring rock climbing, skating, zip-lining and other experiences directly to kids who rarely get the chance to leave the city. "When students go back to school in September, I want them to be able to say they did something fun over the summer," he says.

His calendar is packed with community events: an early childhood education conference on ACES, a trunk-or-treat for children with autism, an awards ceremony honoring local educators, mental-health first-aid trainings and even a life-insurance awareness event. At home, he and his wife tend five garden beds and are launching a raised-bed gardening initiative to help families grow healthy food affordably.

Bugg is serious about healthy eating and activity. Two years ago, he weighed 320 pounds and was on multiple medications. Today, he is down nearly 90 pounds and has dramatically improved his health. "Everything I do to improve my life, I try to bring to the community," he says.

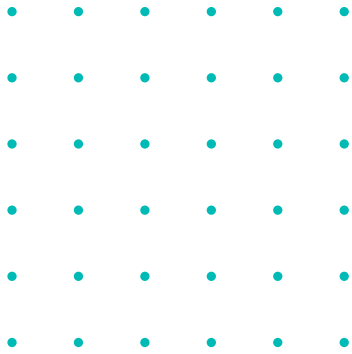
Though he once felt overlooked, Bugg is now deeply engaged with the Paterson Education Association and serves as its community liaison. He is grateful that ESPs are finally being recognized. "Paraprofessionals bring so much to the table," he says. "We live in the community. We know the families. We help make students' lives better."

Recognition may not come naturally to him, but his work speaks loudly. In Paterson, if something happens on the block, someone knocks on his door. That, he says, is the community his mother taught him to build. And it's the community he continues to nurture every single day.

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*Kathryn Coulibaly writes the monthly ESP column. She is an associate director in the Communications Division.*

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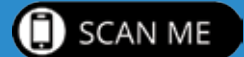
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# New law requires limits on cellphones at school

By Katrina Homel



On Jan. 8, then-Gov. Phil Murphy signed a law that requires boards of education to adopt policies restricting student use of internet-enabled devices, including cell phones, during the school day and other specified times. These bans would take effect during the 2026-27 school year. Phone-free schools were identified as a policy priority by Murphy in early 2025 due

to concerns about the impacts of these devices on student mental health, well-being and academic achievement.

Accordingly, the N.J. Department of Education (NJDOE) published guidance on student use of internet-enabled devices in September 2025. Later that month, the New Jersey Commission on the Effects of Social Media Usage on Adolescents published its report, "Growing Up Online." The report recommended that districts institute "a bell-to-bell ban on the use of cellphones and social media in school." In October, the NJDOE launched the Phone-Free Schools Grant Program, awarded to 86 school districts in the state.

Murphy approved the new law shortly before leaving office. It defines an "internet-enabled device" as "a smartphone, tablet, smartwatch, or other device capable of connecting to the internet and enabling the user to access content on the internet, including social media applications." They do not include devices that schools may provide used for an educational purpose. Boards of education, including public school districts and charter schools, must adopt policies addressing use of these devices by students not only during the regular school day, but also on the school bus and during school-sanctioned events where a school employee is directly supervising the student.

These board policies must also speak to the use of internet-enabled devices during an emergency situation and can have stricter limitations than required by law. The NJDOE was tasked with issuing new "age appropriate and grade-level differentiated" guidelines for boards to follow within 90 days after the law was signed. These updated guidelines were available in late in January. The law required that they:

- Prohibit usage of internet-enabled devices "on school grounds during the school day."
- Be legally compliant, including with special education and health laws that may require use of these devices as an accommodation.
- Address usage during an emergency.
- Cover device storage options.
- Include guidance on network-based restrictions on access to social media.
- Discuss procedures on communicating board policy.

Moreover, the guidelines include that devices can be used during otherwise-prohibited times if a principal, superintendent or designee authorizes it, which can only occur when "no reasonable alternative exists to achieve the same objective while maintaining compliance with the guidelines." Additionally, exceptions are made when device use is needed for:

- Prescribed care by a health care professional where documentation has been submitted by a parent/guardian
- Translation services
- A case-by-case basis, and under specified conditions, for a student who is a routine caregiver for a family member.

Devices are permitted where they may be required by other laws, for example, special education laws. The guidelines allow a principal, superintendent or designee to make a reasonable accommodation to use these devices for educational purposes.

NJEA lobbied in favor of the law and successfully requested changes prior to its passage so that (1) NJEA and other education stakeholders would help develop the guidelines and (2) the state didn't impose one-size-fits-all guidelines on all boards of education. Members with questions about the law and related issues should contact their NJEA field representative for assistance.

## Resources



Growing Up  
Online



N.J. Dept. of  
Education guidance

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*Katrina Homel is an associate director of NJEA Legal Services and Member Rights in the NJEA Executive Office. She can be reached at [khomel@njea.org](mailto:khomel@njea.org).*

# NJEA REPORT

## NJEA honors advocates at NJEA MLK Jr. Human Rights Celebration

Eight individuals were honored at the 52nd annual NJEA Martin Luther King Jr. Human Rights Celebration for their leadership in equity and justice: Dr. Tiffanie ThrBak, Keith Coston Jr., Assemblywoman Heather Simmons, Allison Connolly, Micah Gary-Fryer, Christine Sampson-Clark, Dr. Jametta Clarke and Donna McClary.

NJEA President Steve Beatty, NJEA Vice President Petal Robertson and NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Tina Dare presented the awards.

The event was held at the Newark Symphony Hall on Jan. 17.

The awards were conferred by the six NJEA committees that comprise the NJEA Equity Alliance: the Human and Civil Rights Committee, the Minority Leadership and Recruitment (MLR) Committee, the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) Committee, the Urban Education Committee, the Women in Education Committee and the Exceptional Children Committee.

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



Dr. Tiffanie ThrBak, the 2026 Cumberland County Teacher of the Year and a Bridgeton middle school teacher, is the recipient of the Dr. Judith Owens Spirit Award. Brittany Lamb (second from right) is chair of the NJEA MLR Committee.



Christine Sampson-Clark (l), a Trenton teacher and a former nationally elected member of the NEA Executive Committee, receives the Marie Blistan Advocacy Award from NJEA Exceptional Children Committee Chair Tomeka Sanderlin.



Donna McClary (l), founder of Unmask Joy, Inc., receives the Marie Blistan Advocacy Award from NJEA Exceptional Children Committee Chair Tomeka Sanderlin.



2021-22 New Jersey State Teacher of the Year Theresa Maughan leads a conversation with keynote speaker Dr. Eddie Glaude Jr., a Princeton University professor, public intellectual and political commentator.



The chairs of the six committees that comprise the NJEA Equity Alliance. From left: Todd Pipkin, Tomeka Sanderlin, Lisa Veit, Christopher Cannella, Fawnya Gibson and Brittany Lamb.



Keith Coston Jr. (center), president of the Plainfield Education Association, receives Urban Educator Activist Award. Todd Pipkin (second from right) is chair of the Urban Education Committee.



Micah Gary-Fryer and Allison Connolly receive the Equality Champion Award. Gary-Fryer is a teacher at the Essex County Schools of Technology. Connolly is president of the Township of Ocean Education Association. Christopher Cannella (second from right) is chair of the SOGI Committee.



NJEA Women in Education Committee Chair Lisa Veit accepts the Elizabeth A. Allen Women in Education Award on behalf of its recipient, Assemblywoman Heather Simmons.



Dr. Jametta Clarke, a social studies teacher at Lawrence High School in Mercer County, receives the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Human and Civil Rights Award.

# Trenton EA members share expertise and passion at the NJEA Convention

By Kimberly Crane

## A history of support

NJEA encourages members to share their expertise and passion for public education by presenting at the NJEA Convention each November in Atlantic City. By empowering members to lead workshops, NJEA affirms that some of the most valuable professional learning comes directly from other educators. Member-led presentations highlight innovative practices in real time, foster collaboration and strengthen the shared commitment to public education in New Jersey.

In November 2025, the Trenton Education Association (TEA) continued its strong tradition of professional leadership by sending eight presenters to the convention. Their sessions showcased a deep culture of collaboration, reflection and educator-driven growth.

### Natasha T. Agrawal (with Veronique Lambert)

*Share Tables: Simple Solutions to Food Waste and Hunger*

Agrawal, an ESL teacher at Carroll Robbins Elementary School, co-presented a virtual workshop focused on reducing food waste through “share tables” in school cafeterias. Students place unopened, unwanted food on a designated table for peers or families to take. Drawing from successful practices in her own school, Agrawal emphasized student-centered, sustainable solutions that promote generosity, environmental awareness and community care. “Food waste is a global issue,” she noted. “Online presentations reach educators who cannot attend the convention.”

### Nicole A. Backlund

*Micrography: Making Art With Words*

Backlund, an art specialist at the Ninth Grade Academy, introduced participants to micrography—a technique blending written expression with visual art. Her workshop emphasized creativity over perfection, offering a calm, encouraging space for educators to make art themselves. Backlund was proud to step outside her comfort zone, noting, “With support from my union leadership and Teacher Leadership Academy (TLA) cohort, I felt inspired and confident.”

### Alexa G. Borota

*Canva Tools for the Modern Secondary Classroom*

Borota, an 11th-grade English teacher at Trenton Central High School, demonstrated how Canva’s design tools help create engaging, scaffolded lessons for diverse learners. Stressing that Canva Pro is free for educators, she encouraged participants to begin with simple templates. “I love supporting other teachers,” Borota shared. “Presenting at the convention lets me reach a larger audience.”

### Ronnette T. Branham

*Breaking Language Barriers*

Branham, a second-grade teacher, offered actionable strategies for supporting multilingual learners academically, socially and emotionally. Grounded in real classroom experience, her session encouraged inclusive practices and strong teacher support systems. “Our students are brilliant and resilient. They just need the right support.”

### Shakida Faniel

*County Teachers of the Year Lemonade Stand*

Faniel, a special education teacher at Joyce Kilmer Intermediate School and the 2025 Mercer County Teacher of the Year, described the convention as energizing and unforgettable—especially hearing Malala Yousafzai speak. “The vibe was electrifying,” she said.

### Crystal M. Feliciano

*Managing Workplace Anxiety*

Feliciano, a Teacher Leader at Trenton Central High School, focused on educator well-being, offering practical tools to manage anxiety using approaches rooted in transformational leadership and holistic practice.

### Anjanae Haqq, M.Ed.

*What Can We Learn From Rwanda? Lots!*

Haqq invited participants to explore lessons of resilience, unity, and restorative practice drawn from an educational journey to Rwanda. Grounded in the principle of *ubuntu*, which means humanity, her session affirmed educators’ power to model healing and hope.

### Preeti H. Shah

*Discover Digital Tools*

Shah, a special education math teacher, shared accessible digital strategies, particularly through Canva, to enhance learning and save time, reflecting her 15 years of experience in education and computer science.

Together, TEA’s presenters exemplified professional excellence, innovation and community. Their contributions reinforced that some of the most meaningful professional learning comes from educators themselves.

For more information on the Trenton EA presenters, visit [njea.org/trentoneapresenters](https://njea.org/trentoneapresenters).

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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).*

## You can present at the 2026 NJEA Convention

Interested in presenting at the 2026 NJEA Convention? Share your skills and excitement for continuing education with other NJEA members. Learn more at [njeaconvention.org](https://njeaconvention.org).

## Gov. Mikie Sherrill nominates NJ Dept of Ed, Higher Ed commissioners



Lily Laux

In January, Gov. Mikie Sherrill nominated Dr. Lily Laux as New Jersey's next commissioner of education. Gov. Sherrill nominated Margo Chaly to serve as the next secretary of higher education.

Dr. Laux was previously a principal at ILO Group, which partners with state agencies, districts and other leaders on a variety of issues. Previously, Laux served as Deputy Commissioner at the Texas Education Agency. Laux has also held positions as the Executive Director of Economic Mobility Systems and with Teach for America. She was a middle school teacher in Memphis, Tennessee. Laux earned a bachelor's degree from Columbia University, a master's in teaching from the University of Memphis and a Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Austin.



Margo Chaly

Chaly has most recently served as the Executive Director of the New Jersey Higher Education Student Assistance Authority (NJHESAA), which works to help families and students afford higher education. Prior to that, Chaly was Manager of Litigation & Operations at a law firm and worked for more than a decade at multinational insurance companies. Chaly is a lifelong New Jerseyan and a graduate from Ithaca College and Seton Hall University School of Law.

## Teachers can now be certified in early Childhood education through NJCTL

With the state greatly expanding the number of school districts offering free, full-day pre-K since 2018, there is an ongoing need for more teachers certified in early childhood education.

In response, the New Jersey Center for Teaching and Learning (NJCTL), a nonprofit organization that provides teacher training in high-demand areas, is now offering certification in Early Childhood Education, also known as "P-3."

NJCTL offers teachers the opportunity to earn the specialized credential through online, asynchronous courses that can be taken whenever convenient—a bonus for busy professionals who don't have the time to attend traditional universities.

NJCTL offers two P-3 graduate programs approved through the N.J. Department of Education.

"Both of these programs prepare educators to create responsive, inclusive and developmentally appropriate learning environments for young children through coursework and field experiences," explained NJCTL Executive Director Robert Goodman.

The first program, available now, is an "alternate route" for current and prospective teachers who hold a P-3 Certificate of Eligibility. They can begin working as P-3 teachers upon completion of the first course. The 10-course program, to earn 33 graduate credits, costs \$7,425 and is discounted to \$5,940 for NJEA members.

The second program, expected to be available in April, is for any prospective teacher with a bachelor's degree seeking a traditional teacher preparation program. Through the 11-course program, enrollees prepare for the early childhood Praxis exam, receive clinical practice and work toward full certification.

The program will provide 36 graduate-level credits. Tuition is \$8,100; discounted to \$6,480 for NJEA members.

These programs—at considerably less cost than traditional graduate school programs—prepares teachers for roles in public/private schools, child care leadership, curriculum development or family support.

"Our programs open the doors for those who want to become preschool teachers, directors, consultants, curriculum developers and family specialists," Goodman said. "In such a high-demand area, NJCTL is pleased to fulfill a key role."

NJCTL also provides teacher training in other critical areas, such as mathematics, the sciences and special education.

NJCTL, founded and supported by the New Jersey Education Association, is a nonprofit that is providing a simple, scalable solution for our nation's teacher shortage and the great social injustice that comes from depriving underserved students access to in-demand coursework. Learn more at [NJCTL.org](http://NJCTL.org).

## Lame duck legislative session ends with NJEA wins

### Pension justice work will continue



**NJEA President Steve Beatty, Vice President Petal Robertson and Secretary-Treasurer Tina Dare were joined by hundreds of active, retired and aspiring educators to deliver more than 112,000 petitions calling for Tier 1 for Everyone.**

The 221st session of the New Jersey Legislature ended Jan. 13 with two major victories for NJEA members.

A longtime NJEA priority, revamping the state's outdated public school charter law, came to fruition when the Senate and Assembly passed S4713/A5936 and S4716/A5935. After months of work with stakeholders, including the New Jersey Charter Schools Association, those bills won broad consensus and passed both houses with overwhelming bipartisan support. Three decades after passage of the original law authorizing public charter schools in New Jersey, the new bills provide for greater accountability and transparency for those public schools.

On the pension front, S4223/A5118, which restores the right of public employees who are on long-term disability to be insured through the state health benefits systems, also overwhelmingly passed both houses, the final day of the legislative session. Following on the heels of another win earlier this year that strengthened the rights of members who returned to the pension system following a break in service, it represents the second important pension reform win of the year, showing continued momentum on pension issues that will carry into the coming legislative session.

The charter reform bills and the long-term disability bills were signed by Gov. Phil Murphy.

In addition, Gov. Murphy signed A3451 which contains a number of changes to the state's laws concerning unpaid, job-protected leave that eligible employees may take under the NJ Family Leave Act (NJFLA). This change will make it much easier for school employees to qualify

for unpaid, job-protected leave under NJFLA. This will particularly help where members take sustained leave for childbirth and bonding or to care for a family member, particularly if they need to take more than one leave within a short timeframe. Once these members return to work, they will have to work far fewer hours to qualify for NJFLA.

Another top NJEA priority, reform of the pension systems to eliminate DCRP and return all members to Tier 1 of the PERS and TPAF systems, will continue in the upcoming legislative session.

NJEA President Steve Beatty, NJEA Vice President Petal Robertson, and NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Tina Dare said this about the wins and the member advocacy that drove them:

"These victories are a direct result of the relentless advocacy of NJEA members over the past year and especially over the last six weeks. Restoring health benefits for members on long-term disability is a fundamental matter of fairness. It will be life changing for the affected members. Modernizing New Jersey's charter school law is long overdue and brings greater fairness and accountability to that sector of our public schools.

"These wins show what we can accomplish when we stand together and speak up for justice. But our work is far from done. We remain committed to achieving full pension justice, including a Tier 1 pension for every member. That fight continues, and NJEA members will keep leading the way as a new Legislature is seated and a new governor takes office."

## The New York Giants celebrate NJEA Members

*By Steve Priolo, NJEA External Partnerships*

NJEA's two-year partnership with the New York Giants culminated in a very special day for Mark Richards, recipient of the NJEA-NY Giants Educator of the Year. Richards, an educational support professional and the president of the East Orange Maintenance Association, was honored at the Giants vs. Dallas Cowboys game on Jan. 4. Richards' picture and school affiliation were broadcast on video boards throughout MetLife Stadium during the game. In addition, the Giants made a \$2,500 donation to Richards' district for classroom improvements.

Several other NJEA members were recognized as Educators of the Week throughout the season at Giants' home games. Each honoree's school was awarded a \$1,000 grant from the team:

**Angela DeLuccia, Sparta EA**  
**Elizabeth Gorka, Sayreville EA**  
**Patricia Guerra-Frazier, Union EA**  
**Cathy Hurley, Bayonne EA**  
**Teresa Johnson, Delsea EA**  
**Jacqueline Kruzik, Matawan Aberdeen Regional EA**  
**Judy Martinez, Trenton TESA**  
**Linda Miller, Jersey City EA**  
**Marisol Mondaca, Red Bank Regional EA**  
**Rosa Morgan, Sayreville EA**  
**Christine Nagy, Middletown Township EA**  
**Dayna Orlak, Waldwick EA**  
**Stacey Sweeny, Atlantic City EA**  
**Stacy Yanko, Hopatcong EA**

*Steve Priolo is the associate director of External Partnerships. He may be reached at [spriolo@njea.org](mailto:spriolo@njea.org).*



Mark Richards was honored at the Giants vs. Dallas Cowboys game on Jan 4.



Top: Christine Nagy sports her Giants gear at the Jan. 4 game.

Middle: Stacey Sweeny was joined by her bundled-up entourage.

Bottom: Honoree Patricia Guerra-Frazier enjoyed the game with her husband, James.

# Warren County Education Association: An organizing powerhouse

By Jennifer Clemen

The Warren County Education Association (WCEA) is setting the standard for member engagement, communication and community-building across New Jersey. Under the dynamic and inclusive leadership of President Erin Durkin, the association has transformed challenges into opportunities and built a strong, connected network of more than 2,000 educators across one of the state's most geographically diverse counties.

NJEA President Steve Beatty often says, "Lead, follow, or get out of the way," and WCEA is unquestionably leading the way. With locals spread up to 25 miles apart and membership sizes ranging from small school districts to large associations, unifying Warren County once posed a significant challenge. Today, WCEA stands as a model of what is possible when leadership is intentional, inclusive and relentlessly member-focused.

"Members are seen and heard," Durkin said. After stepping into the presidency four years ago, she quickly recognized the need for a clear, consistent plan to reach every member. Geography could no longer be a barrier to engagement. Through thoughtful communication strategies and creative, welcoming events, WCEA has fostered meaningful connections across the county.

Durkin's leadership style has earned praise throughout the association. "Communication is her superpower," said NJEA Executive Committee member and WCEA Treasurer Laurie O'Brien. "Her emails strike the perfect balance between listening to members, responding to their needs and motivating them to take action that strengthens our association."

In addition to regular outreach, Durkin hosts Zoom roundtable sessions for local presidents, membership chairs and other leaders. These meetings provide a valuable space for collaboration, problem-solving and shared support. "Local leaders need a community, too," Durkin said. "WCEA is proud to be that support system and to help leaders feel confident and connected."

The results speak for themselves. WCEA events that once struggled for attendance now regularly sell out, often with waiting lists. Annual new member events welcome educators into the association by highlighting union benefits, organizational structure and advocacy opportunities. The highly anticipated Member Extravaganza delivers engaging

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*Jennifer Clemen is a seventh-grade teacher in Englewood and an NJEA Communications Consultant. She can be reached at [jclemen@njea.org](mailto:jclemen@njea.org).*



**Warren County Education Association President Erin Durkin is working to build a strong, connected network of educators across one of the most geographically diverse counties.**

experiences that leave attendees energized, informed and excited to stay involved.

Community partnerships are another cornerstone of WCEA's success. Through Public Education Partnership (PEP) grants and outreach initiatives, the association has hosted food drives, family nights with the IronPigs baseball team, Bowling for Backpacks and other family-friendly events. These activities strengthen ties between educators and the communities they serve while creating inclusive opportunities for members and their families. WCEA has also built strong collaborative relationships with neighboring counties, including Morris, Hunterdon and Sussex.

Most recently, WCEA brought members together to advocate for pension fairness, calling for all educators to be placed in Tier 1 and eliminating the harmful requirements of Tier 5. A sold-out multi-county trivia night blended fun, education and advocacy, ensuring members left ready to take action beyond the event.

"Members left feeling informed, energized and valued," Durkin said. "When people know their association truly cares about them, they are inspired to speak up, get involved and advocate for themselves and their colleagues."

Through strong leadership, clear communication and a genuine commitment to its members, WCEA continues to lead by example—proving that when educators come together, they can build a stronger union and a stronger future for public education.

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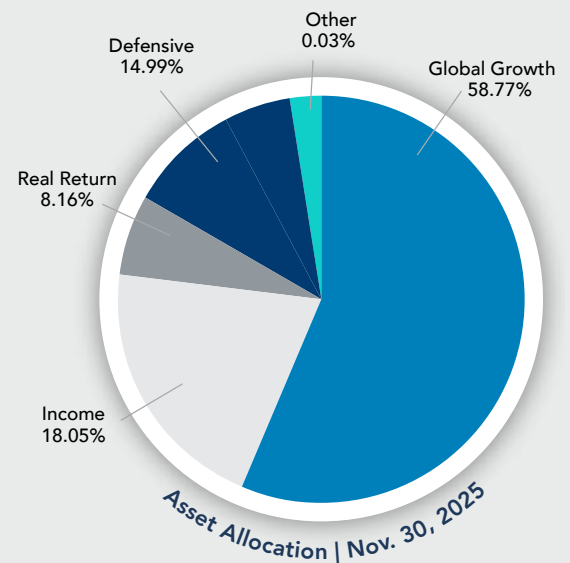
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## PENSION UPDATE

TOTAL PENSION FUND: \$79.25 BILLION

The totals below reflect market values as of Nov. 30, 2025, and for comparison, Sept. 30, 2025. The figures, which are rounded, may not reflect the current market values of some alternative investments through the period noted, because of lags in reporting under industry standards.

	Nov 30, 2025		Sept 30, 2025	
	Market Value (\$ billions)	Asset Allocation	Market Value (\$ billions)	Asset Allocation
Global Growth	\$46.58	58.77%	\$46.09	58.34%
Income	\$14.30	18.05%	\$14.05	17.78%
Real Return	\$6.47	8.16%	\$6.50	8.22%
Defensive	\$11.88	14.99%	\$12.26	15.52%
Other	\$0.024	0.03%	\$0.100	0.13%
Total	\$79.25	100%	\$79.00	100%



All reports and financial statements are posted on the Division of Investments' website at [nj.gov/treasury/doinvest/index.shtml](http://nj.gov/treasury/doinvest/index.shtml)

Hudson County  
Community College  
Professional Association  
(HCCCPA) President  
Michael Ferlise and  
Dr. Christopher Reber,  
president of the college.



# A commitment to COLLABORATION

## Hudson County Community College Professional Association negotiates award-winning contract

*By Michael J. Ferlise*

When you think of contract negotiations, do you envision an armored Russell Crowe defiantly entering the Colosseum as the enslaved Maximus Decimus Meridius in a life and death struggle for his freedom and the liberation of Rome under the oppressive Emperor Commodus? My suspicion is you do.

It is not an unwarranted vision given common assumptions that management and labor relations are naturally opposed to each other and fraught with hostile conflicts. In fact, all too many of us in the labor movement tirelessly and at times heroically confront abysmal circumstances and dishearteningly harsh relations with their administrations.

Since 2018, with an insurgent union leadership and then a new college president, Hudson County Community College has stood firmly and proudly outside this adversarial narrative. Many of our notable collective bargaining achievements, recognized by two Jim George Collective Bargaining Awards during these years, were possible because of a shared commitment by our association and a reform-minded college administration to work together to address and resolve important and complex institutional problems in a mutually beneficial manner. Though it has not always been easy, we have maintained a commitment to collaboration.

The Hudson County Community College Professional Association (PA) represents slightly more than 90 full-time faculty, which, as of our 2025-2028 contract, includes nursing and temporary full-time faculty. We were thrilled and honored to be the 2025 Jim George Collective Bargaining Award recipients. The award not only recognizes and celebrates the success of our settlements but also affirms the value and advantages of the collaborative and non-adversarial approaches we and our college administration have pursued.

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*Michael J. Ferlise is the president of the Hudson County Community College Professional Association. He may be reached at [mferlise@hccc.edu](mailto:mferlise@hccc.edu).*

### **2025 negotiations and preparations**

Preparations for bargaining began in early October 2024 by forming various working groups and ad hoc committees to survey PA members for their preferred contractual items and priorities. The committees also gathered economic data and relevant contracts and legislation to aid in drafting proposals.

Although we relied on the solid guidance of our highly capable and responsive NJEA UniServ Representative, Maury Koffman, we remained principally committed to self-determination - conducting our own research, drafting more than 40 proposals, and leading our team's negotiations.

Our hard-working and outstanding negotiation team included Lauren Drew, Sean Egan, Karen Hosick, Heather Connors and me. We provide the membership with regular updates and feedback and formed several joint taskforces and work groups with members of the administration to address the terms and conditions of the following proposals:

- An accelerated tenure clock application,
- Student mentoring,
- Technology and distance learning,
- New clinical coordination positions in radiography and medical assisting, and
- The inclusion of nursing faculty and temporary full-time faculty as new unit members.

While clearly defining and limiting faculty responsibilities, many of these proposals increased compensation as additional voluntary assignments. Some of these joint ventures were formed a year or more in advance of our actual negotiations, allowing the teams to craft better agreements whose terms and conditions were more thoroughly developed. Nearly all were lengthy and detailed proposals of high quality. The majority sailed through our negotiation sessions with little or no debate since they had already received the union's and administration's stamps of approval.



NJEA UniServ Field Representative Maury Koffman, HCCCPA President Michael J. Ferlise, HCCC President Dr. Christopher Reber and HCCC negotiating team chair Dr. Nicholas Chiaravalloti sit in the HCCCPA office.

### **Bargaining challenges**

We faced our fair share of challenges as we entered negotiations in Spring 2025. A great deal of financial uncertainty and political anxiety cascaded down from the state to the county and into the college's administration and negotiation team in response to the Trump reelection.

Additional changes in the County and County Executive's office, which had previously been supportive of our college, resulted in a sudden and unexpected removal of HCCC's long-serving chair and vice-chair of the board of trustees. The threat of additional turnover loomed, leaving the association uncertain as to the new board's position on our negotiations and the extent to which they would support our goal of financial parity with similar public institutions.

We also faced a burgeoning revolt by a contingent of faculty who adamantly opposed our intention to include nursing lecturers into the unit as full-time tenure-track faculty while also honoring their current salaries that were comparatively higher than non-nursing faculty. The nurses were the last of the lecturers, so categorically eliminating the lecturer position from our institution was a high priority for our team.

In addition, our agreement would allow the college to offer newly hired nurses significantly higher starting salaries than new non-nursing faculty due to their greater

market value and the department's troubling inability to retain nurse lecturers as employees. We believed this put upward pressure on faculty salaries in general. Our rebellious colleagues saw it as deeply unfair and, worse, an obstacle to ratification of an agreement.

The county was expected to pull back its maximum budgetary increase to our college to 2%. With cautious anticipation, the administration offered us a meager wage increase of 3.25%, 3%, 3% for each year of a three-year contract. Following upon the heels of our two previous and highly favorable settlements and our members' expectations for parity, my negotiation team refused to present such paltry terms to our members, which we knew they would not ratify.

Ratification, we decided, would require a more creative response and viable alternatives.

### **New strategy and alternative proposals**

In response to faculty opposition and the unacceptable salary offer, our negotiation team reworked our proposal while I held a series of productive sidebar discussions with Nicholas Chiaravalloti, head of the administration's negotiation team, to work out a satisfactory alternative. Both teams eventually settled on the addition of varied criteria that would increase nursing and non-nursing

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## ***Collaboration, when it works, strengthens unions and transforms institutions.***

faculty salaries based on degree/certification/credential attainment, years of service, as well as rank requirements. Increases may take place concurrently and therefore “stacked” as increments to the base.

We also agreed to a historic, first-time inclusion of a salary guide based on a 15-year/step model to replace our previous “30 Year Hybrid Parity Model” that allowed only a one-time salary adjustment for years of service. Faculty now reach maximums faster and their minimum salary ranges have been considerably increased for each of their four ranks. Instructor starting salaries, for example, increase 9.09% (from the previous \$55,000 to \$60,000); 15.38% increase for Assistant Professor (from \$60,000 to \$69,266); 15.40% increase for Associate Professor (from \$65,000 to \$75,013) and a 14.13% increase for Full Professor (from \$75,000 to \$85,599).

Implementation of the guide included the addition of \$100,000 by the college for one-time equity adjustments that lifted minimums for newly hired instructors and helped ameliorate previous wage inequities for faculty serving 25 years or more. The PA agreed to trade our meager longevity increments - that were not added to our base salaries - to fund the guide.

The new wage increase amounts are significant. While the annual base wage increase for each member of the bargaining unit remains a flat 3.25%, 3.0% and 3.0% for each year of the agreement, the above-mentioned additions will increase our members' base wages by a 12.4% total over the life of this agreement. For example, from Fall 2024 to Spring 2028 (year three of the contract), some members will realize an increase of their base salary from \$72,265 to \$96,144, a 27% increase, and \$89,494 to \$108,505, a 21% increase.

It is worth noting that these amounts do not include two separate \$2,000 pay increases faculty now receive for their degree attainments, which we estimate will add another 1.15% to the base wage increase of 3.25% in year one. About a third of our members will benefit from them in the first year. And 21 members – about a quarter of our membership – will have their salary increased by more than \$10,000 over the course of the contract. For members on-guide, the average year 1 salary increase is 6.2%.

### **Cooperative approaches can pose challenges**

I want to be careful not to idealize or mislead when sharing our generally positive experience at HCCC or in evaluating the promise of non-adversarial approaches. Cooperative approaches can pose challenges and limits. A great deal of thought, effort and trust is required of them, and processes can easily break down despite both sides' commitment. Even when parties agree with it in principle, collaboration can be difficult to define or stick to in practice, and the rules that govern such efforts can be equally difficult to agree on. Similarly, familiar adversarial tactics and mindsets are easy to fall back on, whether intentional or not.

Nor do I want to dismiss the importance of the real structural differences in power that exist between faculty and administration and the limit it may pose to what's possible for labor. This, however, raises larger political and legislative issues.

Nonetheless, I believe our HCCC experience and Jim George recognition demonstrate that productive and meaningful alternatives to the adversarial model are possible and fruitful. Seizing opportunities to work in partnership with a willing administration, if not actively initiating such possibilities with them, offer real advances that further build and strengthen our unions. 🏠



**Ferlise and Reber with the award-winning contract.**

# PATIENCE AND PERSEVERANCE WILL BRING PENSION JUSTICE

*By Marybeth Beichert*

The 221st New Jersey Legislative session ended on Jan. 12 with several major victories for NJEA members, including an extension of the pause on student growth objectives (SGOs), restoration of the pension for members with a break in service, a fifth consecutive full pension payment, stronger charter school accountability and the return of long-term disability for some members in tiers 4 and 5. However, legislation to deliver pension justice and retirement dignity for all members, Tier 1 for Everyone, was not taken up by lawmakers.

It wasn't for lack of effort.

Recognizing that the five tiers of the pension system were adding to the difficulties in recruiting and retaining educators, the Tier 1 for Everyone legislation was designed to collapse pension Tier 5 into pension Tier 1. Two pieces of legislation were created to restore pension justice to all members—one for members in TPAF and one for members in PERS. The legislation would have also eliminated the Defined Contribution Retirement Plan (DCRP), a savings plan that provides no financial stability for our members who work less than 32 hours a week.

For the last two years, this campaign has been one of NJEA's priorities. In Phase 1 of the campaign NJEA local leaders and staff set out to make sure every member understood what pension tier they belonged to, what it meant for their financial future and how to sign up to become a pension advocate. In Phase 2, which began last summer, members were asked to meet with legislators, share their pension tier stories and sign a petition that would be delivered to legislative leaders to help demonstrate to them that something must be done to make the pension system fairer.

On Dec. 4, NJEA held a lobby day with more than 200 members. Members delivered more than 112,000 signed petitions to Gov. Phil Murphy, Assembly Speaker Craig

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*Marybeth Beichert is an associate director in the Communications Division. She can be reached at [mbeichert@njea.org](mailto:mbeichert@njea.org).*



**NJEA President Steve Beatty, Vice President Petal Robertson and Secretary-Treasurer Tina Dare were joined by hundreds of active, retired and aspiring educators to deliver more than 112,000 petitions calling for Tier 1 for Everyone.**

Coughlin and Senate President Nick Scutari. Members wore red to support public education, lined the hallways of the Statehouse, spoke with members of the Legislature and were a visible reminder that NJEA members will not back down until they secure retirement dignity.

Members continued to be a presence in the Statehouse on Legislative session days throughout December up until Jan. 12, when the legislative session ended.

## **Legislation is a slow-moving process**

While the goal of this campaign was to make sure these pension bills went through the legislative process during lame duck and were signed into law by Gov. Murphy before he left office, the fact that they didn't move goes to show that passing legislation takes time and immense pressure.

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## The fight for pension justice goes on.

There are multiple steps for a bill to go through and unlike the Schoolhouse Rock videos many of us watched growing up, passing legislation is not a song and dance. It can be a long, slow-moving and contentious process. The founders designed it that way to ensure that legislation is carefully reviewed, fiscal requirements can be funded and all voices—even the ones who vehemently oppose a bill—have their say. Legislation reflects societies values, but as the late former U.S. Senator Harry Reid once said, “Legislation is also the art of compromise.” Both A5158/S3998 and A5160/S3997 had Republican and Democratic co-sponsors, but it is clear NJEA staff and members must still educate legislators and the public as to why the current pension system is unfair to educators and harmful to students and our public schools.

### Perseverance for the long haul

NJEA members and other public employees have been here before. In fact, they have been advocating for legislation that supports students, public education, fair wages and quality benefits even before collective bargaining became law in New Jersey in 1968. It is what our members do.

NJEA’s advocacy for ESP Job Justice legislation took close to 20 years, numerous sponsors and endless meetings with legislators before becoming law. Even when the bills – with bipartisan support – finally made their way to Gov. Chris Christie’s desk in 2013, he vetoed them and the entire process had to start over again.

Chapter 44 legislation, the antidote to the harmful financial consequences of Gov. Christie’s Chapter 78, took several years of educating legislators and the public and organizing our members in order to turn their frustration into action before becoming law.

NJEA member action on legislation around edTPA, sick leave and, now, SGOs took countless hours, days and months of organizing and lobbying. Working together, our members forced changes to these systems.

It will be no different for Tier 1 for Everyone legislation. The fight for pension justice goes on. NJEA will continue to make sure the bills are re-introduced under Gov. Mikie Sherrill’s administration and a new legislative session. There is too much at stake for our students, our members and public education. 🇺🇸



Dare, Beatty and Robertson led the procession from NJEA Headquarters across the street to the NJ Statehouse on the Dec. 4 lobby day.



Wearing Red for Ed, members delivered petitions, met with legislators and used their collective power to fight for pension justice.



The gallery at the Statehouse was awash in red, a visual reminder of the power of NJEA, NJREA and NJAEA members when they stand together to fight for members’ economic rights.

# LIVING THE REVOLUTION

How New Jersey students are testing  
250 years of American ideals

*By Theresa Maughan*

On the eve of the nation's 250th birthday, my students are discovering that the American Revolution is less a finished story than a question still posed to every generation: How far have we really come in living up to our founding ideals of liberty, equality, justice under the law, representation and tolerance? Drawing on my work with the with the New Jersey Department of Education's (NJDOE's) Revolutionary Schools initiative Revolutionary Schools initiative and the and the statewide RevolutionNJ partnership, my classroom has become a laboratory where those lofty principles are tested against both 18th century realities and 21st century struggles. Through gallery walks featuring diverse Revolutionary era voices, writing tasks that ask students to compare competing visions of freedom and reflection prompts such as "What will my role be in the ongoing American Revolution?" young people in New Jersey are learning to see the 250th anniversary not as a distant commemoration, but as an invitation to help close the enduring gap between the promise of the Declaration and the unfinished work of American democracy.

The 2025-26 school year, my 44th as an educator, started with a collaboration with the NJDOE's Revolutionary Schools project, RevolutionNJ, Assistant Commissioner Jorden Schiff, Pete Mazzagatti, Tami Strege and the amazing Joe Nappi, who is the 2024 NJ State Teacher of the Year. Together, we created half-day workshop sessions for high school students commemorating the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution.

Students were guided through an analysis of the Revolutionary era using primary sources, connecting the past to the present and identifying how they could be change makers or active participants in the Living

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*Theresa Maughan is a social studies teacher at East Orange STEM Academy in East Orange. She was the 2021-22 NJ State Teacher of the Year and the recipient of the 2023 Horace Mann Award for Teaching Excellence. She may be reached at [maughantheresa@gmail.com](mailto:maughantheresa@gmail.com).*



Beth Cooper, curator of the NJ State Museum, joins Theresa Maughan and Hannah Gaston, director of education at the Liberty Hall Museum. Photo courtesy of Theresa Maughan.

Revolution. This event was held at the Newark Public Library on Sept. 17, national Constitution Day, and included a behind the scenes preview of Ken Burns's new series, "The American Revolution." Nappi and I were honored to have New Jersey Commissioner of Education Kevin Dehmer, Lieutenant Governor Tahesha Way and Ken Burns speak to the students in our sessions.

The 250th anniversary of the American Revolution is giving New Jersey educators a rare chance to teach the founding era not as distant mythology, but as a living set of promises that students can interrogate, question and extend.

As a participant in the NJDOE'S Revolutionary Schools project and a partner with RevolutionNJ, our classroom work now aims to center diverse Revolutionary voices, connect 18th century ideals to 21st century struggles and invite students to define their own role in the never-ending journey of American democracy.

### **Revolutionary Schools and RevolutionNJ**

RevolutionNJ is the statewide partnership between the New Jersey Historical Commission and Crossroads of the American Revolution. They are charged with planning New Jersey's commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution. The Revolutionary Schools program, created by the NJDOE in collaboration with RevolutionNJ, recognizes schools that commemorate the 250th through exemplary social studies instruction, civic engagement and local history research.

Within this framework, classroom projects are designed to help students see New Jersey as the "Crossroads of the American Revolution," not only in terms of battles and generals but through the daily lives and choices of 18th century New Jerseyans. RevolutionNJ's interpretive framework explicitly calls on educators to tell a more diverse, inclusive story and to show how Revolutionary events, ideas and ideals continue to shape contemporary debates over democracy and justice.

### **Centering revolutionary ideals**

Much of this work is anchored in five interconnected Revolutionary ideals: liberty, equality, justice under law, representation/democracy and tolerance. Students begin by brainstorming definitions of "revolution" and then mapping their own ideas—change, resistance, power, voice—onto these founding principles. This opening invites them to ask not just what changed in 1776, but whose lives were transformed, whose were left out and who is still waiting for promises to be fulfilled.

The ideals become analytic lenses guiding every subsequent activity. Students examine the tension between universal language such as "all men are created

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***My classroom has become a laboratory where Revolutionary ideals are tested against 21st century struggles.***

equal" and the realities of slavery, gender hierarchy and Native dispossession. In addition, students track how people on the margins claimed Revolutionary language for themselves. At the same time, students connect these ideals to contemporary movements for voting rights, criminal justice reform, LGBTQ+ equality and immigration justice, echoing President Barack Obama's reminder in his Second Inaugural Address that the truths of the Declaration of Independence are "self-evident, but never self-executing."

### **Voices of the Revolution: gallery walk**

The centerpiece of the Sept. 17 Newark Public Library workshop for high school students was a "Voices of the Revolution" gallery walk, structured around those core ideals. The room became an immersive primary source lab, with each station highlighting a different figure—Patriot, Loyalist, woman, Black New Jerseyan, Native leader, artisan, soldier—and linking their words and actions to liberty, equality, justice, representation or tolerance.

Students circulated in small groups, annotating excerpts, images and short biographies, and responding to prompts such as: Who is included in this person's vision of "the people"? Which ideal did they fight to expand, and at what cost? How do their experiences complicate textbook narratives about the Revolution? This structure encouraged mixed ability scholars to engage at different entry points—close reading for some, big picture synthesis for others—while keeping the focus on interpretation rather than recall.

Later, in my own high school classes, the culminating task asked students to write an essay comparing and contrasting two figures from the gallery who made a strong impression. They analyzed how each expressed one or more Revolutionary ideals through words or actions, then concluded by connecting those lessons to 2025, asking: How might each figure's vision still matter today? What can people now learn from placing their stories side by side? This format pushed students beyond hero worship toward historical argument, inviting them to see ideological



Maughan and students use every lesson to learn from the past and discuss what the next chapter of the American Revolution will look like. Photo courtesy of RevolutionNJ.

conflict, moral ambiguity and unfinished work as central to the Revolutionary story.

### **A Living Revolution in the classroom**

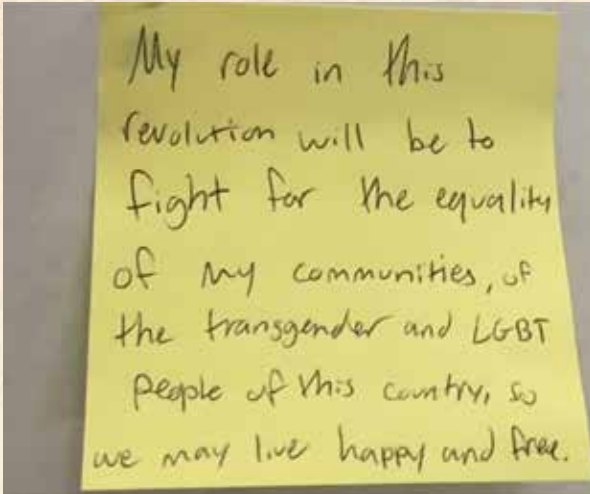
RevolutionNJ's own language emphasizes that the commemoration is "about much more than the American Revolution" and is fundamentally about the democracy that emerged from it. That framing has shaped classroom practice: the Revolution is taught not as a closed chapter, but as a conversation that continues.

A key activity, "The Living Revolution," asks students to reflect explicitly on their own role in this ongoing project. After the gallery walk and essay, students choose the ideal that most resonates with them and answer: What will my role be in the ongoing American Revolution? What specific actions can I take to advance that ideal today? Working with partners, they draft concrete commitments: facilitating a voter registration drive for eligible high school seniors, designing a mini exhibit on overlooked local Revolutionary figures, or organizing a schoolwide teach-in on civil liberties. These steps reframe the 250th as an opportunity for civic practice, not just historical commemoration.

### **How well have we lived up to our ideals?**

The 250th anniversary naturally raises evaluative questions: Which Revolutionary ideals have we moved closer to achieving, and which remain unfulfilled? *Crossroads of the American Revolution* encourages educators to use New Jersey case studies—Black soldiers seeking pensions, enslaved people petitioning for freedom, women managing farms and businesses, Loyalist exiles—to show that debates over liberty and justice were present from the beginning. These stories help students see that even in the 1770s, Americans argued fiercely over what equality and representation should look like.

In classroom discussions and writing, students often conclude that the United States has made substantial progress on ideals like representation and formal equality under law—especially through constitutional amendments, expanded suffrage and civil rights legislation—while also recognizing that persistent racial, economic and gender inequities reveal the limits of that progress. Many identify tolerance and substantive equality as the least realized ideals, pointing to contemporary polarization, hate violence and structural disparities as evidence that the founding promises have not yet been fully extended to all communities. These conversations can be uncomfortable,



Students were asked, "What will be your role in the living Revolution?" Photo courtesy of RevolutionNJ.

but they align directly with RevolutionNJ's goal of elevating complex history to help students respond to the present and prepare for the future.

### Resources NJ educators can use

One practical benefit of participating in the Revolutionary Schools initiative has been exposure to a rich ecosystem of resources that New Jersey educators can bring into their own classrooms. Crossroads of the American Revolution maintains classroom resources that help teachers integrate stories of 18th century New Jerseyans into vocabulary, geography and writing curricula, along with downloadable videos, activity guides and connections to field trips and living history programs across the state. Sites such as the Old Barracks Museum in Trenton, Liberty Hall in Union and other partner institutions offer both in-person and virtual programs that allow students to role-play Revolutionary era New Jerseyans and wrestle with loyalty, liberty and survival.

National partners like the National Constitution Center and the Museum of the American Revolution provide free lesson plans, timelines and thematic units that connect the Declaration's language to later struggles including Seneca Falls, Selma and Stonewall. New Jersey educators can adapt these materials to spotlight local sites and communities, reinforcing that the fight to define American freedom has always been both national and deeply local.

### Looking toward 2026 and beyond

The approach of July 4, 2026, is driving a wave of community-based projects that invite schools to collaborate with libraries, museums and historical societies. The Revolutionary Schools initiative explicitly encourages educators to share information about these local and statewide events and to connect them to classroom inquiry,

**Bring the American Revolution to life with your students:**

 Crossroads of the American Revolution	 Museum of the American Revolution
 Liberty Hall Museum	 New Jersey State Museum
 Revolution NJ	 Teaching the American Revolution

turning field trips and public programs into catalysts for deeper student research and civic engagement.

For educators, the question is not whether to mark the 250th, but how: Will this anniversary reinforce a narrow, triumphalist narrative, or will it help students grapple honestly with contradictions between ideals and reality and imagine how to close that gap? RevolutionNJ offers a model rooted in inclusive storytelling, critical thinking and active citizenship, urging teachers and students alike to see themselves as stewards of a fragile, unfinished democratic experiment. In that sense, every lesson on liberty, equality, justice, representation and tolerance becomes an invitation – not just to learn about the past, but to decide what the next chapter of the American Revolution will look like, and who will be fully included in it. 🗣️



# NJEA MEMBERS ADOPT NEW STRATEGIC PURPOSE, MISSION AND VISION

*By Steve Baker*

At its Jan. 10 meeting, the NJEA Delegate Assembly unanimously voted to adopt a new Strategic Purpose, Mission and Vision that will serve as the association's guiding framework for years to come. That vote followed a unanimous vote of the NJEA Executive Committee the previous evening. This action replaces the Mission, Vision and Goals that have directed NJEA's work for decades and reflects a commitment to aligning our union's priorities with our stated intention to be a justice-centered labor union.

## **Why the change?**

The newly adopted document reaffirms NJEA's identity as a member-led, justice-centered labor union that champions the rights, dignity, and working and learning conditions of public educators. It lays out a mission focused on advocating for and protecting members' rights, benefits and interests while promoting a high-quality, equitable system of public education for all students. It describes a New Jersey where educators are respected and supported and every student has access to an inclusive, safe and high-quality education.

NJEA's previous Mission, Vision and Goals provided a strong foundation for advocacy and organizing in its day. However, as NJEA President Steve Beatty explained, the educational and societal landscape has shifted significantly in recent years.

"Our members face challenges that look very different from those of 20 or 30 years ago," Beatty said. "We need a clear statement of our values that will help us identify shared objectives and develop effective strategies. Adopting this new framework ensures that every part of NJEA is working toward the same goals."

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*Steve Baker is the NJEA Communications Director. He may be reached at [sbaker@njea.org](mailto:sbaker@njea.org).*

"This process was about listening to members and making sure their priorities shaped the outcome," said NJEA Vice President Petal Robertson. "The new Strategic Purpose, Mission and Vision reflects the values we stand for and the union we are striving to become. It gives us a clear path to strengthen our union and fight for equity, justice and respect in our union and our school communities."

"NJEA members deserve a union that shares our values and is committed to our success," NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Tina Dare said. "This framework helps ensure we can become that union. It elevates our shared priorities and clearly states our purpose. It's a tool we will use in all of our important decision making, beginning with the development of our budget in the coming weeks."

## **How it came together**

The new Strategic Purpose, Mission and Vision is the result of a yearlong planning process led by the Strategic Planning Steering Committee. Beginning last spring, the committee worked with facilitator Lisa Nentl-Bloom to gather input from members and leaders across the state. A major turning point came at July's NJEA Summer Leadership Conference, where NJEA leaders participated in extended planning sessions that helped shape the draft plan.

Throughout the fall, the committee continually reviewed and revised the framework, boiling it down to its essential elements and working to ensure that it was fully aligned with the values and priorities of NJEA members. By January, the plan was ready for adoption, reflecting broad member input and collaboration across NJEA.

Beatty said the process was designed to keep members at the center. "We wanted a plan that every local, every committee and every staff team could use," he said. "When our work is aligned, we can deliver more for our members and for public education."



***When our work is aligned, we can deliver more for our members and for public education.***

### What the plan includes

The Strategic Purpose, Mission and Vision is organized around three pillars: Membership, Labor Rights, and Solidarity and Justice. Under these pillars are commitments to advance economic security and dignity, ensure professional respect, champion academic freedom, cultivate diverse and inclusive leadership, strengthen communities and public schools, and engage and unify all voices.

These priorities will guide NJEA’s advocacy, organizing and professional development work. Members will see the

plan reflected in efforts to recruit and retain members, campaigns for fair compensation and benefits, and initiatives that promote equity and honesty in education.

Beatty emphasized that the plan is intended to evolve. “This is not a document that sits on a shelf,” he said. “We will use it in our planning work. If necessary, we will review and refine it as conditions change. Most importantly, we will keep member voices at the center of that process.”

### Looking ahead

The adoption of the new Strategic Purpose, Mission and Vision marks an important step forward for NJEA. It honors the association’s history while providing a clear, actionable framework for the future. For members, it means a stronger, more unified organization focused on delivering results in classrooms and communities. 🏠

## NJEA PURPOSE

The New Jersey Education Association is a member-led, justice-centered labor union that champions the rights, dignity and working/learning conditions of public educators.

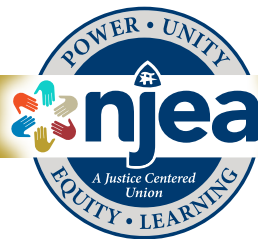
## NJEA MISSION

The New Jersey Education Association is dedicated to advocating for and protecting the rights, benefits, and interests of our members, while promoting a high-quality, equitable system of public education for all students.

## NJEA VISION

We envision a New Jersey where public educators are respected, supported, and equipped to thrive, and where every student has access to a high-quality, inclusive, and safe education. Guided by our diverse, member-driven community, NJEA advances educational excellence, equity, and social justice for all through organizing, advocacy, professional development and community engagement.

FOUNDATIONS OF



OUR ADVOCACY

### MEMBERSHIP

- Recruit and retain members
- Organize member to member
- Leverage collective power

### LABOR RIGHTS

- Advance economic security and dignity
- Ensure professional respect
- Champion academic freedom

### SOLIDARITY/JUSTICE

- Cultivate diverse and inclusive leadership structures
- Strengthen communities and public schools
- Engage and unify all voices

# THE LEGACY OF LONG COVID

By Dorothy Wigmore

## Long COVID is real: What can be done?

It's debilitating staff and students alike, among others. It's a mish-mash of symptoms and diseases that too often are not recognized, understood, taken seriously or treated effectively, much less prevented. Globally, education is one of the worst sectors hit since the pandemic was declared six years ago on March 11, 2020.

We're talking about long COVID—also called Post-COVID-19 Condition or Post-Acute Sequelae of SARS-CoV-2 infection (PASC).

The invisible and dynamic disability is a result of getting infected in this COVID-19 pandemic, whichever virus variant is going around, including current ones. Yes, the pandemic is still with us, however tired we are of it; it's only the emergency that the World Health Organization (WHO) declared over in 2023.

## What is it?

"If we learn one thing from this pandemic, we must recognize that 'pandemics disable people'—that is, acute infections can lead to chronic disabling disease," long COVID researcher Dr. Ziyad Al-Aly told a U.S. Senate Committee in January 2024.

Make no mistake: long COVID is disabling. The WHO defines the umbrella term as "the continuation or development of new symptoms three months after the initial SARS-CoV-2 infection, with these symptoms lasting for at least two months with no other explanation." The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says it "includes a wide range of symptoms or conditions that may improve, worsen, or be ongoing."

What's unusual is that it encompasses 200-plus symptoms and conditions involving almost every system in the body. Recovery may be complete or incomplete, and too many have return bouts and permanent effects.

Individual effects vary, as does severity, from hidden effects through mild and come-and-go symptoms to

life-changing/limiting conditions such as heart attacks, strokes, diabetes and myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome.

Dysautonomia (e.g., postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome/POTS) is common; those disorders disrupt the autonomic nervous system, which controls things such as blood pressure, heart rate, body temperature, breathing and digestion. Other ones are fatigue, "brain fog," cognitive impairment, depression, and cardiovascular, respiratory and metabolic problems. "Post-exertional malaise" from often-small physical, cognitive or emotional stimulation can put people in bed for days.

Anyone who gets COVID-19 can get long COVID; 90% follows a mild infection. It can start in two ways, Dr. Avindra Nath explained in a 2025 webinar. Either someone leaves the hospital with persistent symptoms, likely from acute infection damage, or they have a mild or asymptomatic case, don't seek medical care and later develop new symptoms.

The odds increase with the number of infections. Women are twice as likely as men to get it, for reasons to be determined, as are people with underlying conditions and those unvaccinated for the virus.

Long COVID is not rare, affecting at least 20 million U.S. adults by 2024, ranging from 13-28% of those in prime working years. Studies estimate up to 5.8 million American children also have it. These numbers far outweigh those for SARS-CoV-2 deaths and the prevalence—the numbers currently ill—is higher than other chronic diseases such as childhood asthma or diabetes and climbing.

Personal consequences are stressful and frustrating. They may face overall disability, poor quality of life, less or inability to work or go to school, loss of income and health insurance as well as increased out-of-pocket expenses.

Beyond that, social and health care systems are used more, fewer people work in key sectors and workers compensation systems are paying out big bucks. A 2025 study found current long COVID cases could cost US society at least \$2-\$6 billion annually.

## How are education staff affected?

Long COVID has disrupted careers for education staff, while posing organizational challenges.

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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.*



## Resources

In 2022, an EdWeek Research Center survey found that almost 20% of U.S. education staff surveyed said they had contracted long COVID, translating to hundreds of thousands in the sector. At least half said they knew at least one co-worker with it, and just over 40% said at least one of their students has had long COVID. A year later the numbers were down, reflecting recovery and, likely, how many left the sector.

### We're still learning but we know a lot

"I think the biggest challenge, really, was getting them to understand initially what my symptoms are and trying to explain what I've been doing and how I've got to where I am," a U.K. study participant said. It's a common experience for too many.

Yes, we're still learning about long COVID. Numbers affected, reported symptoms and repercussions vary, depending on the definition used, as do explanations about the causes.

However, we do know long COVID is a real, chronic, disabling, life-changing disease causing significant global economic challenges. It is a public and occupational health quagmire, with wide-reaching effects. Without a cure, prevention is essential.

### What can health and safety committees do?

The only way to prevent long COVID is to prevent getting COVID-19. To that end, committees need to push for:

- The local association and school districts to recognize the pandemic is still here and the virus is in the air, so precautions are needed
- Inspections and regular maintenance of ventilation systems, with reports that get follow-up action
- Cleaning the air in all school spaces and on buses, using ventilation, filtration and upper space UV
- Respirators, as needed.

Committees also can:

- Conduct walk-throughs/surveys to identify air quality issues and other factors contributing to the spread of airborne hazards.
- Learn more, and survey members, about COVID-19 and Long COVID concerns and experiences.
- Respond with workshops or conversations that provide information and opportunities to develop informed responses that support and protect members.

Members with long COVID need support, including recognition of their reality and accommodations required under the Americans with Disabilities Act, where long COVID is designated as a disability. Reduced stressors, such as pacing—how much someone does, how often—are key examples of appropriate actions.



**Bateman  
Horne  
Center:**  
*Long COVID*



**Dr. Ziyad Al-Aly, Addressing  
Long COVID: Advancing Research  
and Improving Patient Care (2024  
testimony to a U.S. Senate committee)**



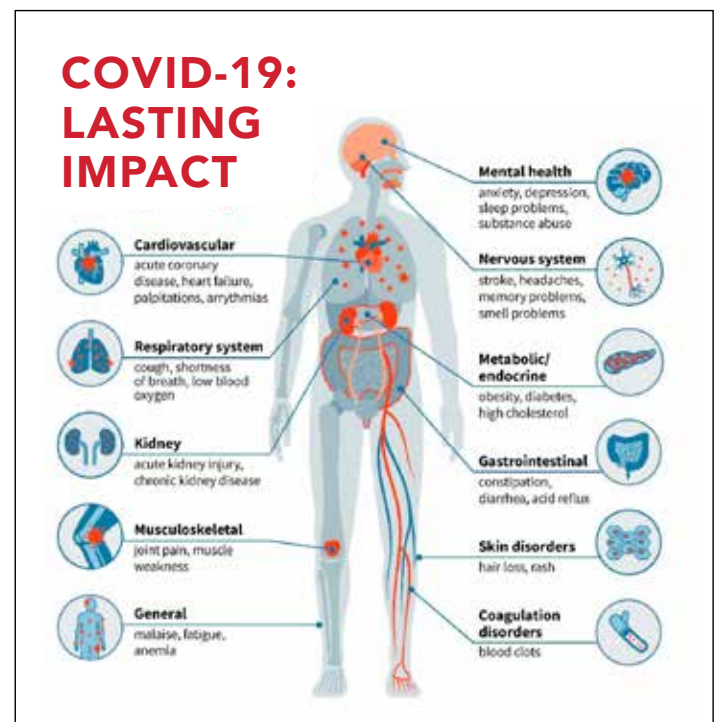
**Long COVID Web: Including Insights  
from long COVID Clinical Research and  
Therapeutic Approaches**



**Rory J. O'Connor and others, Work  
and vocational rehabilitation for people  
living with long COVID: Advancing  
Research and Improving Patient Care**



**The RECOVER Initiative**





PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

## NJREA membership: The gift that keeps on giving

Five years ago, John Carlson, then-president of the Atlantic County Retired Education Association (ACREA), proposed to the executive board of the Atlantic County Council of Education Associations (ACCEA) that it gift one year's NJREA membership to all professional and support staff retiring that year. Chic Brandt, now the ACREA president, agreed that in this digital age, new retirees didn't need a clock, a watch or a plaque anymore. Instead, they need information about pensions, health benefits, working after retirement and member benefits.

In June 2024, ACCEA began gifting its first year of membership in NJREA to all members retiring by June 30. June 2026 will be the third year this well-received and generous gift is awarded at a retirement luncheon.

Jaime Valente, NJEA's membership division manager, emails local and county presidents to explain the gifting process. While Atlantic County is the only county education association gifting all new retirees, several locals gift membership to thank retiring staff for their dedication to their students and community. Some county associations, such as the Passaic CREA, reimburse the locals for the expenditure.

"It's important to budget funds annually for gifting," explained Barbara Rheault, ACCEA president. "We anticipate 100-120 staff will retire and we want them to continue as informed NJREA members."

Gifting has paid off for the Atlantic ACREA. "Membership does increase," said Margaret "Candy" Peterson, membership chair. "When new retirees attend our fall and spring meeting and luncheon, not only do they keep informed of state and national issues that impact retirees, but they also become acquainted with people with similar backgrounds."

It is important to note that the NJREA membership gift may be applied to the purchase of lifetime membership which, like annual membership, includes NJREA, NJEA, NEA-Retired and the county retired association.

"Our membership gift keeps on giving because the recipients contribute to our philanthropic, legislative and recruitment activities," said Brandt. "I truly look forward to our June 2026 retirement luncheon and seeing those smiling faces as I present them with our gifting certificate, customized by NJEA's Membership Division."

For more information, contact [membership@NJEA.org](mailto:membership@NJEA.org).

## Around the counties March 2026

*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.*

### Bergen County REA

**May 12:** Luncheon meeting at Seasons Catering in Twp. of Washington. Reservation deadline is May 1. To attend, contact Marie Papaleo at 201-407-2543.

### Cumberland County REA

**March 4:** Winter luncheon meeting at The Millville Motorsports Park in Millville. To attend, contact Pam Garwood at 856-392-6909.

**May 6:** Spring luncheon meeting at Millville Motorsports Park in Millville. To attend, contact Pam Garwood at 856-392-6909.

### Essex County REA

**May 20:** Annual spring business luncheon meeting at the Hanover Manor in East Hanover. The guest speakers will be the NJEA officers. Reservation deadline is May 14, and the cost is \$40. To attend, contact Kathie McKoy Osborne at 973-715-6591.

### Gloucester County REA

**March 23:** MBOS orientation Zoom presentation. The presenters will be Mike Salerno and Sarah Favinger. Reservation deadline is TBA, and there is no cost. To attend, contact Margery Walsh at 856-381-1123.

**May 6:** Spring business meeting and luncheon at Ott's on the Green Bar and Grill in Sewell. There will be a member benefits fair. Reservation deadline is TBA, and the cost is \$30. To attend, contact Margery Walsh at 856-381-1123.

**Hudson County REA**

**May 6:** General membership meeting, member benefits fair and luncheon at LaReggia Restaurant in Secaucus. Reservation deadline is April 24, and the cost is \$40. To attend, contact Donna Middlebrooks at 973-610-7129.

**Mercer County REA**

**May 20:** Spring luncheon meeting at the Mercer Oaks Golf Course in Princeton Junction. The entertainment is TBA. Reservation deadline is May 10, and the cost is \$37. To attend, contact Lisa Rizziello at 609-577-6158.

**Middlesex County REA**

**March 12:** Spring luncheon meeting at the Grand Marquis in Old Bridge. There will be a member benefits fair with Aetna and Horizon Blue Cross/Blue Shield. Reservation deadline is March 2, and the cost is \$46. To attend, contact Susan Jaysnovitch at 732-925-1606.

**Monmouth County REA**

**April 14:** Spring luncheon meeting at Falcone’s at Renaissance in Ocean. The new slate of officers will be elected. Reservation deadline is April 6, and the cost is \$45. To attend, contact Debbie Adamchak at 848-459-2672.

**Morris County REA**

**May 13:** General luncheon meeting at the Birchwood Manor in Whippany. Entertainment will be provided by Bob and Friends, with three comedians. Reservation deadline is May 1, and the cost is \$35 for members and \$55 for guests. To attend, contact John Williams at 609-504-9681.

**Ocean County REA**

**May 7:** Luncheon meeting at the Captain’s Inn in Forked River. Speaker to be announced. Reservation deadline is April 25, and the cost is \$32. To attend, contact Pam Raynor at 862-268-5210.

**Passaic County REA**

**March 25:** Luncheon meeting at the Brownstone in Paterson. Reservation deadline is March 20, and the cost is \$35. To attend, contact Kitty Sausa at 201-410-1325.

**Salem County REA**

**May 18** Spring luncheon meeting at Woodstown Diner. There will be a presentation of the Good Kid Award – Pennsville Student. Reservation deadline is May 11, and the cost is \$20. To attend, contact Rosemma Ward at 856-467-4795.

**Somerset County REA**

**May 5:** Luncheon meeting at the Somerville Elks Club. The speaker will be Joel Farkas and his topic will be The Declaration of Independence Reservation deadline is TBA, and the cost is \$30. To attend, contact Kathy Kapp at 908-722-7715.

**Sussex County REA**

**April 13:** Spring luncheon meeting at Farmstead Golf and Country Club in Lafayette. Reservation deadline is March 30, and the cost is \$35. To attend, contact Betty Monaghan at 908-303-6436.

**Union County REA**

**May 19:** Spring luncheon meeting at Casa del Rey in Roselle Park. There will be a presentation from NJEA Government Relations and Horizon Aetna. Reservation deadline is May 10, and the cost is \$40. To attend, contact Luanne Lohman-DiCicco at 908-403-4093.

**Warren County REA**

**April 1:** Luncheon meeting at Hawk Pointe Golf Club in Washington. The entertainment is TBA. Reservation deadline is March 25, 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).





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- LEADERSHIP (EdD)
  - P-K Education Leadership • Higher Education Leadership • Health Education Leadership
- LEARNING DISABILITIES
- LITERACY/READING
- PRESCHOOL, ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION

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## Nurses and school nurses push back on reclassification

By Gail Hall, RN, MSN, CSN-NJ and Stephanie Reilly, BSN, RN, CSN-NJ

On Nov. 20, the U.S. Department of Education (USED) published a list of professional degrees no longer eligible for higher education loans. Included in that list is nursing. This decision impacts student loan limits and access to federal Grad PLUS loans. The rationale by the USED for excluding nursing as a "professional degree" classification is rooted in historical categorization from the 1960s and a strict interpretation of federal law regarding the criteria for program classification and student loan limits.

What is a profession? Nursing, specifically New Jersey Certified School Nursing, should be recognized as a profession because it fully aligns with the widely accepted standards used to define a true profession. Here are the key reasons:

- Nursing is an occupation that requires specialized knowledge and often advanced education, training and a high level of skill.
- School nurses pass national licensing exams and hold additional certifications in school nursing. They have a defined scope of practice governed by state nursing boards, national nursing standards and school nursing professional organizations like the National Association of School Nursing (NASN) and the New Jersey State School Nurses Association, which includes individual county school nurse organizations.
- We have a strong ethical framework including standards of practice from the NASN. School nurses have autonomy, often acting as the only medical provider in the school building. We make professional judgments on clinical decisions based on evidence-based practice. This includes developing individual health care plans, assessing health needs, responding and treating emergencies

and managing and treating chronic conditions. School nurses have a strong commitment to public service, and we work daily to promote student health, which supports learning.

School nurses are not alone in our school communities affected by the USED decision to reclassify professions eligible for higher education funding. As per the USED, other school-related groups not deemed a profession are:

- Nursing and nurse practitioner programs
- Physician assistant studies
- Physical and occupational therapy
- Public health (MPH and DrPH)
- Audiology
- Social work
- Most education and teaching degrees
- Counseling or therapy
- Speech pathology

Many school-related professional organizations—including the American Nurses Association, NASN and other advocacy groups—have spoken out against the new definition, noting that it could restrict pathways into student-support professions, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. SCR 140, introduced by New Jersey Sen. Joseph F. Vitale in December 2025, urges the USED to include certain degree programs, one of them being nursing, to be included in the list of professional degree programs used by the federal student loan system. As of press time, the bill has not been reintroduced in the new legislative session.

The NASN has been unequivocal in affirming that school nursing is a profession. They are actively challenging this reclassification and collaborating with national nursing organizations to oppose the policy and safeguard opportunities for advanced education for future nurses.

From a nursing perspective, this policy is both shortsighted and damaging, not only to our workforce, but also to the students, families and communities who rely on our expertise. The professional responsibilities of school nurses remain unchanged, and we will continue to advocate for recognition, respect and educational pathways that strengthen, not undermine, our profession.

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*Gail Hall is a school nurse in the Freehold Regional High School District and the legislation chair for the NJ State School Nurses Association.*

*Stephanie Reilly is a school nurse in the Lindenwold School District and the legislation co-chair for the NJ State School Nurses Association. Hall and Reilly may be reached at [legislation@njssna.org](mailto:legislation@njssna.org).*

# STAFF NEWS

## HIRES AND PROMOTIONS



NJEA welcomed **JAMES OTTOMANELLI** as a secretary in the Office of Policy & Politics in the Government Relations Division on Jan. 5. Ottomanelli comes to NJEA with a background in labor and community organizing. He served as a shop steward for

RWDSU Local 1102 in his previous role, and he has contributed to mutual aid efforts in both Trenton and at The College of New Jersey. Ottomanelli earned a dual degree in philosophy and African American studies.



NJEA welcomed **ANA ROMAN** as a temporary secretary in the Region 23/25 office in Hasbrouck Heights. She also will provide support to Region 19 in West New York and Region 20 in Jersey City. Roman previously worked as a freelance business consultant and private tutor before joining NJEA staff. She has more than 10 years' experience in administrative roles and community outreach. Roman earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from Berkeley College and an associate degree in education from Essex County College. She was a longtime resident of Newark before moving to Carlstadt with her partner and daughter.



How to write for the NJEA

## REVIEW



### What can I submit for publication?

#### Feature article

Review feature articles address areas of interest to NJEA members. This is an opportunity to help your colleagues improve their skills by describing a successful approach or strategy. A feature article should range between 1,200 and 1,600 words. Remember to use subheads to break up sections; consider listing resources or tips as a separate sidebar.

#### Letter to the editor

Respond to content that has appeared in the *Review* by submitting a letter to the editor that is about 250 words or less.

#### Speak out

This occasional column lets members opine about a hot topic in education. If you have strong feelings about a current issue that would be of interest to other members, speak out in an essay of 600 words or less.

#### I Am NJEA

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

### How do I submit for publication?

#### Submitting content

Email submissions to [NJEAREview@njea.org](mailto:NJEAREview@njea.org). Be sure to include your name and contact information, the name of your district and what you do there, the name of your local association, as well as the name and contact information of your local association president.

#### The review process

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

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



## AEA ADVOCATES FOR MEMBERS DURING NJ'S LAME DUCK LEGISLATIVE SESSION

By Antonio Hernandez

While most were focused on holiday shopping and Black Friday deals, educators and advocates across New Jersey were in Trenton fighting for something far more permanent: pension justice. With the legislative lame duck session in full swing, NJEA members made it clear that there would be no coasting toward the end of the year. Instead, we showed up demanding Tier 1 for Everyone.

### Real experience in the Statehouse

Throughout December and January, NJEA members engaged directly with legislators.

On Dec. 4, the Statehouse was buzzing with activities and members. After a powerful debrief from NJEA President Steve Beatty and encouraging words from NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Tina Dare, we took to the halls. I attended as a photographer, but I walked away with a master class in advocacy.

I followed Somerset County Education Association President Dan Epstein, who showed me the ropes of effective lobbying. His biggest piece of advice? You need a "killer" pitch: short, informative and impossible to ignore. Putting that into practice, I was able to grab a legislator's attention. Seeing the behind the scenes of policy work was a reminder that laws aren't just words on paper. They are the result of people showing up and speaking truth to power.

### Why the student voice matters

The momentum didn't stop there. On Jan. 8, leaders like Madison Baca, president of the NJAEA, and Abigail Rodriguez, student ambassador, returned to the Statehouse for the second time in a week.

Their dedication highlights a vital truth: Pension justice is a generational fight. When aspiring educators show up, the dynamic in the room changes. It reminds legislators that we aren't just future employees. We are voters. We are the solution to the teacher shortage. We are watching how legislators treat the profession we are about to enter. We send the powerful message that we are not scared to fight for our future. When we stand united, from students to retirees, real change isn't just possible; it's inevitable.

Tier 1 for Everyone! Pension justice for all!



*Antonio Hernandez is the communications chair of NJAEA and a student at Passaic County Community College.*

Lobby days brought NJAEA leaders Antonio Hernandez and Abigail Rodriguez to the NJ Statehouse to fight for pension justice.

## What is a Teacher Leader?

A teacher leader is someone who maintains their role as a teacher, outside of a supervisory role, and provides instructional leadership in their school community. Teacher leaders go by a variety of titles and roles: instructional coach, professional development expert, mentor, school-community liaison, lead teacher, and many others. Teacher leadership is an evolving field, and so, new roles and titles are established by different schools and districts all the time.

**WEB:** [njea.org/tla](http://njea.org/tla)



*The NJEA Teacher Leader Academy admits candidates of any race, color, creed, national origin, ethnic origin, disability, marital status, domestic partnership status, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity to all the rights, privileges, programs and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the NJEA Teacher Leader Academy. It doesn't discriminate on the basis of race, color, creed, national origin, ethnic origin, disability, marital status, domestic partnership status, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity in administration of its educational policies, admission policies, or scholarship programs.*



# Teacher Leadership is MORE IMPORTANT than ever!

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For further details, visit [njea.org/tla](http://njea.org/tla)

Teacher leaders create new models of professional learning, develop new systems to monitor student progress, connect with families and communities and advocate for the profession.

Join our program and collaborate with fellow educators who are finding ways to lead from the classroom as they share ideas, support their colleagues, and work with school and district leaders to create systemic change that will support high-quality teaching and learning.

**EMAIL:** [teacherleader@njea.org](mailto:teacherleader@njea.org)

**NEW COHORT  
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NOW!**

Rainbow Connection celebrates Susan M. Waldron for

# WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

By Amy Moran, Ph.D.

This Women's History Month, let's celebrate Susan M. Waldron, a 20-year New Jersey educator, currently working in North Brunswick Township where she is an elementary school special education paraprofessional.

In addition to being a local association representative, Waldron currently holds positions in the local North Brunswick Township Education Association (NBTEA), including as its legislative action team (LAT) chairperson, the website manager, a representative to the Middlesex County Education Association (MCEA), and the Education Support Professional (ESP) Mentoring Program coordinator.

At the county level, Waldron is the MCEA second vice president, the Middlesex County representative on NJEA's Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) Committee, Educational Support Professional Advocacy Network (ESPAN) captain and Facebook page manager. She has served as a delegate to the NEA Representative Assembly. Prior to that, she was the co-president for New Jersey Educational Services Commission paraprofessionals from 2015-20.

Waldron has been a member of the SOGI Committee since 2018. She wanted to get involved both as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community and because she felt that ESP voices need to be in more spaces within our association. For Waldron, SOGI representatives and their leaders have worked to bring awareness and intentional changes to both the committee and our community.

"We have worked with NJEA to become a more inclusive association by adding gender-affirming demographic information on membership applications and registration forms. We have policies put in place to have gender-neutral bathrooms at all meetings, events and conferences along with visible signage. Our committee has taken on the great task of hosting and facilitating a conference so that members can come together in a space that is affirming to them," Waldron says.

One of SOGI's biggest successes, Waldron attests, has been moving from a special NJEA committee to a standing NJEA committee. This change reinforces to members that the association supports and acknowledges



the needs of our LGBTQIA+ members, setting the goals they work on each year to improve the conditions for all staff and students. For Waldron, a great source of pride is when members connect with their county SOGI representative for:

- Association support, if needed, at local board of education meetings
- Help finding curricular resources
- Gender & Sexuality Alliance training
- Assistance with LGBTQIA+ inclusive contract language
- A support network designed to help LGBTQIA+ NJEA members

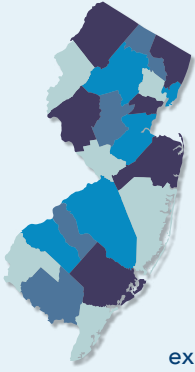
"Out" at work since 2011, Waldron never felt like she was treated differently and felt only welcome from her colleagues. As a bisexual woman with grown children, she says, "When you are out at work, you are always coming out. And switching school districts introduces a whole new group of people to come out to. Moreover, most of our colleagues don't realize that we are always coming out. It can either become a burden with putting us in a constant state of alert, or we can hold our heads up high and speak our truth, making it a 'them' problem if they can't accept us as we are."

After having adopted this attitude, Waldron says, "I do not feel that I have ever been excluded from anything or discriminated against for being out at work." In fact, when Waldron began working in North Brunswick, she told her local president about the queer-affirming NEA "I'm Here" badges, and they got a grant to get badges for all members who requested them. One of Waldron's queer colleagues came to her after and thanked her, saying they never thought that they would see the day that something like that would be available in their career.

Thank you for all you do, for so many, Susan M. Waldron!

---

*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.*



# SUSSEX TO CAPE MAY

## Workshops and conferences

### SHOWCASE

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

### NJ ASSOCIATION FOR GIFTED CHILDREN ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The NJAGC will hold its 2026 annual conference on April 17 at the Palace at Somerset Park. The theme of the conference is Pursuing Excellence: The Art & Science of Gifted Teaching.

The purpose of the NJAGC 2026 conference is to celebrate the balance between creativity and evidence-based practice that defines our gifted education community.

Participants will attend a keynote session and one breakout session in the morning, lunch (compliments of NJAGC) and three breakout sessions in the afternoon. Each participant will receive six professional development hours, if applicable.

Regular member: \$239

Regular nonmember: \$299

Regular nonmember + membership: \$289

The Palace at Somerset Park  
333 Davidson Ave.  
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Learn more and register at [njagc.org](http://njagc.org).

### 2026 NJTESOL/NJBE SPRING CONFERENCE

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Intersectionality: Shaping Experiences and Creating Opportunities

The 2026 Conference of the New Jersey Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages/Bilingual Educators (NJTESOL/NJBE) will have two components: an in-person conference and a video library conference. The in-person conference will take place at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in New Brunswick on May 19-21. You can register for one, two or all three days. The conference will feature three keynote speakers: Dr. Elsa Cárdenas-Hagan, Dr. Sharroky Hollie, and Dr. Margarita Machado-Casas.

In addition, you'll select from many presentations approved for the continuing education requirement, network with your colleagues, and obtain the latest information on state and national initiatives. You can also

meet with representatives at the sponsors' and exhibitors' booths to find the latest and greatest teaching tools. You can earn professional development hours throughout the day.

The Video Library Conference is a select collection of presentations you will have access to view starting on May 27 using our conference platform. There is no set schedule, and you will be able to view the workshops from May 27 to Aug. 20. By using your unique login, your hours will be tracked so that you can earn professional development hours. Please note that the select collection of presentations will not include the keynotes or special invited guest speakers.

Presentation topics will include Advocacy, Social Justice, and Policy; Supporting Newcomers, SLIFE and Refugees; Family and Community Engagement; Dual Identified/Special Populations; Early Learning and Family Practices; Social Emotional Learning; Content-Integrated Approaches; Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking; Technology; Language Assessment; Program Administration and Evaluation

### Registration and more information

Registration includes one free year of membership.

Visit [njtesol-njbe.org/spring-conference](http://njtesol-njbe.org/spring-conference) for more information and to register.

For other conference questions email Caia Schlessinger, conference coordinator, at [conference-coordinator@njtesol-njbe.org](mailto:conference-coordinator@njtesol-njbe.org).

## MORE TO LEARN

### FREE WORKSHOPS FROM THE NJ CENTER FOR CIVIC EDUCATION

The New Jersey Center for Civic Education offers a series of free, all-day workshops for teachers during the 2025-26 school year.

Workshops will be held at Rutgers University's Piscataway campus from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., with continental breakfast and lunch provided. Sessions are supported by state funding and are free to school districts.

The schedule includes:

- Civics for K-5 – March 10, 2026
- The Development of Democracy in Ancient Civilizations (middle school) – March 20
- Infusing Civics, Economics and NJ into High School U.S. History – March 26

For more information and to register, visit [civiced.rutgers.edu/events](http://civiced.rutgers.edu/events).

## JOIN THE NGSS SUMMER INSTITUTE FOR GRADES K-12

July 27-31

The Raritan Valley Community College Science Education Institute is offering its NGSS Summer Institute in person starting Monday, July 27. The weeklong Summer Institute provides K-12 teachers and administrators with practical ideas and tools to implement the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). Every year, the organizers update the Summer Institute to incorporate what they are learning about classroom implementation through their work with thousands of teachers in New Jersey and across the nation.

During the Institute participants will learn how to:

- Select appropriate and relevant phenomena and connect them to NGSS Core Ideas.
- Turn NGSS Practices and Crosscutting Concepts into 3D performance tasks that direct students as they engage in investigations of phenomena.
- Support students in using Core Ideas during 3D investigations of phenomena.
- Support students in defining engineering problems and designing solutions for them.
- Engage students' prior ideas throughout 3D investigations and build on them to further develop students' conceptual understanding.
- Make Crosscutting Concepts explicit in questions to support instruction and assessment.
- Use explanation, argument, and CER to assess student learning.
- Plan their own 3D investigations that include formative and summative assessments.
- Make more effective use of their instructional materials including OpenSciEd.
- Use our unique Planning Guide to support effective science instruction and assessment and access our data base of over 800 3D investigations in science and engineering.

The Institute will be led by Dr. Wil van der Veen, author and a nationally recognized expert on the NGSS and science education. Participants will work in small groups that are facilitated by experienced classroom teachers from the NGSS Teacher Leader Program.

The weeklong Institute will be held July 27-31 at Raritan Valley Community College in Branchburg, N.J. Each day begins at 9 a.m. and ends at 3 p.m.

Light breakfast and lunch will be provided.

The fee is \$400.

To register, go to [tinyurl.com/RVCC-REGSUM26](https://tinyurl.com/RVCC-REGSUM26). For more information, contact Donna Frasca-Brady at [donna.frasca-brady@raritanval.edu](mailto:donna.frasca-brady@raritanval.edu) or 908-526-1200, ext. 8942.

## SELECTIVE MUTISM IN THE SCHOOL

Virtual Conference

April 10

9 a.m. – 5 p.m.

The selective mutism, Anxiety, and Related Disorders Treatment Center, or SMart Center, is hosting this virtual conference. The conference will be led by world-renowned selective mutism expert, Dr. Elisa Shipon Blum. Dr. Shipon-Blum's has helped thousands of children, teens and young adults overcome selective mutism, social anxiety, extreme shyness and related challenges. In addition to Dr. Shipon-Blum, the conference will feature other selective mutism experts, including Jenna Blum, Psy.D., and Jennifer Brittingham, LPC.

6.5 hours of professional development credit is available. Make sure to discuss its applicability with your administrator.

The cost of the conference is \$250 (\$225 before April 3.) The rate for students in doctoral, graduate, or undergraduate programs \$100 for students in doctoral, graduate or undergraduate programs.



For more information and to register:

[smart-center.ce-go.com/selective-mutism-in-the-school-virtual-conference](https://smart-center.ce-go.com/selective-mutism-in-the-school-virtual-conference)

## SPANISH SEIZURE TRAINING FOR SCHOOL PERSONNEL

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Invitamos a los educadores hispanohablantes a explorar el curso Crisis Epilépticas para Personal Escolar de la Fundación para la Epilepsia. Aprenda sobre la epilepsia, primeros auxilios, planes de acción, terapias de rescate, emergencias y estrategias para apoyar a estudiantes en las escuelas. ¡Todo en español! Este curso cumple con los requisitos de la legislación de Escuelas Seguras ante Crisis Epilépticas.

Learn more about the course/¡Inscríbese hoy!: [bit.ly/49HyJfP](https://bit.ly/49HyJfP)



# Thriving together: How labor management collaborations fuel educator well-being

*By Kimberly Crane*

In school districts across the nation, a revolution is underway. Changes in communication and problem-solving practices are placing educator well-being at the heart of student success. At the center of this movement is the New Jersey Labor Management Collaborative's (NJLMC) partnership with the organization Educators Thriving.

## The road to well-being

Educators Thriving works with districts and unions to cultivate a supportive school culture where educators feel seen, trusted and valued. Their programs provide support strategies that sustain well-being and professional joy through coaching focused on communication, adaptability and self-care.

Educators Thriving Co-Founder and Head of Research Hailie Fox, Ph.D. says, "The impact of this work has been substantial across our partner organizations. Our

participants are reporting greater job satisfaction, stronger staff retention and higher well-being."

## Partnership provides evidence of impact

Educators Thriving's custom Educator Well-Being Measure data confirms that dedicated LMC work increases wellness, reduces stress, and enables other meaningful gains, including financial support.

Mike Ritzius, NJEA liaison to the NJLMC, explained, "Partnering with Educators Thriving provides us with a research-based measure to assess and draw correlations between LMC implementations and how people actually feel at work."

The resulting data paints a clear picture: responsive leadership and a supportive culture are the most significant predictors of overall staff well-being, retention and job satisfaction.





## ***Educator well-being is a foundational element of successful schools and positive outcomes for students.***

### **Collaboration in practice**

The Clifton Public Schools LMC, launched by Clifton Education Association (CEA) past-President Lori Lalama and current Superintendent Danny Robertozzi, has made remarkable gains in staff wellness.

Educators Thriving's messaging at the 2024 NJLMC Pre-Con in Atlantic City resonated immediately with current CEA President, Shari Merola. Merola recalled, "We knew right away that this was what our district needed."

Merola and Woodrow Wilson Middle School Principal Andy Jaeger helped grow the district's LMC, which was specifically designed to connect ideas with action.

For Merola, an art educator, collaboration is inherently connected to her artistic nature. "Artists are born collaborators," she explained. "We love sharing ideas, giving feedback and building on each other's creativity. That spirit translates perfectly into how our team works."

A sense of trust is what keeps Clifton's collaboration strong. Merola says, "People want to be here. We've built something that works, and we're not letting that go."

### **Turning data into action**

Clifton Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Janina Kusielewicz was pleasantly surprised by the wellness survey results. "We were encouraged to hear how supported our educators feel from administration and from their association," she said.

"Though the initial data is encouraging, the work isn't done," Kusielewicz said. She noted that Clifton's record of being above national averages is motivation to keep improving, not a signal to stop.

Kusielewicz firmly believes that happy educators equal happy kids. "We know that educators experience less stress when they feel supported and have the internal and external tools they need," she said, "That is also when students have the best outcomes."

### **Leading with collaboration**

NJEA President Steve Beatty has made educator wellness and retention a focus of his term. "What this work shows, plain and simple, is that educator well-being is a foundational element of successful schools and positive outcomes for students," Beatty said. "When labor and management work together, we are resourcing the strongest tools possible to ensure that our public schools are the best in the nation."

To learn more about Educators Thriving and their work supporting educator well-being, visit their website at [educatorsthiving.org](http://educatorsthiving.org).

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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).*

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## NJEA/NEA Member Benefits presents 2026 State of Student Debt Town Hall (Virtual)



### We will cover:

- The latest on repayment plans and what current updates may mean for you.
- Strategies to lower monthly payments and minimize long term interest.
- Forgiveness options, including Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) and Teacher Loan Forgiveness (TLF).
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**March 30**  
**7 p.m.**

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

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

# NJEA Delegate Assembly

## Sept. 6, 2025

The NJEA Delegate Assembly met at the Doubletree, Somerset, 200 Atrium Drive, Somerset, N.J. on Sept. 6, 2025, at 9:30 a.m.

The meeting was called to order by President Steve Beatty.

The roll call and the seating of delegates was taken by Secretary-Treasurer Tina Dare. There were 117 members present, and a quorum was met. Alternates were seated as follows: Ryan for Mendelson (Bergen); Long for Campisi (Camden); Byock for Lobasso (Essex); Strzykalski for Fields (Middlesex); Lewis for Paprota (Middlesex); Lieberman for King (Monmouth); Ballard for Reilly (Monmouth); and Coy-Bush for Scott (Monmouth).

Absent without alternates were the following: Stevenson-Kinder (Cumberland) and Castiglione (Salem).

Maryam Sarhan, Atlantic County, gave the Inspirational Message and along with President Beatty, led the delegation in the Flag Salute.

A brief ceremony was held to mark the swearing in of the new officer team, President Steve Beatty, Vice President Petal Robertson, and Secretary-Treasurer Tina Dare. The ceremony was officiated by NEA President Becky Pringle.

### President's report

Beatty highlighted the following:

- Strategic plan: vision, mission, and goals
- Leadership training and development
- Looking back and plan forward for NJEA
- Tier 1 For Everyone
- NJEA Labor Table Taskforce
- The state and national political landscapes
- OneNJEA
- Polls and surveys
- NEA update
- NEA Foundation's Global Learning Fellowship
- Organizing for Education
- NJDOE and BOE Update: Assessments
- Department of Education Holocaust Commission
- Staff and member unity building

Beatty recognized the 2025-26 New Jersey County Teachers of the Year and asked for a round of applause for them.

### Vice president's report

Vice President Petal Robertson highlighted the following:

- Good news, including Orange EA
- NJAEA Membership Recruitment and Engagement Report
- Property and Personnel Committee
- New Jersey Business and Industry Association
- ESP dues review

### Secretary-treasurer's report

Secretary-Treasurer Tina Dare delivered the NJEA fiscal report.

Dare highlighted the following:

- Trenton Thunder: County ESP and Teachers of the Year Event
- NJREA
- Gov. Murphy bill signing
- Tier 1 for Everyone
- Cherry Hill Education Association: New Member Event

### Executive Director's report

Executive Director Kevin Kelleher highlighted the following:

- PAC by the numbers
- Membership
- Elections matter
- Membership Processing
- Communications
- Human and Civil Rights, Equity and Governance
- Online convention registration
- Labor Management Collaborative
- Research
- Organizational Development
- UniServ
- NEA

### Nondelegate speakers

Gail Maher, Monmouth County, the president of the Wall Township Education Association, spoke to oppose an NJEA ordered redo of the local association's presidential election.

Joe Nardino, Monmouth County, and the parliamentarian of the Wall Township Education Association, spoke to oppose an NJEA ordered redo of the local association's presidential election.

Patty DaSaro, Monmouth County's representative to the NJEA Public Relations Committee and president of the Holmdel Township Education Association, spoke to oppose an NJEA ordered redo of the local association's presidential election.

Liz Cross, Monmouth County, a former Wall Township Education Association Elections Chair, spoke to oppose an NJEA ordered redo of the local association's presidential election.

Nadine Wade is a former WTEA Elections Committee spoke to oppose an NJEA ordered redo of the local association's presidential election.

Jaimi Lynn Campbell, Monmouth County, is the Wall Township Education Association vice president for certificated staff, spoke to oppose an NJEA ordered redo of the local association's presidential election.

Lori Lalama, NJREA, spoke to urge NJEA to continue to issue printed union membership cards, rather than rely solely on digital union cards.

### Reports of committees without recommendations

#### Elections Committee

Joe Toma, Middlesex County, presented the Elections Committee report, which summarized the completed NJEA election cycle for statewide officers, Executive Committee members, Delegate Assembly delegates, and alternates.

### Reports of committees with recommendations

#### Health and Safety Committee

Keith Hinton, Essex County, chair of the Health and Safety Committee presented the committee's report recommending:

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** that NJEA create the Clarence Osborne Health and Safety Award to honor advocates who excel at championing the mission and goals of the committee.

The Delegate Assembly unanimously passed the recommendation and the recommendation was adopted.

### Membership Committee

Kevin Bloom, Middlesex County, chair of the Membership Committee, presented the committee's report, which made the following recommendations:

**RULE RECOMMENDATION NO. 1:** that NJEA immediately terminate printing physical membership cards and exclusively provide digital membership cards to all active members of the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA), New Jersey Aspiring Educators Association (NJAEA), and New Jersey Retirees' Educators Associations (NJREA) through the member profile page of NJEA.org, as well as any other member profile page that may exist on future platforms. 88 Membership Committee Report to Delegate Assembly September 6, 2025

**RULE RECOMMENDATION NO. 2:** that NJEA provide a new member email to all new NJEA, NJAEA, and NJREA members providing a link to their digital membership card upon enrollment. **RULE**

**RECOMMENDATION NO.3:** that the NJEA membership card shall contain – at a minimum – the member's full name as it appears on their member profile, PIN number, and expiration date, which shall reflect a date two months from the date of access, unless the member has an effective termination date prior to that time. Should a member have a termination date within two months from access, that termination date shall be reflected as the expiration date.

**RULE RECOMMENDATION NO. 4:** that the NJEA, in September 2025, shall send an email and letter to all active members with detailed information on how to access their digital membership card, as well as reset their password to njea.org, if needed. In subsequent years, this communication shall be sent via email only

After discussion, Barbara Rheault, Atlantic County made a motion to refer the recommendations back to the committee. The motion was seconded by Dan Siegel, Mercer County. The motion carried.

### Women in Education Committee

Sarah Reichenbecher, Monmouth County, chair of the Women in Education Committee presented the committee's report, and as a member of the Delegate Assembly she moved the four recommendations:

**RULE RECOMMENDATION NO. 1:** NJEA shall annually recognize and publicize Maternal Health Awareness Day (January 23rd) and National Breastfeeding Month (August) to promote women's health awareness and normalize breastfeeding and pumping in the workplace.

**RULE RECOMMENDATION NO. 2:** NJEA shall arrange for and provide a dedicated lactation space at all statewide conferences, advertise the availability of the space in registration paperwork, and publicize the location of the space in conference materials. NJEA has already begun to provide safe and clean lactation rooms at events. The costs associated with this effort may vary depending on the event space, but they shall be included in the event spec and budget.

**RULE RECOMMENDATION NO. 3:** NJEA shall provide a lactation space upon request for members at all NJEA locations (regional offices and HQ complex). In anticipation of future requests, a designated staff member for each NJEA office will determine potential temporary or permanent lactation spaces that meet legal requirements.

**RULE RECOMMENDATION NO. 4:** NJEA, in partnership with existing relationships and collaboration with the WIE committee, shall research and establish best practices for lactation rights for members, develop

resources around these best practices, and educate members, leaders, and staff about these best practices through existing communication channels.

The recommendations were unanimously adopted.

### For the Good of the Order

Barbara Rheault, Atlantic County asked the Delegate Assembly to keep Steve Bouchard, a former Atlantic County Executive Officer and Second Vice President in their thoughts and prayers after he was seriously injured in a headon car accident and remained hospitalized following emergency surgery.

Sarah Reichenbecher, Monmouth County, asked for guidance on how to address the WTEA issue highlighted during the Nondelegate Speakers portion of the agenda after a related New Business Item wasn't submitted properly and could not be introduced.

### Adjournment

President Beatty asked for a motion to adjourn, and the motion was made and duly seconded. Delegates voted to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned at 3:11 p.m.

## Oct. 11, 2025

The NJEA Delegate Assembly met via Zoom on Saturday, Oct. 11, 2025.

The meeting was called to order by President Steve Beatty at 7 p.m.

The roll call and the seating of delegates was taken via a poll through the Zoom application at the request of Secretary-Treasurer Tina Dare. There were 110 members present, and a quorum was met. Alternates were seated as follows: Magretto for Lipoff (Bergen); Long for Campisi (Camden); Kinsey for ThrBak (Cumberland); White for Tedesco (Essex); Waldron for Landolfi (Middlesex); Strzykalski for Wildermuth (Middlesex); Fitzsimmons for Marino (Monmouth); Manlapid for Brensinger (Morris); and Pipkin for Fuller (Passaic).

Absent without alternates were the following: Crane (Atlantic); Scott (Atlantic); Robinson-Taylor (Camden); Carminati (Cumberland); Stevenson-Kinder (Cumberland); Mooney (Hudson); Duncan (Mercer); Del Popolo (Middlesex); Paprota (Middlesex); Preko (Middlesex); Price (Monmouth); Baca (NJAEA); Castiglione (Salem); and Nelson (Somerset).

President Steve Beatty asked for a warm welcome to Congresswoman Mikie Sherrill, who addressed the delegates and, along with President Beatty, led the delegation in the Flag Salute. Sherrill then departed the meeting.

### Report of committees with recommendations

#### Budget Committee

President Beatty presented the committee's recommendation as follows:

**RULE RECOMMENDATION:** that NJEA transfer the unspent balance of the prior fiscal year 2024-25 budget transfer for independent expenditures of \$3,400,000 be transferred from Net Assets into the current fiscal year 2025-26 budget, along with an additional transfer of \$3,600,000 from Net Assets, into cost center 0471 Organizational Projects to cover independent expenditures related to the election campaigns.

Christine Candarella, Essex County moved to transfer the funds and accept the recommendation.

Following discussion, a Zoom poll was conducted, and the recommendation was approved.

Peter Helff, Higher Education, made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:25 p.m. The motion was seconded and carried.

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# MARCH & beyond

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## WEDNESDAY

MAR  
02

Read Across NJ  
& America Day



## SATURDAY

MAR  
21

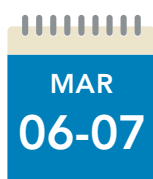
Delegate  
Assembly



## WEDNESDAY

APR  
15

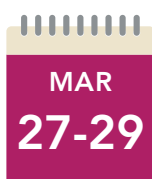
Executive  
Committee  
meeting



## FRI & SAT

MAR  
06-07

Winter Leadership  
Conference Central



## FRI TO SUN

MAR  
27-29

Higher Education  
Conference



## SATURDAY

APR  
18

Equity Alliance  
Conference



## WEDNESDAY

MAR  
18

Executive  
Committee  
meeting



## SATURDAY

APR  
11

Celebration  
of Women



## THURSDAY

APR  
23

NJREA  
Spring Luncheon

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

## MARCH 27-29, 2026

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March 27-28 – Conference

March 28-29 – Collective Bargaining Summit

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Members must register themselves for the conference – there is no group registration using the online platform. Payment will be required by credit card only. When registering, members will need to know their NJEA PIN.



Registration Deadline  
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# WE ARE PROFESSIONALS

## WE DARE YOU TO SAY OTHERWISE

Buried deep within the 870-pages of landmark legislation known as the One Big Beautiful Bill Act of 2025 (OBBBA) are harmful changes to public education including the U.S. Department of Education's (USED) definition of what counts as a professional degree. At a time when the country is already facing a teacher shortage, this change will affect who can afford to become an educator and who can afford to advance their career.

The proposed rule change recategorizes "professional" status to place limits on the amounts of federal student loan aid available to graduate students. Starting in July 2026, new borrowers can only borrow \$20,500 per year in federal student loans for most graduate programs. Students in "professional degree" programs may borrow up to \$50,000 per year.

The rule change classifies teachers, nurses, social workers, audiologists, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, public health and counseling therapists—careers that serve the public good—as "nonprofessional," making them subject to the lower loan amount.

The Pew Research Center reports that of the 3.8 million teachers working in America's public schools, 77% are women. In New Jersey, 80% are women. This is just another political, financial and demoralizing attack on a field dominated by women.

If the rule change feels deliberate, it should. The USED could have redefined education as a professional category, but it didn't. And every educator should recognize this for what it is: an effort to demean the dedication and expertise of a female-led profession that will harm public education.

The student loan cap associated with "nonprofessional" fields has the potential to discourage many educators from advancing their careers. Envision the educational support professional who wants to return to college and earn a teaching certificate, the teacher who wants to earn her master's and become a reading specialist, librarian,

school counselor or educational leader. A federal student loan lifetime maximum limit of \$100,000 does not go far—especially if someone already has undergraduate loans. Loans from private lenders are risky, demand higher interest rates and offer fewer protections. Educators will have to question if an advanced degree is worth the added financial debt.

Respect for women in education has always been lacking and the OBBBA rule changes continue to prove the point. When women first entered the profession during the mid-1800s, it had long been a male-dominated field. Women earned a third of what a male teacher made and were required to sign contracts that stated they would not date, marry or have children. They had an ethics code, a dress code and a moral standards code that had them on par with saints. They were scrutinized by their male administrators and the public, rigidly controlled, and had no professional autonomy. They were poorly paid, had no pensions and no benefits. Most retired into poverty, unless they had the help of a family to take them in or were economically fortunate enough to marry later in life.

The "nonprofessional" category is disrespectful, but nothing new. As Michael Sedlak and Steven Schlossman observed in *Who Will Teach*, "Society's views of teachers are largely a result of how society views all women."

We must remember our history and the women who fought before us. Women like Elizabeth A. Allen, NJEA's first female president and a tireless advocate for teachers and their right to be respected as professionals. She secured the first tenure law and the first statewide teacher retirement law that provided a pension. As the Trump administration's misguided attacks continue, women will be leading the fight to protect public education and students. 🗳️



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## NJEA PURPOSE

The New Jersey Education Association is a member-led, justice-centered labor union that champions the rights, dignity and working/learning conditions of public educators.

## NJEA MISSION

The New Jersey Education Association is dedicated to advocating for and protecting the rights, benefits, and interests of our members, while promoting a high-quality, equitable system of public education for all students.

## NJEA VISION

We envision a New Jersey where public educators are respected, supported, and equipped to thrive, and where every student has access to a high-quality, inclusive, and safe education. Guided by our diverse, member-driven community, NJEA advances educational excellence, equity, and social justice for all through organizing, advocacy, professional development and community engagement.

FOUNDATIONS OF



OUR ADVOCACY

### MEMBERSHIP

- Recruit and retain members
- Organize member to member
- Leverage collective power

### LABOR RIGHTS

- Advance economic security and dignity
- Ensure professional respect
- Champion academic freedom

### SOLIDARITY/JUSTICE

- Cultivate diverse and inclusive leadership structures
- Strengthen communities and public schools
- Engage and unify all voices