

REVIEW



an education and advocacy resource

REVIEW

MAY 2026



20 CLOSING THE REGULATION GAP

24 COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS
LEAD TO CONTRACT WIN

28 BRINGING YOUR PASSIONS INTO
THE CLASSROOM

32 FOR PODCASTING TEACHERS,
LIFE IS A BALANCING ACT

34 FROM FEATHERS TO FORESTS

*Closing the
regulation gap*





Building Language Skills While Supporting Student Cultures

ADDRESSING THE CRITICAL SHORTAGE OF ESL/BILINGUAL TEACHERS IN OUR SCHOOLS

Throughout New Jersey, culturally and linguistically diverse students need expert support in our classrooms at every level. FDU's **English as a Second Language (ESL) and Bilingual Certification Programs** – offered 100% online – offer you the training and experience needed to create a collaborative, inclusive and supportive classroom.

ONLINE GRADUATE STUDY AREAS

- BILINGUAL EDUCATION
- ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE
- EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP
- LEADERSHIP (EdD)
- LEARNING DISABILITIES
- LITERACY/READING
- PRESCHOOL, ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION

IN-PERSON GRADUATE STUDIES

(On Campus, Select School Districts and Statewide Locations)

- DYSLEXIA STUDIES - ORTON GILLINGHAM

ALL-ONLINE ESL & BILINGUAL CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS

FDU's **ESL Certification Program** for certified teachers is a 15-credit concentration. The **Bilingual Certification Program** is a 12-credit concentration.

- Credits in either program be applied toward FDU's 36-credit M.A. in Education for Certified Teachers.
- To obtain both the ESL and Bilingual certificates, teachers only need to complete a total of 18 credits.

APPLY NOW FOR FALL 2026 • NO APPLICATION FEE

For Details Contact Graduate Admissions

EMAIL: grad@fdu.edu • CALL: 201-692-2554



Personal. Global. Transformational.

fdu.edu/soe



NJEA ESP of the Year Angela Feliciano and NJ State Teacher of the Year Gillian Ober were honored at the March Delegate Assembly meeting.

Share your photos with us!



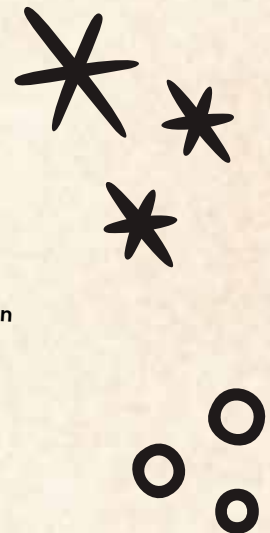
Email a photo about the great things you're doing at the local, county, state or national levels to NJEAREview@njea.org. In your email, include the photo and a caption of no more than 50 words explaining the activity. You might see yourself in a future issue of the NJEA Review!



Members of the Delegate Assembly donated diapers, children's art supplies and nonperishable food to help the families of those detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement who are being held at Newark's Delaney Hall Detention Facility.



The Southampton Township Education Association hosted a "Bagels and Books" event for kindergarteners and their guests. Students heard a story, went on a scavenger hunt, received a new book and enjoyed bagels and fruit.



FEATURES

20 CLOSING THE REGULATION GAP

Closing the regulation gap requires prioritizing safety, co-regulation and routines based on neuroscience so students can engage, learn and thrive.

By Edwin Quezada, M.Ed.



20

24 COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS LEAD TO CONTRACT WIN

The North Brunswick Township Education Association used community connections and social media to mobilize support, strengthen relationships and secure an award-worthy contract for members.

By David Yastremski



24

28 BRINGING YOUR PASSIONS INTO THE CLASSROOM

Deptford music educator Carl Cox uses his passion, industry experience and professional relationships to inspire students and cultivate their appreciation for jazz.

By Sal Randazzo



28

32 FOR PODCASTING TEACHERS, LIFE IS A BALANCING ACT

Two veteran teachers create a podcast to explore balance, share stories, support educators and navigate the challenges of teaching, parenting and life.

By Joe Vitale and Jamie Wanko



32

34 FROM FEATHERS TO FORESTS

New Jersey Audubon helps schools engage students in hands-on sustainability projects, environmental learning and community action through Eco-Schools and teacher support programs.

By Dr. Roberta Hunter



34

COLUMNS

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE 7

Start strong, finish stronger

THE ADVOCATE 8

Resources for your local association

BULLETIN BOARD 10

Cool stuff to check out

A+ EFFORT 11

NJEA members, community unite to recall Park Ridge board member

EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT

PROFESSIONALS 13

ESPs members' stories

LIVING HISTORY 15

Revolutionary Schools invigorate social studies

THE NJEA REPORT 16

Education in the news

HEALTH AND SAFETY 36

No cell, bell to bell

RETIRED MEMBERS 38

News and events

ASPIRING EDUCATORS 43

News and events

SPEAK OUT 44

In members' own words

SUSSEX TO CAPE MAY 46

Workshops and conferences

VOICES OF EQUITY 48

NJEA Justice and Equity Fellowship

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION 49

Spotlight on CTE

GOVERNANCE 50

Delegate Assembly minutes

COLLABORATION CORNER 53

Labor Management Collaborative

MEMBER BENEFITS 55

Get your money's worth

COMING UP 57

What's next at NJEA

FINAL EXAM 58

Don't get body slammed by anti-union agitators

The number \$22.5 billion

The total state support for Pre-K-12 education, including pensions and health benefits, in Gov. Sherrill's proposed FY2027 budget.



Did you know?



NJEA Member Benefits can help you plan your next vacation. Check out travel partners at memberbenefits.njea.org/travel.



Edwin Quezada, a trauma-informed educator at Maple Shade High School, uses self-regulation techniques to help teach his students resilience.

PHOTO BY

Kathryn Coulibaly

REVIEW



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

President: Steve Beatty | Vice President: Petal Robertson | Secretary-Treasurer: Tina Dare
Executive Director: Kevin Kelleher | Deputy Executive Director: Denise Graff Policastro

VOLUME 99
NUMBER 10

Editorial Director Steven Baker
Art Director Gregg Poserina
Graphic Designer Jennifer Larson
Advertising Sara B. Ream

EDITORIAL & PUBLISHING OFFICES

The *New Jersey Education Association Review* (ISSN-0027-6758) is an official publication of the New Jersey Education Association, published monthly 10 times a year, September through June, plus one special *New Jersey Education Association Review* Convention issue, which will be published in September. Send correspondence relating to editorial material, manuscripts, membership or subscriptions to: 180 W. State St., P.O. Box 1211, Trenton, NJ 08607-1211. Periodicals postage paid at Trenton, NJ 08650 and at additional mailing offices. Email: NJEAReview@NJEA.org

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Chairperson: Steve Tetreault, Holmdel; Amanda Best, West Orange; Hussain Haqq, Trenton; Antonio Hernandez, NJAEA; Enrique Manlapid, Chatham; Linda Miller, Jersey City; Claudette Peterkin, Englewood; Salvatore Randazzo, Deptford; Miriam Reichenbach, retired; Sonya Squitieri, Passaic; Rebecca Zarabi, Summit.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Atlantic: Melissa Tomlinson; Bergen: Susan McBride, John Sassi; Burlington: Tamara Beatty; Camden: Laurie T. Gibson-Parker; Cape May: Tammi Lee; Cumberland: Lou Russo; Essex: Sharon Ortiz; Gloucester: Ryan Griffin; Hudson: Diane MacKay; Hunterdon: Susan Vala; Mercer: Christine Sampson-Clark; Middlesex: Jennifer Herrick, Melissa Vega; Monmouth: Steven Koumoulis; Morris: Kerri Lee Farrell; Ocean: Lisa Simone; Passaic: Marco Martinez; Salem: Colleen Gilmartin; Somerset: Amy Salinger; Sussex: Carla Mancuso; Union: Ann-Margaret Shannon; Warren: Laurie O'Brien; Higher Education: Tobyn DeMarco; Retired: Kitty Sausa; Non-classroom Teacher: Marie Battist-Rock; NJAEA: Madison Baca. ESP at-large: Keith Coston Jr.; Immediate past president: Sean M. Spiller
NEA State Directors: Brenda Brathwaite, Theresa Fuller, Laurie Gibson-Parker, Lauren Greenfield, Christine Hewitt, Temika Langston-Myers, Mark Richards, Barbara Rheault, Stacy Yanko. ESP-at-Large: Charles E. Wilson III.

ADVERTISING

Advertising is printed as a service to readers but does not imply endorsement.

Submitted content reflects the opinions of the contributors.

POSTMASTER

Send address changes to:

New Jersey Education Association Review
Attn: Membership Processing
180 W. State St., P. O. Box 1211
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; 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



Start strong, finish stronger

The other day, while walking my dog Quincy at lunch time through the neighborhood, we passed a local school where elementary school children chased each other on the playground. It dawned on me: this school year is officially winding down. Summer is just around the corner and the children are beginning to lose focus as they dream of the endless possibilities and adventures that summer offers. This is a good time of year; and as tired as we are, it's beginning to feel like we made it.

As I drew closer to the school, I saw the children laughing. They were playing a game that looked like tag. Then, as is often the case, there was a dispute between two children. One boy claimed he tagged a boy who claimed he hadn't been tagged at all. It was getting heated. Then, as if out of nowhere, an educator arrived. She calmly spoke to both boys. They shook hands and ran off as if nothing had happened. In my mind, what happened was a small yet profound example of the work we do. Every single day.

An educator helped two young people overcome a conflict. She helped them grow. She taught them to see a situation differently than they had. She made a difference. We, as NJEA members, make a million little differences in the lives of young people all year long. These smallest acts, built up over the course of a school year, instill in young people the invaluable, immeasurable skills of compassion, understanding and patience.

And it's not by accident. We teach so much more than the subjects we were assigned because we work so much harder than is required. We do more than a job description could contain. As summer approaches, I think about the thousands of NJEA

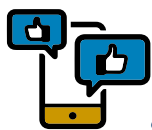
members who will still be working in our schools, and others who will spend time away from their families, planning lessons, writing curricula, decorating their classrooms, attending conferences, updating school facilities, organizing their communities and working to ensure hungry children get fed.

Our work never ends. It never has, never will. We care too much. I stood there, thinking about all those unsung heroes, teachers and educational support professionals alike, who give so much to their communities and, in doing so, make the future better for all of us. To me, this commitment is the essence of our union. It is my hope that every NJEA member knows and feels that the countless, unseen hours of their work is noticed, appreciated and valued.

When we work through the summer to negotiate a strong contract or spend the summer months organizing around issues or candidates that who support us, we are doing the work of our union. Hundreds of NJEA members will attend the NEA-RA this summer, and thousands more will be at our annual NJEA Jack Bertolino Summer Leadership Conference in Atlantic City. These are just a few examples of how our members grow, and, in doing so, live out our mission, our union in solidarity with one another and our fellow working people.

It dawned on me then, as Quincy grew a little anxious and wanted to get a move on, that while the school year begins to wind down, our work, as educators and union members, never winds down. We start every year strong, and we finish each year even stronger.

In solidarity,



officers online

STEVE BEATTY

Facebook

@SteveBeatty: Today we celebrate the heart of our schools—our incredible paraprofessionals. As a teacher and NJEA president, I see every day the compassion, patience, and dedication you bring to supporting our students and educators alike.

You are mentors, advocates, and essential partners in learning. Our classrooms are stronger because of you, and our students succeed because of your unwavering commitment. Thank you for all that you do—today and every day.

On April 1, NJEA President Steve Beatty acknowledged Paraprofessional Appreciation Day with a celebratory meme. He expressed his gratitude and appreciation for the professionals that offer direct support to both teachers and students daily.

PETAL ROBERTSON

Facebook

@PetalforNJEA: It always feels good to go home again. Thank you to Mrs. Gary's class for inviting me to read for Women's History Month.

Sending love and support to my Montclair family. It was so good to see all of you.

On March 30, NJEA Vice President Petal Robertson shared a reel of images portraying her visit to Northeast Elementary School in Montclair. Robertson was invited there to read a book to students for Women's History Month and chose the book "I Am Enough" by Grace Byers.

TINA DARE

Facebook

@TinaDareforNJEA: Schools are the backbone of our communities! Proud to experience the Buena Health Fair this week, which brought the community together with services, resources, and activities throughout the school. Events like this show just how powerful our schools can be when they open their doors and connect with families and neighbors.

A huge shout out to the Buena Support EA and President Doris for hosting a table and representing the union while connecting with community members. Your leadership and commitment help strengthen the bond between our schools and the communities we serve.

On April 3, NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Tina Dare shared photos from the Buena Regional Community Health and Wellness Fair hosted by the Buena Regional Support Staff Association. Each participant was given a "Health Passport" to complete while exploring all there was to learn and for a chance to win a prize.

The ADVOCATE

RESOURCES FOR YOUR LOCAL ASSOCIATION

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. Log in, click on "About" and choose "Regional Offices." Type your local association in the search and you will find information about your local association representatives and the NJEA UniServ office that serves your association.

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

NJEA seeks distinguished service award nominations

Do you know an individual or group that has made a significant contribution to public education in New Jersey? Nominations are now being sought for the 2026 NJEA Ruthann Sheer Award for Distinguished Service to Education. The award is named in memory of an educator from Hackensack who was its 1994 recipient. The award was first presented in 1934.

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

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

The deadline is June 30.

Nominations are preferred at njea.org/serviceaward.

You also may submit nominations by mail to: NJEA; Attn: Lynne Nelson, NJEA Distinguished Service Award; PO Box 1211; Trenton, NJ 08607-1211. Please include the nominee's name, address, phone number and email address, along with a narrative explaining why the nominee should win the award.

Nontenured? Know your rights and responsibilities

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

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

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

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

Register to vote!

The voter registration deadline for the primary election is May 12. The primary election will be held on June 2. Learn more at nj.gov/state/elections.

Changing school districts? Salary guide placement is negotiable

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

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

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

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

Membership chairs: WDEA List #3 is due!

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

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

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

Additionally, this information should be supplied to the association for all negotiation unit members every 120 days. Preferably September, January and May. Once processed by the NJEA Membership Division, local

presidents and membership chairs will be able to reconcile their list using the WDEA Recon Tool found in their Web Apps.

In between WDEA lists, NJEA requests that each month you have new employees, submit a Potential Member Reporting Form, with the appropriate information. This form will be used to help keep your membership and potential membership records up to date. This form can be found on njea.org. On a laptop or desktop computer, log into your dashboard at njea.org. Click on "Documents," then "Forms," and look for "Potential Member Report."

Apply for a passport

The SAVE America Act is a federal bill that would require new identification requirements for voters. New Jersey has one of the lowest REAL ID compliance rates in the nation. Conversely, New Jersey leads the nation in the percentage of residents who hold valid U.S. passports with 79%. A passport is a vital document that can be used as federal proof of citizenship. If you do not already have a passport, it is a good time to consider applying. Learn more at njea.org/uspasport.



nea Member Benefits

TRAVELERS

Join the thousands of members who've compared and switched to the NEA® Auto & Home Insurance Program from Travelers.

As an NJEA member, you have access to special savings not available to the general public on Travelers auto insurance. Drivers who switch save an average of \$611.*

See what members are saying ...

"My experience with changing from my former car insurance to Travelers was wonderful! A very friendly, knowledgeable agent helped me with the particulars needed to make the change seamless. I am so happy with my decision to switch my insurance carrier to Travelers!"

– Kathleen R.

"Once I processed losing [my insurance company] after all these years, all it took was calling Travelers. What started out as a stressful situation ended up very positive. I saved by switching and would encourage others to simply call Travelers."

– David D.

"We love Travelers! We are paying lower rates because we are safe drivers, as evidenced by your app that captures our driving habits. That is really appreciated!"

– Major and Zora C.

See for yourself.
Request your NJEA member quote today.



Call Travelers: 877-857-0867
or scan the QR code for a quote.

*Average savings based on new auto policyholders countrywide who reported savings to the Travelers Call Center in 2024. Individual savings may vary; Savings are not guaranteed.

NEA, NEA Member Benefits and the NEA Member Benefits logo are registered service marks of NEA Member Benefits.

NEA has retained Members United Insurance Agency to manage Insurance Programs for its Members. Members United Insurance Agency is not affiliated with Travelers.

Coverages, discounts, special program rates or savings, billing options, and other features are subject to availability and individual eligibility. Not all products, features or coverages available in all areas or states. Other terms, conditions or exclusions may apply.

Policies of Insurance offered by Travelers are underwritten by: The Travelers Indemnity Company or one of its property casualty affiliates, One Tower Square, Hartford, CT 06183.

© 2026 The Travelers Indemnity Company. All rights reserved. Travelers and The Travelers Umbrella are registered trademarks of The Travelers Indemnity Company in the U.S. and other countries. PL-19886 Rev. 2-26

COOL STUFF



BEYOND FIELD TRIPS

Beyond its curriculum-aligned field trips, the New Jersey Hall of Fame (NJHOF) at American Dream is dedicated to providing educators with even more valuable resources while also honoring their commitment to students! Join the NJHOF educator email list: bit.ly/NJHOFeducator.

Educator testimonial: NJ Hall of Fame professional development

New Brunswick K-12 Music Supervisor Robert Sears was enthusiastic about a recent visit to the NJHOF. "Our visit was a transformative experience, bridging history and modern engagement. Immersive technology, from life-size holograms to the virtual karaoke stage, blew our staff away and sparked endless ideas for classroom innovation. With partners like TeachRock and resources including student scholarships, the Hall of Fame is more than an exhibit; it's a vital educational partner. It was a day of profound inspiration."

To learn more about hosting a professional development event at the NJHOF, email Learning@NJHallOfFame.org.

Honoring education's everyday heroes: Marbel Tamayo

For more than two decades, Paterson Spanish teacher Marbel Tamayo has mentored students. Since 2015, she's remained committed to her classroom while battling non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. In 2025, Marbel received the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (AATSP) Support Award. On March 7, she was honored as an NJHOF Everyday Hero in front of her family, students, colleagues and Paterson Mayor Andre Sayegh.



NJEA MEMBER DAY AT EDELMAN FOSSIL PARK

Edelman Fossil Park and Museum in Sewell is proud to partner with NJEA. Edelman is offering discounted admission and unique programming on May 9. Use code "NJEAmemberDay26!" and save up to 31% off museum general admission on NJEA member day.



STUTTERING AWARENESS WEEK IS MAY 11-17

To someone who stutters, many things in life are easier done than said—the opposite of the old adage. As the Stuttering Foundation notes, this play on words summarizes how the fear of speaking keeps many people from being heard. The foundation offers resources for those who stutter, their parents and educators. For more information visit stutteringhelp.org.



PROJECT CITIZEN

Project Citizen offers students in grades 4-12 the opportunity to learn about and apply the skills of active citizenship in policymaking. The process-based program engages students in identifying, researching and trying to implement solutions to a public policy problem, often focusing on an issue in their community. Students choose the problem they work on and are invested in the successful completion of their project.

Teachers use the process-oriented text to create an interdisciplinary project that involves civics, math, technology, language arts, art and science. It is a natural starting point for an effective service-learning project, providing the research and community outreach opportunities necessary for an effective educational experience. It takes approximately six weeks, working one day a week, for students to complete a project. Visit civiced.rutgers.edu/programs/project-citizen for additional information.

Students present their projects at the annual New Jersey State Project Citizen Showcase. There is no charge and lunch is provided. This year's annual Project Citizen Showcase will be held on June 3 at Rutgers University. The projects are evaluated by educators and legislators. The highest scoring middle and high school projects are sent to the National Project Citizen Showcase in July.

Teachers should register with Craig Uplinger at cu88@scarletmail.rutgers.edu by May 15 to observe or to bring a class to the 2026 Project Citizen Showcase.

A+ EFFORT

NJEA members, community unite to recall board member

By Christine Elan Dow

Park Ridge schools are competitive but rarely newsworthy. In March 2025, though, they made headlines. Following a harrowing board of education meeting, a large group of concerned parents, teachers and community members gathered to discuss how to protect Park Ridge students from a board of education member who sought to publicly degrade, defund and potentially dismantle the town's two elementary schools and combined junior-senior high school.

A Park Ridge graduate joins the board

Robert Fisher, a 2023 Park Ridge High School graduate, became one of the youngest school board members ever elected in 2024. Fisher flew back from his freshman year at Vanderbilt University to attend some, though not all, board of education meetings. Upon joining the board, Fisher began calling for books to be banned and DEI policies to be abolished. After serving on the board for just over a year, he had missed nearly half of the regular session meetings. It became clear to many that he was working for his own interests rather than those of the students. He refused to sit on any board committees, even though the board's work mostly took place during committee meetings.

During a March 2025 special budget meeting, Fisher's talking points went from negative to nefarious. Though *Niche.com* ranks Park Ridge as ninth out of the county's 77 districts, *NJ.gov* notes a consistent graduation rate of Park Ridge High School between 93-98%, and state data reflecting test scores well above average, Fisher bemoaned the school's academic prowess, graduation rates and test scores. Citing "poor performance," he insisted on a budget that included a 0% tax increase, far short of the state's 2.8% budget cap.

Despite educator and Board President David Bradler's assurance that budget cuts have never improved a school district, to appease Fisher, Budget Committee head Natalie Agoos and Business Manager, Robert Wright, fleshed out what a 0% budget would entail. Fisher's preferred budget would result in a cut to all extracurricular programs in the junior high school and all sports programs in the junior and senior high schools. Further, it would require the termination of all paraprofessional aides in the elementary

school, threaten the jobs of every nontenured teacher, and cut almost all Advanced Placement (AP) courses.

Close call spurs recall

Once word of Fisher's proposed budget cut spread, the community woke up. At the May 6 budget meeting, students, parents, the local association and senior citizens packed the PRHS theater and spoke for hours demanding the board pass a budget that would allow the schools to continue to function. The budget indeed passed, despite one abstention and one "no" vote. Fisher did not attend the meeting.

Though the budget passed, Fisher would remain on the board for the next year's budget vote. Using the momentum of their victory, the community group that formed in March began to organize a formal effort to recall Fisher.

Around this time, residents became aware that Fisher's father was selling his house in town. Fisher's residency was now in doubt. When Fisher suddenly produced a lease claiming he was renting a room in a local family's basement for \$10 a month, its validity was understandably questioned. As the house was not registered as a two-family house with a separate living space for rent, the family amended the "lease" to claim that Fisher was a "roommate" who shared the house. Though Fisher produced documents with this new address, the lack of transparency regarding his residency only highlighted the fact that he was not interested in serving the town but rather using it to propel himself politically.

The recall begins

The goal of a recall is not to remove a board member but to demand that their position be put to a vote in an election. Parents Laura Clark and Theresa Hollers headed up the committee to recall Fisher, filing paperwork with the state on May 14, 2025. The committee would need to acquire the signatures of 25% of the town's registered voters to recall Fisher. They would have until Aug. 11, 2025, to submit 1,894 signatures.

Petition circulators worked social media accounts, stood outside supermarkets and coffee shops, approached commuters at the train station, spoke to people outside the town pool and houses of worship and set up a table at the town picnic in an effort to make personal connections to inform their neighbors about the board of education and how they were trying to reestablish balance.

Christine Elan Dow is a Teacher of English and Speech and Drama in Park Ridge. She can be reached at christine.elan.dow@gmail.com.

The most successful ventures were by committee members who hosted signature drive-up events in their driveways, along with good old-fashioned canvassing. In the heat of summer, petition circulators split up the town on a map and went knocking door-to-door.

The petitioners knew from experience that Fisher would scrutinize petition forms for any discrepancies. With that in mind, Clark and Hollers set a goal of obtaining 2,500 signatures, which would be more than double the number of votes cast for Fisher in the first place. The committee gathered 2,141 signatures.

As anticipated, Fisher's lawyer disputed the validity of the signatures, claiming that each of the signature pages, containing five signatures each, needed to be notarized. Though Clark had received email confirmation to the contrary by the county clerk himself, the clerk upheld Fisher's complaint.

Committee members paid out-of-pocket to retain an attorney to ask that they be given time to "cure" the pages by having them notarized. Fortunately, that step was not required when a county judge accepted the signatures as they were.

Outside influence

In addition to their recall efforts, the committee faced online backlash from people in and out of the community who wanted to characterize Fisher as a child being bullied. Online detractors, the loudest being a Park Ridge resident

who heads the Bergen County chapter of an extremist parent group, were aggressive, but largely comprised of people outside the town. Some even showed up at the BOE and disseminated false information via text blasts despite having no connection to the town.

The majority of negativity on social media stemmed from people who do not know Park Ridge. Town residents know their children and everyone else's: whether they are a young couple who has just moved here, a single parent or a senior citizen who can trace their roots in the town back generations, they know that a quality school community is good for everyone.

The outcome

After the court ruled in favor of upholding the petition on Sept. 15, the Appellate Division affirmed the decision on Sept. 18, 2025. Fisher resigned the following day. Weeks later, a separate agreement was reached to have the attorney fees paid by the county clerk's office.

The lesson here is:

- Go to your board of education meetings.
- Know who is running local government.
- Talk to your neighbors.
- When in doubt, it doesn't hurt to get your petition sheets notarized!

The Park Ridge community reminds us that when outside noise tries to divide us, we must remember we are stronger together.

NJEXCEL

New Jersey EXpedited Certification for Educational Leadership

Register for an
Info Session at
www.njexcel.org

Teacher Leader Certification is also
available through NJEXCEL.

(609) 860-1200
www.njexcel.org



Get Started. Get Skilled. Get Certified.

Do you aspire to be a supervisor, principal, or superintendent but lack the necessary certification?

Is your master's degree in a field other than educational administration?

Do you really want to take the time and pay the cost for a second master's degree through a college or university?

Here's the good news: You don't have to!

In as little as 12-18 months, you can earn your certification through NJEXCEL, the Foundation for Educational Administration's school leadership certification program.

The first smile many students see each day

Meet Morris County ESP of the Year Sue Ritz

By Kathryn Coulibaly



For more than 23 years, Sue Ritz has been a steady, joyful force in Rockaway's schools. Ritz is a paraprofessional whose work in the autism program has helped shape countless students' lives.

Ritz's journey into education began long before she ever stepped into a classroom as a staff member. As a parent, she became deeply involved in the PTA, eventually serving as vice president and then president. She chaired committees, organized events and launched new programs such as the Reflections program, which gave students opportunities to express themselves through writing, drawing, painting and music. "It was a way for kids to shine outside the structured school day," she says.

Her PTA leadership also opened her eyes to the dedication of educators. She saw teachers spending their own money on bulletin boards, books and classroom decorations, often working late into the evening or coming in during the summer. Wanting to support them, she created a PTA grant program to help fund classroom needs. "I was there all the time," she recalls. "Eventually, I applied for a job because I wanted to be part of that team."

Ritz began her career in the preschool disability program, then moved through transitional kindergarten and multiply disabled programs before finding her home in the autism program. She has worked with students across the spectrum and loves every moment. "There's never a boring day," she says. "It's the most rewarding program I've ever worked in."

During the pandemic, Ritz deepened her skills, becoming a Registered Behavior Technician (RBT). She now recertifies annually and uses her training both in school and in private home therapy with children she does not work with during the school day. "It's helped me immensely," she says. "The techniques, the background make me better for my students."

Ritz currently works with middle school students aged 11 to 14, helping them master both academic and essential life skills. She lights up when describing the victories such as teaching three students to tie their shoes last year or helping a child finally grasp multiplication. "People take these things for granted," she says. "But when a student looks at you and says, 'Hey, Miss Sue, I can tie my own shoe,' their smile is infectious."

Her work extends beyond the classroom. As a liaison between the board certified behavior analyst (BCBA) who writes behavior plans and the parents, she helps ensure plans are implemented effectively and families feel supported. She also serves as one of three paraprofessional union representatives, a role she takes seriously. From contract negotiations to Pride events, from back-to-school nights to helping new members understand their contract, Ritz is a tireless advocate. "Everyone has a talent," she says. "When we come together as a collective whole, we do what's right, especially for the children."

Despite her many contributions, Ritz remains humble. "I always think, what am I doing? It doesn't seem like much," she says. "But I guess it is." For her students, she is the first smile they see each morning, the steady presence who helps them feel safe, capable and loved. "I take care of them like my own children," she says. "That's what being an ESP is. We stand behind the kids, propping them up and helping them believe in themselves."

For Sue Ritz, there's no better work in the world.

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

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



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!

The NJEA Teacher Leader Academy is a N.J. Department of Education approved one-year program* for candidates seeking to earn the NJ Teacher Leader Endorsement.

For further details, visit 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

**NEW COHORT
OPENS IN JULY**

**APPLY
NOW!**

Revolutionary Schools invigorate social studies

By De'jah M. Johnson



Civic engagement is not just a buzzword; it is the backbone of a healthy democracy. Education helps students understand the world around them and the forces that shape it. The history rooted in their immediate environment is equally important. When students learn the stories of the land beneath their feet, social studies becomes a tool for self-awareness, belonging and empowerment.

Building connections to state and local history is central to the work of the New Jersey Historical Commission and Crossroads of the American Revolution Association, whose partnership forms RevolutionNJ, the organization leading New Jersey's commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution. In collaboration with the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE), they developed the Revolutionary Schools program to support educators in bringing local history, civics and inquiry-based learning into K-12 classrooms statewide.

"Inspiring students to explore what interests them and see themselves as future changemakers strengthens the democratic foundation that social studies education seeks

De'jah M. Johnson is the communications coordinator for RevolutionNJ, the organization leading New Jersey's commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution. She can be reached at De'jah.Johnson@sos.nj.gov.

to uphold," said Lieutenant Governor Dale G. Caldwell, who oversees RevolutionNJ in his role as secretary of State.

What is a Revolutionary School?

The NJDOE and RevolutionNJ invite every K-12 school and districts to become a Revolutionary School, an official educational partner in the statewide commemoration. While aligned with the upcoming semiquincentennial, Revolutionary Schools is designed to extend throughout the 2026-27 school year, with programs and resources evolving into lasting curriculum staples. There are currently 135 districts and more than 300 schools participating in the Revolutionary Schools program.

All resources developed for this programming are aligned with the New Jersey Student Learning Standards for Social Studies and designed to integrate into existing curricula. The initiative is delivered through two core programs that offer developmentally appropriate, classroom-ready approaches to civics and local history.

History Happened Here is a program for grades 5-12 that empowers students to investigate 250 years of local history within their communities. Students select a topic of interest and complete a research project in formats of their choosing, including exhibitions, videos or websites. Students are also encouraged to visit one historical site. This approach promotes student autonomy while reinforcing critical thinking and research skills. Educators receive a toolkit with implementation guidance and rubrics, while students are supported with research tools, participating site lists and resources that distinguish fact from opinion.

Foundations of Democracy, designed for grades K-5, builds on students' curiosity about fairness, relationships and their surrounding environments. Democratic classrooms introduce young learners to civic values in age-appropriate ways. Classroom toolkits include instructional resources and civic inquiries that support participatory learning.

At its core, social studies is essential to helping students understand society and their place within it. This anniversary is not a distraction from this work. It is an opportunity to deepen it. Through Revolutionary Schools, educators are supported in transforming this historic moment into meaningful learning that connects the past to the civic responsibilities of the future.

To learn more about the Revolutionary Schools program, visit revnj.org/revolutionary-schools.

NJEA REPORT

Cherry Hill educators bring literacy to life through NEA grant

By *Stephanie Natera-Smith*

For students in four Cherry Hill elementary schools, literacy recently came to life in a way that felt personal, exciting and unforgettable. Thanks to a \$7,500 grant from the National Education Association awarded to the Cherry Hill Education Association (CHEA), students had the opportunity to meet New York Times best-selling author Nick Bruel, creator of the popular *Bad Kitty* series.

Bruel visited four elementary schools, bringing stories, creativity and enthusiasm directly into school communities. The visits were about more than meeting an author. They also helped students see reading and writing as joyful, meaningful and connected to their own lives.

The success of the initiative reflected the power of collaboration. After CHEA secured the grant, the association partnered with local PTAs at all four schools to strengthen the experience and broaden its impact on students and families. The teamwork helped turn a single grant into a districtwide celebration of literacy.

"This grant provided an incredible opportunity for our students and showed what is possible when educators, families and school communities come together around literacy," CHEA President Wally Batista-Arias said. Batista-Arias said CHEA was proud to secure the funding and work with PTA partners to expand its reach.

The excitement began even before Bruel arrived. In the weeks leading up to the visit, students at A. Russell Knight Elementary School participated in a February Read-A-Thon and logged more than 62,000 minutes of reading.

For Cherry Hill educators, the initiative served as a reminder that when public schools are supported through grants, advocacy and strong partnerships, students gain experiences that inspire learning long after the event ends.

Stephanie L. Natera-Smith is an associate director in the Communications Division. She can be reached at snatera@njea.org.



Students in four Cherry Hill elementary schools met New York Times best-selling author Nick Bruel, creator of the popular "Bad Kitty" series.



New Jersey's growing health insurance crisis



Why it's a problem and why we MUST fix it



Health insurance rates are increasing dramatically every year, causing a growing concern for school districts and public school educators. We currently have access to plans that remain affordable to us because we pay a percentage of our salary instead of a percentage of the premium. But huge annual premium increases are draining district budgets, threatening jobs, and making bargaining harder, which ultimately hurts all of us.



When Ch. 44 passed in 2020, it provided school employees with the option of health insurance based on salary, not premium. But that law expires at the end of 2027 – less than 2 years from now – and we will be back at the table negotiating health benefits at a time when health care costs are escalating rapidly. That will create a bargaining and health insurance crisis if we don't act decisively before then.

What's causing the huge increases?

- **Lack of transparency in health care costs.** It is difficult, even impossible, to shop for the best value. When you walk into a provider's office, you have no way of knowing how much they will bill your insurance. The same is true for almost every kind of medical care in every setting, and is equally true for prescription drugs.
- **A large percentage of health insurance premiums go to things other than health care.** In the American health care system, too much spending is unrelated to treating patients. From insurance brokers to medical billing personnel to hospital executives to private equity and corporate investors, a large percentage of our health care dollars go somewhere besides actual treatment and prevention.

The old "solutions" never worked

- **Shifting costs onto employees is a failed strategy.** Over and over, the state and districts have turned to premium sharing or higher co-pays, deductibles and out-of-pocket expenses for employees to lower the employer's costs. But those changes only hurt working families like ours and do NOTHING to control costs because the big cost drivers are out of our control. NJEA is adamantly opposed to cost-shifting. We demand cost-control!

• Having every district on its own diminishes our power.

In New Jersey, boards of education have the right to negotiate the carrier. This puts many individual school districts at a disadvantage because districts with higher claims can have much higher premiums and small districts have less bargaining power. Having every district working together would give us much more power to fight back against rising costs.

What we have to do

We are a union. We know that our power is in our numbers. When we stand together, when we work together and WHEN WE FIGHT TOGETHER WE WIN! We are working to develop an approach that will allow us to use the combined power of our **nearly 200,000 active and retired members in nearly 600 districts and colleges** to address the causes of increasing premiums and fight for the best quality health care at the best possible price for NJEA members and our families. We are committed to working with school districts, legislators and the Sherrill administration to find solutions that benefit our members and protect our families AND our paychecks.



By the numbers: Gov. Sherrill's first budget

On March 10, Gov. Mikie Sherrill presented her first state budget.

\$12.4 billion in K-12 School Formula Aid, the highest in state history.

\$1.4 billion for Preschool Education Aid.

\$4.5 million for new districts starting preschool programs.

\$350 million through the Schools Development Authority for ongoing school construction.

\$50 million for capital maintenance and emergent needs.

\$7.3 billion total pension contributions, the full actuarial payment.

Gov. Sherrill's budget maintains funding for county colleges and key programs such as the Tuition Aid Grants (TAG) and community college affordability initiatives, but NJEA is calling for increased funding for county colleges. On March 18, NJEA testified on the state budget and called for greater funding for county colleges, along with other priorities.

NJEA's statement on the FY2027 budget and health insurance crisis

NJEA's officers, President Steve Beatty, Vice President Petal Robertson and Secretary-Treasurer Tina Dare, issued this statement following Gov. Mikie Sherrill's inaugural budget address on March 10:

"Gov. Sherrill's first budget shows a firm commitment to public education. The record level of state aid for school districts that she included will help ensure that New Jersey's students have the resources and support they need to thrive. That aid also helps keep her affordability promise by reducing property tax pressure at the local level.

"As she acknowledged, there is still work to do to ensure that our school funding formula fully and fairly meets the needs of every community and every student, but funding the current formula is a necessary first step toward making those improvements. We look forward to working with the Sherrill administration and legislative leaders to strengthen and secure our school funding formula.

"We also commend her commitment to students through increased funding for pre-K education, as well as additional funds to provide academic support for students who need it. Her investments in student mental health and online safety will also pay dividends. New Jersey students and their families will benefit from these smart budget priorities.

"By fully funding the state's pension obligation, she is also delivering on her affordability promise. Hundreds of thousands of public employees – including nearly 200,000 NJEA members – are counting on the state to keep up its end of the pension bargain so they can afford to retire with dignity. While much more is needed to restore

fairness to our pension systems, the full funding included in this budget is essential and demonstrates a genuine commitment to fiscal responsibility.

"New Jersey's county colleges are slated for flat funding. We appreciate that this budget does not propose a cut, as has been the case in recent budget proposals. However, the state has long fallen short of its funding obligations to those colleges, resulting in higher costs and fewer program offerings for students and this budget does not address that shortfall. We look forward to discussing the importance of increased support for these critical education institutions with the Sherrill administration and legislative leaders. Families across New Jersey rely on county colleges as places to receive valuable career training and as a more affordable way to begin a four-year degree. Providing even modest but consistent annual budget increases would set the state on a path toward meeting its responsibilities while helping to build the skilled workforce needed to support a growing economy.

"We know that the cost of health insurance remains a daily concern for millions of New Jersey families. While not directly addressed in today's presentation, it's an issue that we need to solve together. We believe there are solutions that will control costs without burdening families or limiting access to health care. It's another area where we are eager to partner with Gov. Sherrill and legislative leaders to innovate."



NJEA has been vocal about the importance of finding solutions to the health insurance crisis. Read President Beatty's op-ed published on March 8 on [NJ.com](https://www.nj.com).



Three NEA Directors were elected at the March 21 Delegate Assembly meeting. NEA Directors help set and implement national policy, ensure financial stewardship, participate in committee work and advocate for NEA's legislative priorities. NJEA is entitled to nine NEA State Directors.

DA elects three NEA Directors

At the March 21 meeting, the NJEA Delegate Assembly elected three members to represent New Jersey on the NEA Board of Directors. Theresa Fuller of Somerset County and Christine Hewitt of Burlington County were reelected and Shrona Wise-Schimpf of Hudson County was elected to her first term. They will each serve a three-year term beginning Sept. 1

As members of the NEA Board of Directors, the directors help set and implement national policy, ensure financial stewardship, participate in committee work and advocate for NEA's legislative priorities, including engagement with Congress. The directors function as critical links between NEA leadership and members by bringing state and local perspectives to national decision-making and communicating NEA policies and actions back to affiliates. Working at national, regional and state levels, NEA Directors provide leadership in interpreting and advancing NEA programs, support unified agendas,

strengthen collaboration among affiliates and ensure member voices inform the association's strategic direction.

Based on its membership, NJEA is entitled to nine NEA State Directors. The current directors are Brenda Brathwaite of Atlantic County, Theresa Fuller of Somerset County, Laurie Gibson-Parker of Camden County, Lauren Greenfield of Essex County, Christine Hewitt of Burlington County, Temika Langston-Myers of Cumberland County, Barbara Rheault of Atlantic County, Mark Richards of Essex County, Stacy Yanko of Sussex County and Charles E. Wilson of Passaic County.

The Delegate Assembly also elected six NEA Director Alternates. They are: Shereen Ducasse of Gloucester County, John Senft of Camden County, Maryam Sarhan of Atlantic County, April Stevenson-Kinder of Cumberland County, Nicole Fuller of Passaic County and Shereen Ducasse of Gloucester County.

CLOSING THE REGULATION GAP

By Edwin Quezada

I want to put something on the table that might sound uncomfortable at first, but it's the truth. We don't only have an achievement gap; we have a regulation gap. Across New Jersey, we're working hard to close academic gaps. We focus on planning, differentiating, tutoring and reteaching. But if our student's nervous systems aren't regulated, none of that sticks. You've seen it. The student who blows up over a minor correction, the one who shuts down halfway through class or the group that spirals the moment tension hits the room. These are not "bad kids." These are people whose dysregulated nervous systems are responding exactly as the brain reacts under stress.

When students live with poverty, instability, racism, bullying, unsafe neighborhoods or unaddressed trauma, their brains adapt to survive, not to learn. The prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain responsible for focus, reasoning, language and empathy, goes offline.

When we teach as if everything is fine, we're not fighting laziness or disrespect. We're colliding with biology. It's impossible to teach a child whose brain believes it is unsafe. You can throw every intervention at them, every tutoring session, every reteach lesson and nothing will stick if the brain is dysregulated. I have taught in Trenton, Camden and at Maple Shade's alternative program. Throughout my career, self-regulation skills have been one of the most important things I employ in my classroom.

Alternative program at Maple Shade High School

Since opening in September 2024, Pathways Alternative School has been built around a simple belief: students learn best when they feel safe, supported and understood. We take pride in being a neurodivergent-friendly community

Veteran teacher Edwin Quezada and his colleagues at Maple Shade High School's Pathways Alternative School work to help students feel safe, supported and understood.



and in welcoming a wide range of learners, including students who have experienced chronic absenteeism, credit challenges or the effects of ongoing trauma.

Our approach focuses on the whole child. Along with academics, we help students build the social and emotional skills they need to grow and succeed beyond school. We also try to meet students where they are by offering flexible ways to learn, whether that means working independently, one-on-one with staff or in small groups. With the support of our school counselor and team, we help students move from simply getting through the day to feeling more connected, engaged and confident in themselves.

The science is clear

This isn't guesswork. It's neuroscience, and it aligns directly with what some of the world's leading trauma experts have proven. Much of my own understanding, practice and research as a trauma-informed educator is rooted in the work of Dr. Bessel van der Kolk, author of "The Body Keeps the Score."

Dr. van der Kolk's research made something obvious to me early in my career: the body literally stores trauma, and the nervous system reacts long before cognition does.

The Body Keeps the Score became one of my essential guides. It is a foundation for my classroom routines, professional development workshops and my entire approach to trauma-informed education. When educators understand the body-brain connection, student behavior stops feeling personal and becomes informative.

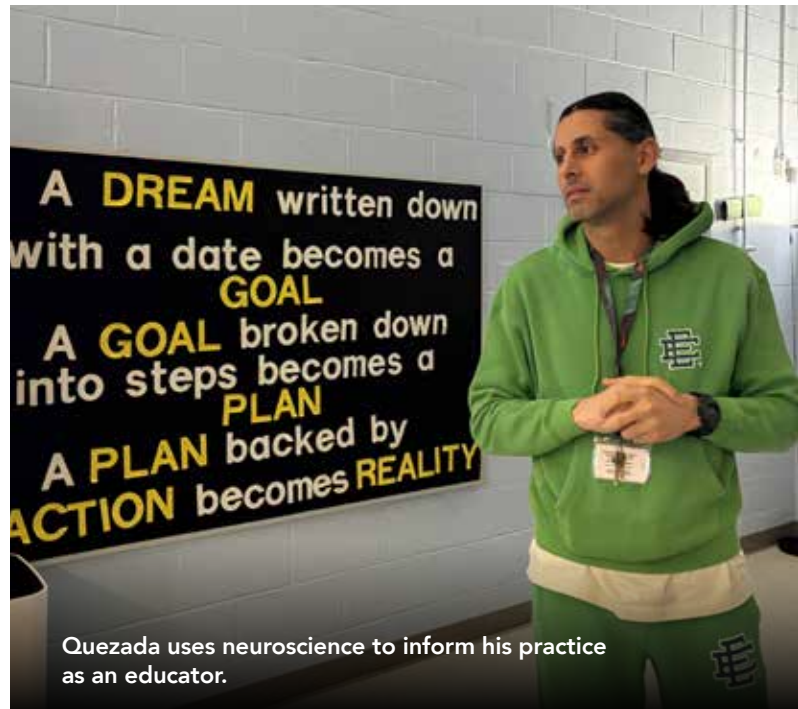
Self-regulation: the missing core subject

Imagine if emotional regulation were treated the way math and reading are: as a daily essential skill, not an as-needed intervention. Five to ten minutes of breathing, regulation and reflection can shift the entire tone of instruction. These aren't "extra activities," they are the foundation of all learning. A student in survival mode can't access critical thinking. A student whose amygdala is activated cannot reflect, problem-solve, infer, analyze, or empathize.

When we teach the science of stress: what's happening in the amygdala, how to calm the body, how to identify early warning signals, we are giving students control over the engine behind every learning task they will ever do.

This is something educators often forget: Self-regulation is not just for students. It's for educators, too. A regulated teacher is the intervention. Students match our pace, tone and energy long before they ever absorb our content. Our nervous system becomes the anchor in the room. When we model calm, it allows students to co-regulate with us. And co-regulation is the bridge that leads to independent regulation.

Edwin Quezada, M.Ed, is a trauma-informed educator at Maple Shade High School. He can be reached at quezada.edwin@gmail.com.



Trauma-informed practice in the classroom

A trauma-informed classroom is not complicated. It's not expensive. And it doesn't require special training or technology. It requires consistency, predictability, safety and attunement.

Below is the daily three-step routine I use. It is grounded in neuroscience, aligned with trauma-informed care and accessible to teachers across all grade levels.

Mantra → Breathing → Mood for Learning.

This sequence regulates the body, the mind and the spirit. It returns the student to the present moment and makes their nervous system safe enough to learn and safe enough to attune to the educator.

Step One: Mantra (one minute)

What it is:

A short phrase repeated together that signals belonging, safety and readiness.

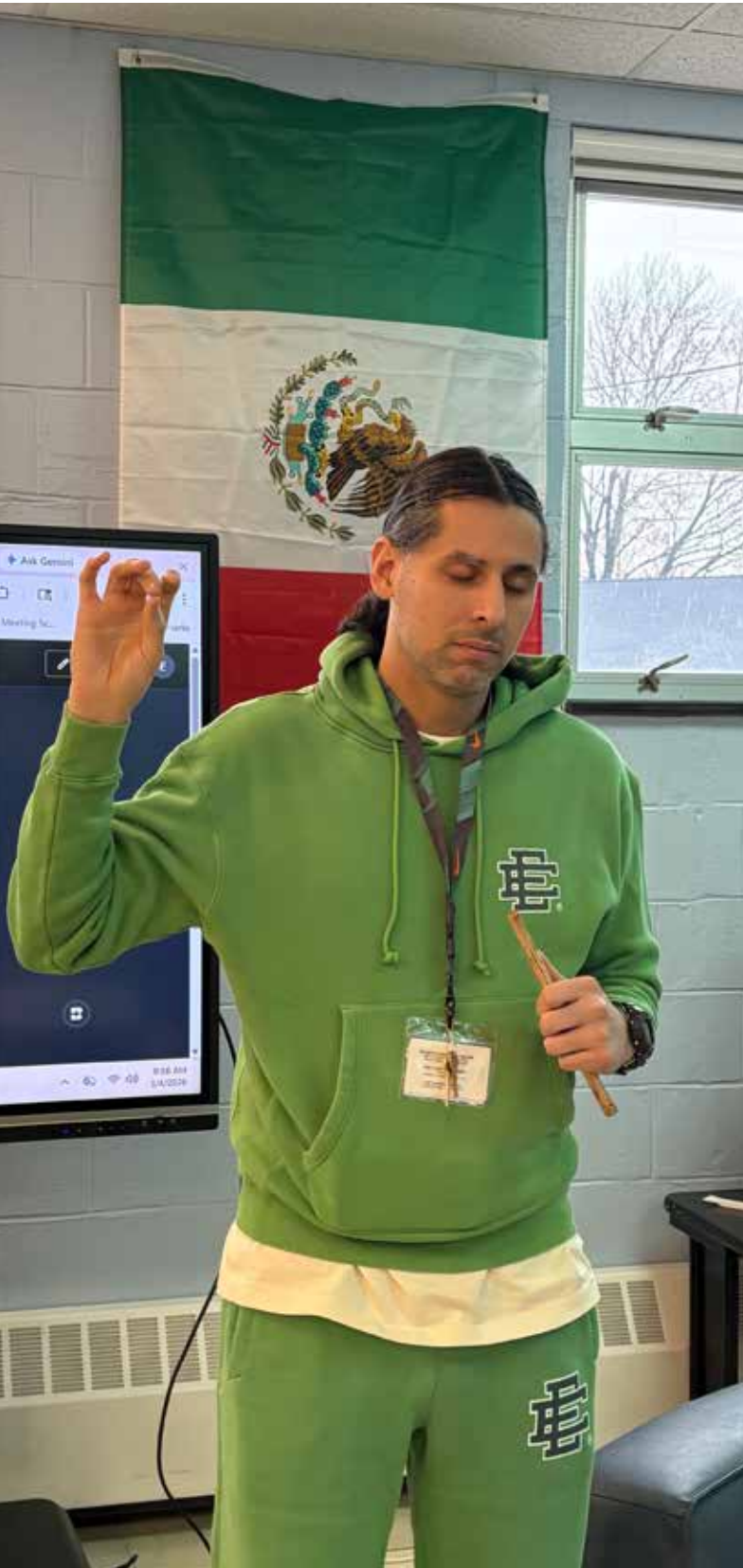
Why it works:

A mantra interrupts stress-based thinking and reorients students toward collective identity and safety. It becomes a grounding ritual the same way athletes, musicians and performers center themselves before high-stakes moments.

What it looks like in the classroom:

Students settle into their seats. You offer a gentle cue: "Alright team, let's get centered."

The class repeats the following mantra after me: "May all people be happy."



Quezada demonstrates a breathing exercise for students.

“May all people be free.”
“May all people be healthy.”
“May all people be at peace.”

Some students whisper. Some say it firmly. Some say it quietly to themselves.

It doesn't matter. The power is in the ritual. This is the predictable beginning that signals you are entering a safe space.

Actionable tip for educators:

Choose one mantra and stick with it for four to five weeks. Ritual becomes regulation.

Step Two: Breathing (one to two minutes)

What it is:

Intentional slow mindful breathwork designed to slow the heart rate and deactivate the amygdala.

Why it works:

Breathing is the fastest, most accessible way to regulate the nervous system. Students with trauma histories often arrive at class with elevated cortisol. Deep, slow, mindful breathing resets the body chemistry.

What it looks like in the classroom:

Your voice becomes calm and confident:

“Feet flat on the floor. Hands on your lap. Shoulders relaxed.”

Then you guide with Triangle Breathing:

- Inhale for three seconds.
- Hold for three seconds.
- Exhale for three seconds.

Or a student-led version:

- Trace each finger as you breathe in and out.

The room gets quieter. A few students take noticeably deeper breaths. Some close their eyes. Some slow down. A minute later, the energy in the room has shifted, not because of compliance, but because of regulation.

Actionable tip for educators:

Pick one breathing technique and have students repeat it daily so they internalize it.

Step Three: Mood for learning (two minutes)

What it is:

A simple, low-stress self-assessment that helps students recognize their emotional readiness. It also helps them understand that the calm they are feeling is their body's natural state — the way they are meant to feel when they are regulated and ready to learn.



Trauma-informed teaching is the future of education.

Why it works:

Students learn to recognize their internal state before it escalates. Teachers gain real-time insight that prevents conflict.

What it looks like:

You ask: “What is your mood for learning?” Students respond using colors, hand signals or words:

- Green: I'm ready. (Good) Thumbs up.
- Yellow: I need a moment. (In-between) Hand tilted/hand wobbles.
- Red: I'm here, but not fully prepared yet. (Not ready) Thumbs down.

There is no punishment for not being ready. No calling a student out. No embarrassment.

Why this question matters most:

It teaches emotional literacy. It validates internal experiences. It gives teachers data they can actually use. And most importantly, it builds trust.

Actionable tip for educators:

Always respond with support, not consequences. A student who says “red” is communicating safely. Do not punish them for it.

Routines create culture, which leads to change

When trauma-informed routines become consistent, the entire school environment transforms:

- Students feel safe.
- Classrooms stay calmer.
- Power struggles decrease.
- Students trust adults.
- Learning actually sticks.

Students move from dysregulation to regulation and from regulation to engagement. This is not about perfection. It is about predictable safety.

New Jersey can lead the way

New Jersey can lead the way on this issue by embedding trauma-informed and self-regulation practices directly into our state curriculum. That means:

- Teaching emotional regulation as a skill, not a reaction.
- Aligning well-being with academic metrics.
- Giving teachers real tools and training.
- Recognizing mental health as the foundation of academic success.

Educators are ready

At the 2025 NJEA Convention, I presented “Fostering a Trauma-Informed Learning Environment.” Educators practiced these routines with me: the mantra, the breathing and the Mood for Learning check-in. The feedback was clear: educators are ready. They see that regulation is not extra. It is the entry point to meaningful learning. If we want to close the achievement gap, we must close the regulation gap.

Healing is not separate from learning. Regulation is not separate from achievement. Trauma-informed education is not a trend. It is the future of effective teaching. 🗣️



Quezada says that trauma-informed classrooms are not complicated. They require consistency, predictability, safety and attunement.



Learn more about Quezada's trauma-informed practices in his classroom at njea.org/regulation.

Video by Danielle Earle, NJEA Communications.



The North Brunswick Township Education Association has spent years building relationships with the community and communicating their successes. Their hard work paid off during a contentious bargaining cycle.

Community connections lead to contract win

By David Yastremski

When Beth Passner became president of North Brunswick Township Education Association (NBTEA) in 2020, her students, her members and the entire world were in lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a new president, Passner was confronted with an entirely new set of expectations regarding how NBTEA would serve the North Brunswick Township school community. She quickly realized she needed a new avenue to communicate how NBTEA was stepping in to help their students and families during the lockdown, so she created a public-facing Facebook account to help get the message out and to keep her members and students' families informed.

"We wanted to showcase the great things that the NBTEA was doing for the students and schools during that time," Passner said.

For the past six years, NBTEA's Facebook feed continues to celebrate their members and profession on a weekly basis. Passner and her team highlight member achievements including awards, retirements and tenure, while sharing important information with the community regarding political action and endorsements at the local and state levels. Furthermore, they use their page to communicate opportunities for their students and families, including food bank information and backpack drives, along with other community initiatives, many of which are supported with \$60,000 in NJEA Public Education Partnership (PEP) and Families and Schools Together Work for Children (FAST) grants.

Building bridges with other unions

Over time, more and more followers would access NBTEA content, building a network between the association and community, including other organizations and unions.

"We would also use our page to share information and updates from other union organizations so followers can be informed and offer their support when needed," Passner stated. NBTEA supported the Robert Wood Johnson nurses during a five-month strike in 2023 and continues their annual support of the North Brunswick PBA Local 160's toy drive.

Passner noted, "It's important not to just build relationships for times of crisis. But when a crisis does occur in our neighborhood, we will be there."

In 2024, NBTEA experienced its own crisis by declaring impasse during their contract negotiations. "It was the end of the school year but because we built our Facebook following, we already had the mechanism in place to run a focused public relations campaign to inform our community and engage our supporters," Passner stated.

Social media and in-person organizing pay off

A crisis team was created with many new members who became active with the association for the first time. NBTEA began organizing their members and using their Facebook page to encourage attendance at board of education meetings.

"In April, we had 115 members at the meeting. In May, more than 200 people rallied outside our negotiations meeting. Again in June, more than 200 people attended the board of education meeting, including many parents who voiced their support," Passner said.

After every meeting, NBTEA would use Facebook to share links to the statements and speeches at the board of education meetings. They created the hashtag #IamNBTEA campaign which also was used on lawn signs and shirts. Posts were communicated in English and Spanish.

The NBTEA's public relations campaign paid off. Parents and community members spoke in support of the NBTEA during end-of-year and summer board of education meetings. The momentum led to their Aug. 13 negotiation session where 300 people rallied for a fair and just settlement. Passner noted how surprised the



The NBTEA used a variety of tools to build community engagement, including online and in-person organizing, but they also lived their union values by standing up for other labor unions going through crises.

board was to see such an amazing turnout in the middle of summer.

Additionally, the other union organizations that NBTEA supported in the past returned the advocacy.

"The nurses said that we were there for them, so they were here for us," Passner said. In addition, North Brunswick police officers provided Gatorade and water during the hot summer night rally while offering their support for NBTEA's fair settlement.

And it worked. After seven hours of mediation that night, NBTEA settled their contract. "Even the mediator commented on how big the turnout was that night," Passner said.

A contract that reflects the association's values

NJEA Field Representative Tom Bohnyak emphasized that the NBTEA focused on making necessary improvements to their salary guides.

"The settlements reflected above county average percentages for all three years for both certificated staff and ESPs with guide enhancements that will benefit

David Yastremski teaches English and communication at Ridge High School in Bernards Township. He serves on the negotiations team for the Bernards Township Education Association and treasurer for the Somerset County Education Association. Yastremski is an NJEA Communications Consultant. He can be reached at dyastremski@njea.org.



The NBTEA's strong show of unity helped lead to an impressive showing at an August mediation session, resulting in a strong, settled contract.

members for years to come," Bohnyak said.

In addition, NBTEA received \$120,000 to specifically support aides' salary guides, including higher raises for aides with substitute certificates and modifying the steps to enable aides to reach the top in a shorter amount of time.

Finally, the NBTEA negotiated automatic overtime for their custodians on emergency closing days and delayed openings, a benefit NBTEA had fought for during the last 20 years.

At the table, Passner was joined by NBTEA officers, including Vice President and lead negotiator Jennifer Herrick; Vice President of Secretaries Arlene Baum; Vice President of Transportation Tasha Petrik; Vice President of Special Services Rina Richardson; Vice President of Aides Rona Hales; Treasurer Lindsey Simons; and Corresponding Secretary Joseph Landolfi.

They focused on building a diverse group of negotiating team members, including instructional aide Susan Waldron, custodian Yvonne Watson, CST member Maria Morales, and teachers Candy Hoffman and Michael Kestlinger, along with Bohnyak.

“

It's important not to just build relationships for times of crisis, but to ensure that when a crisis does occur in our neighborhood, we will be there.

In October, the NBTEA was honored as one of the finalists for the 2025 NJEA Jim George Collective Bargaining Award, which honors excellence in negotiating contracts.

Building a union that strengthens the community

According to Passner, the campaign and outreach did not just achieve a stronger contract. The community connections the association has built have been an important factor in encouraging new staff to join the association.

“At staff orientation, we present a slideshow of all the work we do in the community, including the food banks and toy drive,” Passner said. “We emphasize that when you become part of the North Brunswick family, you are part of a union that cares about our entire community. We do more than settle contracts, we build lasting relationships that benefit our members, our community, and most importantly, our students and their families.” 🏡



The NBTEA sees themselves as part of the North Brunswick family.



Signs blanketed the community, showcasing North Brunswick’s support for the NBTEA.

Accessing NJEA PEP and FAST Grants

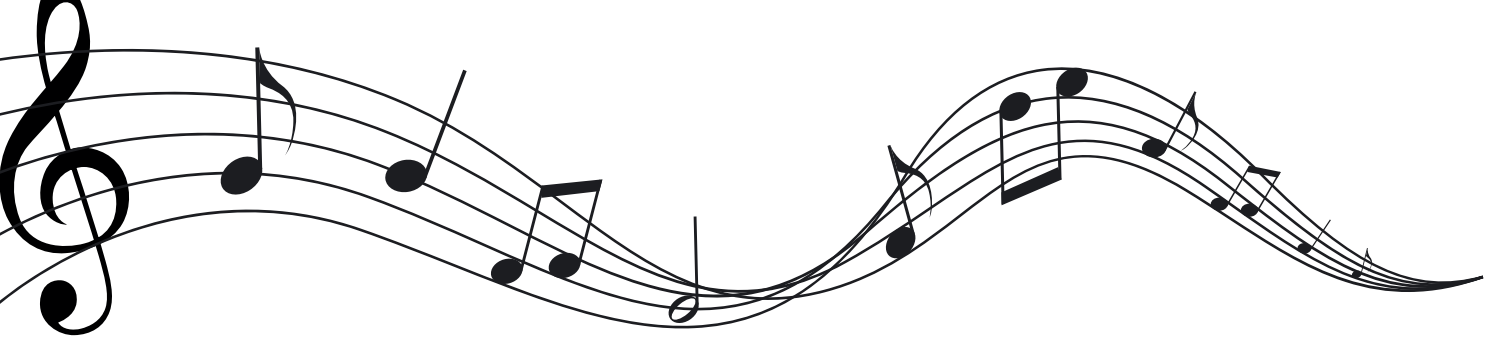
Public Education Partnership grants

Public Education Partnership (PEP) grants cover a variety of topics and areas, including combating privatization, passing school budgets, addressing drug and alcohol issues in the community, and helping to keep teen drivers safe. For more information about PEP programs and how to use them to increase community awareness of the great things happening in our public schools, go to njea.org/pep.

Families and Schools Together Work for Children grants

NJEA FAST grants, or Families and Schools Together Work for Children, seek to involve parents and families in their children’s education through programs and events to help improve student achievement and ensure that families feel welcome and connected to our schools. For more information, go to njea.org/fast.

Contact your local association president to identify your PEP and FAST chairs.



Bringing your passions into the classroom

*How a Gloucester County music educator builds
relationships with students*

By Sal Randazzo

On any given school day, you can find NJEA member Carl Cox conducting jazz ensemble rehearsals, running piano labs and teaching instrumental lessons. After dismissal, though, you'll often catch him rushing off to a recording studio, a local gig or Philadelphia International Airport for his after-hours career as a professional saxophonist.

Cox is in his 22nd year of teaching at Deptford High School in Gloucester County, where he graduated in 1996. He earned a bachelor's degree in saxophone performance and a master's degree in music education from the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. Since then, he has built his reputation as a musician, performing with artists like Kirk Franklin, The Roots and Sugarland. He also has three contemporary jazz solo albums to his credit, with several singles in rotation on SiriusXM Watercolors channel 66.

Cox says his passion for music keeps him going. "It's why I got into the field. To be able to perform and come back to school to share that experience. I just love doing it, so I don't really think about being tired."

Sal Randazzo is an NJEA member serving Deptford Public Schools as a communications professional. He can be reached at sal.a.randazzo@gmail.com.



Carl Cox is a music educator at Deptford High School and a proud alumnus.

Deptford's jazz legacy

Like many educators, Cox had a model for his success: his own high school jazz teacher, Al Hobbs.

"Al was a highly sought-after musician," Cox says. "He was doing Broadway gigs on percussion. I realized that if he could play and teach, I could play and teach."

Cox was strongly influenced by Hobbs' teaching style. "Al was a personable teacher. You could talk to him. He would say things like, 'I might not have all the answers, but I can listen to whatever you've got to say.'" Cox remembers fondly, "We used to talk about all kinds of stuff. He loved fishing, and we'd talk about different types of rigs. We became friendly."

It was this sharing of personal passions that engaged Cox and helped him buy into what Hobbs was teaching. Hobbs' enthusiasm also shaped Cox's views on education.

"Students have a keen sense of awareness. If you're excited about your content, the student will be excited as well. Every day I go into the classroom, I'm excited to share."

Turning passion into student engagement

When your passions help you develop a community outside of the workplace, your students have access to that world. Says Cox, "I've had kids play with Gerald Veasley, who I perform with. I've had John Legend's band members come in and work with the kids."

But it's not just the guest clinicians that help Cox's students. "I think when they see I can do it, they think, 'Here's another Deptford alum coming back doing what he loves to do.' That gives them hope they can do it as well. I've had a lot of students make a career out of music."

Cox, along with colleagues Amy Gigliotti and Mike Armstrong, helped launch Deptford High School's music academy in 2018, dubbed the Spartan School of Music. This program graduates a cohort of skilled musicians each year. The curriculum includes training on an instrument or voice, plus piano, music theory and senior recitals. This results in highly prepared candidates for college auditions and scholarship opportunities.

Cox stresses the importance of effort from both students and teachers in getting students where they need to be. "People say, 'How do you get your kids so good? You just have a lot of great students.' And I say, 'No, I have



Cox believes in each of his students. He believes time, intelligent practice and patience are the keys to unlocking student's potential.

**“
Some of the students
say I'm their favorite
teacher, and I don't
even teach them. I just
listen to them.**





Cox was heavily influenced by his teacher at Deptford High School, Al Hobbs. Cox with scholarships-winning students Gabe Pino and Gino Antonelli.

the same students you do, but it's our job to make them great.' They didn't start off that way." He approaches this process using the acronym TIP:

- **Time:** "You need to find the time to work with the students, and they need to carve out a part of their day to enhance their skills."
- **Intelligence:** "Intelligent practice. Are they playing mindlessly, or are they actively engaged in a practice session working toward specific goals?"
- **Patience:** "With any skill, it takes time, and you can never give up on a student."

Cox realizes not every student will go into music as a career. "I encourage them to work as a team, because no matter where they work or what job they do, they'll need to work with others. That's my philosophy. Not only to direct them, but to direct them on how to teach themselves and work together as a unit."

The results

Cox recently received the New Jersey Association for Jazz Education (NJAJE) 2025 Achievement Award. A major deciding factor was Deptford's jazz ensemble winning the last four New Jersey State Jazz Championships. "I always tell them, 'I don't care about the results. If you give me your best, I'll be happy.' It's not the win that's important; it's the journey."

And the journey for Cox's students doesn't end at graduation. Many have gone on to be educators and performers, both amateur and professional. Some don't make a living in music but are active members of the performing arts community.

Cox identifies one such student, Shawn Blubaugh, class of 2009. "He works for the Phillies. His love of music stayed with him long after he graduated, and he's now the captain of the Greater Kensington String Band in Philadelphia." Blubaugh reached out to Cox in 2024 to ask for help working with the saxophone section, and Cox soon found himself marching down Broad Street in the 2025 Mummers Parade on New Year's Day.

"Of course, I said yes, because he was my former student, so I wanted to help him. And I did it again this year," he says with a laugh.

"I always try my best to do what I can to help them, even after they've graduated. I think that goes a long way in creating an atmosphere for the students. We all help each other out. I support them, they support me and the ritual continues."

He is just as proud of former students who simply continue to support jazz and local artists. "They're attending concerts, festivals and actively engaged in supporting America's music, which is jazz, and they're the generation that's going to help retain this art form."



Cox works to provide his students with new experiences and looks for moments to build relationships with students throughout the day, whether he has them in class or not.

Takeaways for positive student outcomes

Cox feels educators need to take responsibility for introducing students to new experiences. “Kids don’t know what they want until you give them the opportunity to experience your passion. They only know what they see or hear, and it’s our job to get them excited.”

Those with interests outside their content area can start a club, plan a field trip or just engage in conversation. Cox notes a colleague who runs a physics field trip to Six Flags Great Adventure.

“Students discover the physics of the rollercoasters, but they’re also there to experience a relationship with each other outside the classroom. I think that’s a big part of developing a bond with your students, which enhances your ability to teach them.”

Building relationships outside the classroom

Cox looks for moments to build relationships throughout the school day. “If I’m on lunchroom duty, I try to meet students I don’t know. Some of the students say I’m their favorite teacher, and I don’t even teach them. I just listen to them. They want to talk to you. You don’t know their

personal life, what they’re dealing with. They want an adult to talk to.”

For educators who don’t get those opportunities in school, there are tools that allow you to share your passions digitally. Cox posts short video lessons and tips on his social media channels and website, carlcoxsax.com, getting engagement from students and educators alike.

Speaking about his own success, Cox gives all the credit to his teachers and mentors, pointing out how every educator who interacts with a student helps guide their journey. “All the educators I had helped shape me. If one of them were missing, it wouldn’t have been the same. It was a puzzle that had to come together, and every piece had to be there for me to be successful. You could be a large piece. Whether you realize it or not, your students are listening.”

As Cox reflects on his own journey, he hopes his students remember the same thing about him that he remembers about Al Hobbs. “That I cared. That I always wanted them to succeed in whatever they do. And that I might not have had all the answers, but that I listened.” 🙏



FOR PODCASTING TEACHERS, LIFE IS A BALANCING ACT

By Joe Vitale and Jamie Wanko

- Teachers ✓
- Parents ✓
- Sandwich generation kids ✓
- Friends ✓
- Podcasters ✓

Sandy toes and a great idea: Jamie sets the scene

Three years have passed since the idea we tossed around finally came to life. Sitting in our beach chairs with our toes in the white sand of Surf City on Long Beach Island, we were waxing poetic about the profession we love, the stress it can bring and the solutions we hoped would help.

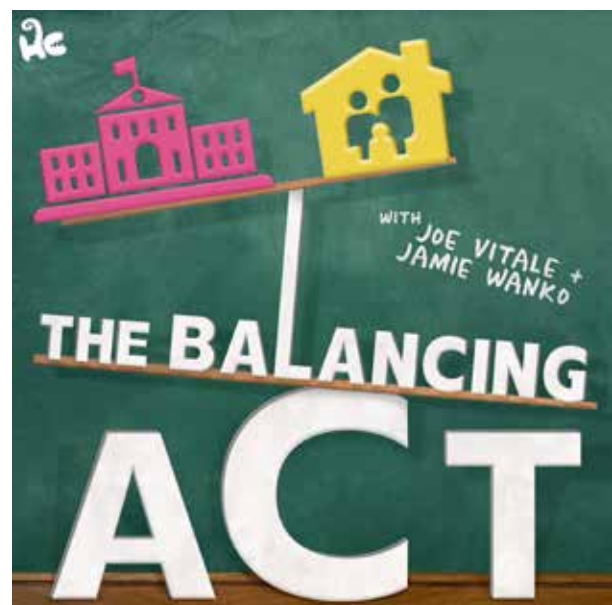
Just a year prior, my mom had become seriously ill, and I was not ready to go back to work in the fall. How could I balance the stress of managing my classroom, my three children and my sick parent while beginning work in an entirely new school? After 21 years in the same school, I was taking the leap to a new building. How would I be able to balance it all? I wasn't sure if I could.

For months, the word "balance" was the basis of our

many talks. Now, with the seagulls stealing snacks, our kids asking us for ice cream money and the lifeguards whistling at swimmers, it wasn't a surprise when Joe leaned over in his Tommy Bahama beach chair and declared, "We are going to do the podcast and we are going to call it, 'The Balancing Act.'"

Right there on the sand, we both knew that there was no going back. We quickly came to an agreement. Fueled by grit and self-confidence, and with absolutely no idea how to tackle this new endeavor, we were going to pursue a passion project that our profession and our families needed in an effort to help as many educators and parents as we possibly could.

Joe Vitale has been a middle school teacher in Woodbridge Township School District for 27 years. Jamie Wanko has been a middle school teacher in Woodbridge Township School District for 25 years. Vitale and Wanko are the cohosts of the podcast "The Balancing Act." They can be reached at podthebalancingact@gmail.com.



The Balancing Act is born: Joe describes the pod

With more than 50 years of collective teaching experience and the desire to put our energy into a new productive project, "The Balancing Act" podcast was born. For years, we had discussed teaching, the art and the science of what it takes to be all you can be inside the classroom, while managing all that exists outside of it.

We are self-professed nerds. Teaching nerds, interest nerds and try-hard nerds. Nerds is a description we adore and take very seriously. Like so many of the best in our field, we believe that better is always possible, tackling problems can and will improve our practice and culture can be influenced, as long as we try. And yet we all know the resilience it takes to confront the events that life throws at us. Our solution to all that ails us is to start a podcast, of course! And that is exactly what we did.

Now, nearly three years later, our two-person team has had its fair share of ups and downs. In November 2025, we spent the day at the NJEA Convention, one of the highlights of our podcasting experience thus far. The glorious day started with listening to an inspirational keynote speech from a personal hero of ours, Malala Yousafzai. Soon after, we set up shop in the large convention hall and spent the rest of the day interviewing New Jersey county and state teachers of the year. We were thrilled with the opportunity to ask educational questions like, "What is your classroom theme song?" and "What is the most important advice you would give to a first-year teacher?"

Share the journey

Over three seasons and nearly 100 episodes, we have interviewed teachers, psychologists, college experts, family drug counselors, media experts and even Jodi Edwards, the beloved co-owner of the New Jersey ice cream shop Nicholas Creamery, who gave us tips on helping teenagers be more employable.

As we continue our journey toward self-growth, reflection and nerdiness, we would love to hear from New Jersey teachers and educators around the world who, like us, seek to learn how to better balance work, stress, parenting, friendships and how to make more time for fun, summer beach trips and laughter.

We welcome current and future listeners. Visit podthebalancingact.com and hope you will give us a like, a listen, a follow or tell a friend. As always, we appreciate you. 🙏



Vitale and Wanko have been friends and colleagues for more than 20 years. When they found themselves balancing aging parents, growing children and demanding careers in education, they created their podcast, the Balancing Act, to help them process those demands and reach out to others.

From feathers to forests

By Dr. Roberta Hunter



Schools in action

When you enter the courtyard of Lincoln Middle School in Kearny, you see that the teachers and students have made the most of a rare outdoor space. There is a covered pavilion, an outdoor classroom, bird feeders, raised beds with crops and pollinator plants and children learning. The produce from the courtyard garden is donated to families and a food bank. Students worked with local businesses and Rutgers University to install a rain garden to absorb rainwater coming off the roof, then taught other middle school students how to create their own. Their gardening club made Lincoln Middle School a bird-friendly school by identifying birds, observing their behavior, making presentations and fliers and building habitat for them.

Across the state in Hillside, the climate ambassadors at Hurden Looker Elementary School have transformed their school community's relationship with sustainability in just a few months. The Ambassadors began by creating an EcoCode rooted in their school's existing ROAR pledge, which stands for Respect, Organized, Accountable and Responsible, reframing it through an environmental justice lens.

Students designed posters and visited every classroom to share them with the school. They collected plastic bottle caps from students, families and community members to build a data-driven art installation on climate change. Guided by their art teacher, their exhibit has drawn more than 100 visitors.

The ambassadors also manage a hydroponic growing system in their main hallway where third and fourth graders plant, harvest and eat what they grow, opening conversations about farm-to-table eating and green careers.

After testing soil and conducting a cardboard drive to prepare the ground, they partnered with professors from Rutgers, the New Jersey Institute of Technology and Seton Hall to plan the spring planting of native trees and shrubs. Thanks to a \$10,000 Sustainable Schools grant, they will be creating a Miyawaki schoolyard forest, a dense, rapidly growing, native micro forest planted on school grounds for education, environmental and mental health benefits.

Supporting teachers and students in sustainability

Supported by generous funding from PSE&G, Eco-Schools U.S. in New Jersey is a partnership between New Jersey Audubon (NJA) and the National Wildlife Federation. Participation and awards are free and more than 180 schools are currently enrolled.

Allison Mulch, NJA director of education, and I provide support for schools. Certification is annual and achieved through students and teachers completing school and community-level projects in three themes: wildlife and biodiversity, climate change and healthy and resilient communities.

Students work with teachers to decide which of 61 action projects are important to them and fit their community. Action Cards provide background and resources to guide them through each action. There are projects for a variety of scales and difficulty levels.

"The Action Cards help busy educators work smarter, not harder. The program provides helpful resources and best practices for each eco-action and provides a valuable framework for collaborating with other teachers and community partners," said Meghan Hooper, a middle school teacher in Atlantic City.

At George L. Catrambone Elementary School in Long Branch, students used a "Design Your Own Action Card" to grow herbs in a hydroponics system, dry and package them to take home to their families. Teachers Kelli Shaughnessy and Michele Morey said, "The Eco-Schools program has



Dr. Roberta Hunter is the education program manager for New Jersey Audubon. She can be reached at roberta.hunter@njudubon.org.

helped our Green Team turn care for our school and planet into meaningful action. It's inspiring to watch students take ownership of sustainability and lead positive change."

Supporting teacher learning

NJA is part of two climate collaboratives, developed by the New Jersey Department of Education to support climate change education standards, along with Rutgers University and Stockton University. Through these partnerships, NJA offers both virtual and in-person programs.

Last summer, New Jersey held the first Climate Education UnConference at Rutgers University. An unconference lets participants decide what they want to learn about with their fellow teachers and provides structure for knowledge sharing and teacher collaboration. There are three more unconferences planned for 2026, one at Rutgers and two at Stockton. The multi-day Teachers' School of Ecology, held each August at Scherman Hoffman Wildlife Sanctuary in Bernardsville, invites teachers to explore ecology and climate change in an experiential, place-based, collaborative environment.

School-based professional development partnerships are also available for teams of educators. Staff are also

available to visit schools to discuss outdoor learning opportunities and highlight which Eco-Schools U.S. Action Cards could be a good match.

Learning in your schoolyard

The Minor Leagues of Birding can bring learning to your schoolyard. Connected to NJA's World Series of Birding, which sees teams competing to see how many birds they can see in 24 hours. Birders can use free apps like Merlin or traditional field guides to identify birds, then share your list with NJA. Want help from an experienced birder? Email roberta.hunter@njudubon.org for more information.



Learn more

Eco-Schools U.S.: njudubon.org/eco-schools

Sustainable Jersey Trees for Schools program:
sustainablejerseyschools.com/grants/trees-for-schools

NJ SCHOOL JOBS

STAFFING NEW JERSEY SCHOOLS



Build Brighter Futures!

Find Education Jobs in New Jersey

Visit our website to:

- ✓ Search for Jobs
- ✓ Apply to Jobs with a click of a button
- ✓ Sign up for **Daily & Real-Time Job Alerts**
- ✓ Upload your resume



www.njschooljobs.com

NO CELL, BELL TO BELL

By Dorothy Wigmore



The sounds of socializing

Since early February, things have been different in Linda Kramer's school.

"The students are even more engaged as they walk through the hallways," she says. "They're actually talking to each other and laughing. But I don't mind that so much, because it's nice. It's good to see them interact."

The change is coming to all New Jersey schools by next fall, although some districts already have made the transition.

Statewide ban on cellphones in schools

What's happening? A state ban on internet-enabled devices during instructional times, or better, the entire school day, with a few exceptions. This includes

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.

smartphones, tablets, smartwatches and glasses, earbuds and wireless headphones, but not school-provided devices such as laptops. Rules vary depending on the grade level. Similar bans are in effect in many other districts.

"The teaching staff were really worried about how the kids were going to react to it and how much pushback we would get from parents," Kramer said. Kramer is a long-time high school instructional assistant and vice-president of her local education association. "I think we were successful because we let everyone know ahead of time this was what was going to happen."

Following legislation that former Governor Phil Murphy signed on January 8, districts now must have policies restricting the use of the devices. New Jersey Department of Education guidelines say the goal is "to promote student well-being, academic engagement and digital safety."

The process is pretty simple, Kramer says. If students have a device, they bring it to their homeroom, shut it off and put it in the pouch. After applying a magnetic lock, the teacher returns the pouch. At the end of the



Resources

day, students return to their homeroom, staff unlock the pouch and return the phone. It's like the magnetic security tag used in stores.

The benefits are clear

Student mental health issues are the biggest concern behind the move, with emphasis on social media's effects. Jonathan Haidt, a New York University social psychologist and author of the influential *The Anxious Generation*, argues that society needs to treat social media platforms as addictive and harmful for young people. He describes four foundational harms: social and sleep deprivation, attention fragmentation and addiction as phones become "experience blockers," especially blocking relationships.

In an interview, Haidt told "The New Yorker Radio Hour" about Australia's recent ban on those under 16 years of age using social media. Where phone-free school policies are done reasonably well, "the results are always spectacular," with laughter in the halls again and loud lunchrooms, he said. The best results apparently come from putting phones in special lockers for the day, followed by using locked pouches. Student backpacks are the least effective.

Educational staff benefit too. Preliminary results from a multi-year study found that almost all teachers surveyed said cellphone bans helped them manage their classrooms and build stronger connections with students. In the study, 85% of teachers said the ban improved their well-being. They felt less stressed and more supported. Almost as many reported their job is more rewarding.

"I would totally agree it's less stressful, because we don't have to stop the instructional process and ask someone to put a phone away, or even have an argument with a child who was unwilling to put their phone away," Kramer says.

Health and safety impact

What the new state law doesn't mention is the other serious harm from wireless devices.

They rely on radio frequency radiation (RFR), lower-energy non-ionizing radiation. Increasingly these days, it is transmitted by mobile phones, base stations, Wi-Fi enabled-routers and computers, security systems, fitness watches, baby monitors and wearable tech.

At Kramer's school, and many others, that leaves students still exposed to RFR from laptops using Wi-Fi and the routers behind it.

According to a 2024 report on the risks of non-ionizing RFR, author Tom Butler wrote, "The weight of scientific evidence consistently finds risks to human health. These risks are magnified where children are concerned." Children and young people are particularly susceptible to harm, given their growing bodies and brains.

"Today, we are with RFR from wireless devices where we were with asbestos and tobacco in the 1970s," the report's authors said. Citing a culture of industry, academic and regulatory delay, denial and collusion and unrealistic test



Environmental Health Trust



New Jersey Department of Education: Guidance for schools on student use of internet-enabled devices



Paul Ben Ishai and others (2024), Applying the precautionary principle to wireless technology: Policy dilemmas and systemic risks

protocols, they show current RFR thermal-only standards "are completely inadequate" to protect people and the environment from long-term harm.

The harm includes brain and salivary gland cancers, cognitive processing effects, sleep disturbance, depression, Alzheimer's disease, ADHD, lowered sperm count, immune dysfunction, heart damage and more.

The authors called for authorities to use the precautionary principle and take action to prevent harm without waiting for more evidence to reduce exposures. They point out that software and hardware modifications, especially around antennae, could reduce exposures.

Others offer tips including:

- Keep a distance between your body and the device when it is powered on.
- Use the speakerphone or wired headset for phones and wired connections for laptops.
- Ensure you have a good signal to avoid increased radiation from poor ones.
- Turn off wireless devices at night and use airplane mode when not in use.

What should health and safety committees do?

- Learn about RFR hazards and educate members, providing tips to reduce exposure.
- Investigate the use of devices using RFR in your school, arguing for a precautionary approach aimed at reducing exposure as much as possible and promoting the use of wired internet connections.
- Support members dealing with the new ban and evaluate its effects.



NJREA: An investment in your security

Union membership is one of the best investments a retiree can make, especially in the current political environment. As a member of NJREA, you have access to a variety of resources to get the most from your retirement, as well as to offer peace of mind knowing there are people working on your behalf to protect it.

Standing up for ourselves

In today's economic climate, there are some who feel that your hard-earned pension is an entitlement that should be eliminated. But NJREA members know that there is power in numbers.

Time and again NJREA members have stood together to protect our rights, the rights of active members and the rights of those just embarking on a career in public education.

NJREA keeps our legislators aware of who we are and how many we are. We need you to write letters, send emails, make phone calls and attend rallies to protect and enhance the benefits you earned serving New Jersey's students.

Benefits of membership

But there's more to NJREA than securing our rights in Trenton. As a retired school employee, membership in NJREA, NJEA and NEA-Retired enables you to continue your membership benefits and participation in:

- NEA Life, AD&D and Accident insurance.
- NEA/NJEA Auto & Home Insurance program.
- NJEA & NEA Travel services.
- NEA Customized Cash Rewards Credit Card.
- Buyer's Edge Discount Buying.
- NEA Retiree Health Program – Get help paying for costs not covered by Medicare.
- Medicare supplements and in-hospital plans.
- NEA Magazine service – Get two free: neamb.com/NJGet2.
- NEA Pet Insurance Program.
- NEA Dental and Vision Insurance Program.
- NEA Retirement Program – Free access to financial advisors.

You'll enjoy benefits you've had for years:

- 30% discount on legal fees through the NJEA attorney referral service.
- Discounts at Magic Kingdom, Universal Studios and other entertainment and attractions.
- NJEA and NEA publications.
- A special quarterly retirees' publication.
- A voice in association affairs.
- Discounts on eye exams, eyewear and hearing aids
- 24/7 access to free and confidential AID-NJEA Helpline.

Additionally, you can attend the NJREA Convention in Atlantic City, fall and spring NJREA luncheon meetings and special sessions for retirees at the NJEA and NEA conventions. County retiree associations also hold monthly social and informal meetings.

Lifetime membership for retirees available

The NJREA membership renewal form offers the option to become a lifetime NJREA member. If you are a recent retiree, you might want to consider lifetime membership and avoid the annual renewal process. Lifetime membership for retired members may be paid in five installments. Interested retirees may contact the NJEA Membership Division at 609-310-4546, Option 9, to set up a payment schedule.

Pre-retirement lifetime membership for active members

Current active professional and support staff who intend to retire in the near future could also consider joining NJREA as a pre-retired lifetime member. Lifetime dues would be calculated at the 2026-27 rate and then paid in 10 installments. Interested in this option? Contact the NJEA Membership Division at the number listed above to get started.

By joining NJREA, you are doing your part to protect yourself and your retired colleagues. NJREA urges you to be one of the many, instead of one standing alone.

NJREA scholarships help graduating seniors

Do you remember what you paid in college tuition for your freshman year? Would it surprise you to learn that even the lowest estimates for college tuition start at about \$16,000 for in-state students and \$27,000 for out-of-state students? Now multiply that by four.

The New Jersey Retirees' Education Association, as well as many of the county retired education associations, offer scholarships to soften the sticker shock of gaining a degree after high school.

NJREA scholarships

Annually, NJREA awards the Elizabeth A. Allen and Isabelle M. Hickman scholarships to a four-year college or university at a value of \$1,500. Both the Fred Aug Memorial Scholarship to a community college and the Walter P. Krichling, Jr. Scholarship to a vocational or career and technical program are awarded at the value of \$1,000. Typically, the scholarship committee reads 400-450 applications in March and contacts the award recipients and their guidance counselors.

Very often a county retired officer attends the high school's award ceremony and presents the scholarship. September's issue of the NJREA newsletter always features a profile of the scholarship recipients.

CREA scholarships

Seventeen county associations responded to a survey regarding their scholarship program. In general, they award between one and six scholarships with values ranging from \$500 to \$2,000 to students who will be attending a four-year college or university, a community college or technical school. Thanks to a bequest, the Morris County REA awards \$5,000 to a student majoring in biology. This award may be renewed for a second year.

Selection process

In general, the county associations have a committee which reads and recommends the recipients of their scholarships. Requirements may include grade point averages, a personal essay, recommendations from a guidance counselor and teacher, extracurricular activities and after school or summer work. A few counties only accept applications from public school students while others require the applicant to major in an educator, counselor or school nurse degree.

Funding the awards

Similar to NJREA's fundraising activity, the county associations collect donations through mailings or at luncheon meetings. Very often baskets of goodies, cakes,



The Bergen County Retired Educators Association is one of the many county retired education associations that award scholarships to high school students.

cookies or pies are sold at the luncheons and the proceeds benefit the scholarship fund. The Atlantic County REA teams up with the Atlantic County Council of Education Associations to donate money as well as serve on the scholarship selection committee. The Passaic County REA works with William Paterson University's education department and awards \$1,000 to two juniors and seniors majoring in education.

Recognizing the recipients

The most rewarding part of the selection process is contacting the recipients and their guidance counselors with the good news. A photo and brief statement about each recipient appears in the county association's and NJREA's newsletters. Recipients and their parents are invited to the county's spring luncheon. Often a retiree attends an award ceremony at the recipient's high school. In some cases, the recipients return to share their first-year college experience.

Not all of the county REAs offer scholarships but they do participate in other philanthropic programs. The Monmouth County REA gives four Generation to Generation grants to classroom educators to fund programs not paid for by a board of education.

Special thanks to the county REAs who contributed to this article: Atlantic, Bergen, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Essex, Gloucester, Hunterdon, Mercer, Monmouth, Morris, Passaic, Salem, Somerset, Sussex, Union and Warren.

Around the counties

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.

Burlington County REA

May 14: Luncheon meeting at Marco's at Indian Springs Country Club in Marlton. Reservation deadline is May 1, and the cost is \$25. To attend, contact Donna O'Malley at 609-268-0838.

Camden County REA

May 12: Spring luncheon meeting at Tavistock Country Club in Haddonfield. Contact Barbara Hasse with any questions at 856-627-3391 or behasse@comcast.net.

Cumberland County REA

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

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.

June 3: Spring luncheon meeting at San Carlo Restaurant in Lyndhurst. Reservation deadline is May 20. The cost is \$60. 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 Rizzello at 609-577-6158.

Middlesex County REA

June 11: Scholarship luncheon meeting at the Grand Marquis in Old Bridge. There will be up to six New Jersey public high school senior scholarship recipients. Reservation deadline is June 1. The cost is \$46. To attend, contact Susan Jaysnovitch at 732-925-1606.

Monmouth County REA

June 9: Summer luncheon meeting at the Battleground Country Club in Manalapan. The new officers will be installed. The philanthropic awards will be presented. Reservation deadline is June 1. The cost is \$45. To attend, contact Debbie Adamchak at 848-459-2672.

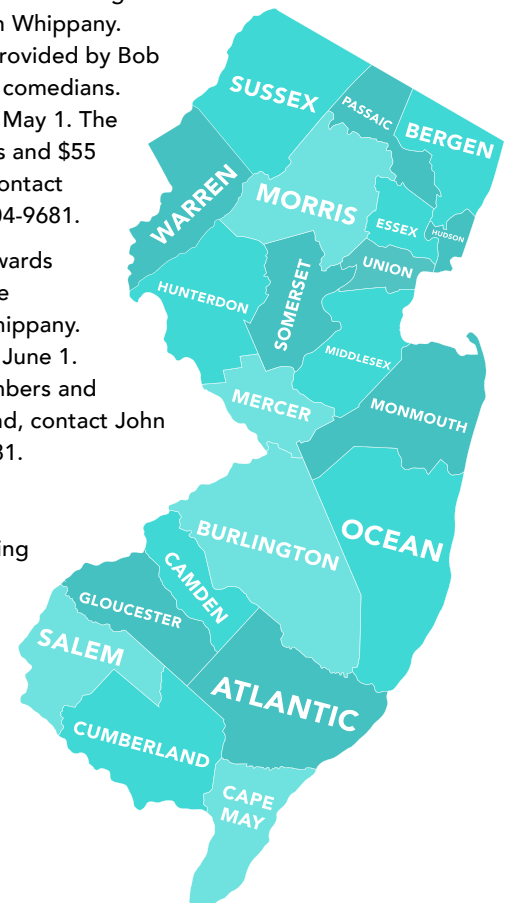
Morris County REA

May 12: 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. The cost is \$35 for members and \$55 for guests. To attend, contact John Williams at 609-504-9681.

June 10: Scholarship awards luncheon meeting at the Birchwood Manor in Whippany. Reservation deadline is June 1. 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.



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.

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

June 3: Luncheon meeting at the Hawk Pointe Golf Club in Washington. The entertainment is TBA. Reservation deadline is May 26, and the cost is \$33. To attend, contact Deb Polhemus at 908-328-8817 or register at warrencountyrea.org/meetings.



Planning a night out at the movies? Going to see the "Devil Wears Prada 2"?

Get up to 30% off your movie tickets through the NEA Discount Ticket Program. Visit neamb.com/start to purchase your tickets.



New NJCTL
Master's Program in Special Education

We are thrilled to announce that NJCTL has been approved to offer a Master of Science in Special Education degree!

Master of Science in Special Education (31 credits)
 Includes TOSD Endorsement for NJ Teachers

- 100% online, asynchronous, and self-paced.
- Full Tuition: \$7440 (\$5952 for NJEA Members)
- No additional fees or textbooks.

Enroll now. Start immediately.

For NJ teachers who only want a TOSD Endorsement that option is still available.

TOSD Endorsement only (24 credits)
 \$5760 (\$4608 for NJEA Members)

Your Weight. Your Way. Your Time.

You've spent your career putting others first. Now it's time to put *yourself* first.



Ana
Lost 56 lbs*
Gastric Sleeve

Gabrielle
Lost 78 lbs*
Revision Surgery

OUR SOLUTIONS

Gastric Sleeve
Medical Weight Loss

Gastric Bypass
Revision Surgery

Nutrition Counseling
Adjustable Gastric Balloon

SURGICAL WEIGHT LOSS

Long-term results, backed by clinical data

Bariatric surgery is one of the most effective long-term solution for obesity. Studies show 40–80% of excess body weight loss with improvements in type 2 diabetes, sleep apnea, and high blood pressure¹. Find out if gastric sleeve or gastric bypass with NJBC is right for you.

- Comprehensive Pre-Operative Care
- Long-Term Post-Operative Support
- Nutrition Counseling & Meal Planning
- Muscle Preservation Support While You Lose Weight

MEDICAL WEIGHT LOSS

A path forward with GLP-1s

NJBC doctors offer a comprehensive medical weight loss approach combining GLP-1 medications with nutrition and muscle preservation support. In clinical studies, patients lost an average of 15% of their total body weight with GLP-1 medications.²

- Physician-Led GLP-1 Management
- Nutrition Counseling & Meal Planning
- Muscle Preservation Classes While You Lose Weight



Telehealth Appointments Available

NJBariatricCenter.com

609-630-7060

Ready to start? Scan to schedule an appointment.

6 LOCATIONS ACROSS NEW JERSEY

- Springfield
- Hoboken
- East Brunswick
- Sparta
- Totowa
- Bridgewater

FREE. ON DEMAND.

Watch Our Weight Loss Surgery Webinar

Hear directly from our board certified surgeons. Watch anytime, at your own pace.



Scan To Watch

¹According to studies, bariatric surgery results in an average weight loss of 40-80 % of excess body weight depending on the procedure. *Results depend on a variety of factors, including but not limited to adherence to post-operative guidelines.
²Wilding JPH, et al. Once-Weekly Semaglutide in Adults with Overweight or Obesity. N Engl J Med. 2021;384:989–1002. Results based on semaglutide 2.4mg. Individual results may vary.



ONE VOICE FOR MANY

By Antonio Hernandez

As tensions across the United States continue to grow around immigration enforcement and reports of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) activity in communities, students at colleges and universities have begun organizing demonstrations and discussions on their campuses.

One student at Montclair State University, Gabriel Vazquez, decided to take action by organizing an ICE walkout in March to raise awareness and show support for immigrant communities.

Vazquez, a freshman at Montclair State University, is a Mexican American student studying to become an educator while working two part-time jobs. After noticing several ICE protests taking place across the United States, he felt that students at his university should also have an opportunity to speak out.

Motivated in part by an ICE walkout that took place at Bloomfield High School, Vazquez sought guidance from New Jersey Aspiring Educator President-elect and Montclair student Abigail Rodriguez. Rodriguez gave

suggestions on how to organize the event and navigate campus procedures. With her support, he contacted university administrators, campus clubs and student organizations to help coordinate the event.

Seeing members of his own community affected by immigration enforcement further motivated him to take action. Vazquez reached out to outside organizations, including Make the Road New Jersey and LASSO, two organizations that advocate for immigrant rights, to participate in the event.

With assistance from campus groups and coordination with campus security, the walkout provided students with a space to express their concerns and stand in solidarity with immigrant communities.

Vazquez hopes the event will inspire students at other colleges and universities to organize similar actions. For him, the walkout is about showing that students should not feel afraid to attend school and that their community stands with them during challenging times.



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

What would you do if your paycheck suddenly stopped?

MAY IS DISABILITY INSURANCE AWARENESS MONTH.

Take a few moments to check in on your income protection plan. The NJEA-endorsed Income Protection+ Program, with coverage issued by **The Prudential Insurance Company of America**, can help.



Check out the Education Hub
Explore videos, resource articles,
Plan details, and more.
→ www.prudential.com/NJEA

Applying is quick & easy! Visit enroll.njea.org

Questions?

Call your EIS account executive at 800-727-3414, Option 3



Disability, Hospital Indemnity,
and Critical Illness Insurance Plans



Group Insurance coverages are issued by The Prudential Insurance Company of America, a Prudential Financial company, Newark, NJ.

Educators Insurance Services, Inc. is not affiliated with Prudential.

© 2026 Prudential Financial, Inc. and its related entities. Prudential, the Prudential logo, and the Rock symbol are service marks of Prudential Financial, Inc. and its related entities, registered in many jurisdictions worldwide.

1073398-00005-00

NIE9_AD_GI20_01



Teacher evaluations miss the mark in CTE classrooms

By Anthony DiAntonio

Doug Birdsall has taught welding for more than 20 years. His students can fabricate clean T-joints, spot flaws instantly and correct their own mistakes without waiting to be told. Walk into his shop, and you'll see focused silence, students working independently and an instructor moving deliberately from station to station, offering feedback through gesture and demonstration.

During an observation, that silence becomes a liability.

A formal evaluation may note a lack of whole-class discussion, minimal questioning, limited verbal feedback and be marked as teacher-directed per the commissioner-approved rubric. The largely nonverbal one-on-one coaching goes unnoticed. Birdsall receives a lower score and is advised to observe a math class.

Birdsall's story is about a system that continues to mistake the unfamiliar for ineffective instruction in Career and Technical Education (CTE) classrooms.

One rubric, many realities

After the Every Student Succeeds Act shifted responsibility to the states, New Jersey leaned into tightening standardization at the district level. The TEACHNJ Act required districts to adopt commissioner-approved evaluation instruments, linking evaluation results directly to tenure, employment decisions and corrective action plans. The regulations at N.J.A.C. 6A:10, commonly known as AchieveNJ, reinforced this, requiring districts to apply the same policies and procedures to all teachers, regardless of discipline.

Intended uniformity became ignorant of reality. In most county technical schools, discussion-based academics and mastery-based CTE programs operate as distinct worlds under the same roof.

Yet the most commonly used evaluation frameworks in New Jersey prioritize verbal discourse, questioning techniques and visible student discussion as engagement. In a welding bay, those measures miss the point.

Anthony DiAntonio is an English teacher at the Cumberland County Technical Education Center and an adjunct professor and doctoral student in Educational Leadership at Rowan University. He may be reached at adiantonio@cctecnj.org.

Policy and context

Districts are not unaware of this problem. The more successful ones have tried to remedy it. Job descriptions are referenced in the contract's evaluation policy. In the best case, there's a conversion document that translates academic standards into CTE settings.

The job descriptions are typically the only things that protect the CTE teacher. However, where potential consequences are decided, that policy language isn't there. When summative ratings are determined, corrective action plans can be triggered by the rarely questioned, almost never challenged rubric scores.

As a result, skilled trade educators feel misjudged. Evaluators are constrained. The feedback is generic and evaluation becomes a compliance ritual. CTE instructors begin to believe the system does not value their work. They stop trusting feedback and start protecting their programs. Not out of resistance, but out of self-preservation.

Teacher evaluation is about growth, reflection and professional development. Instead, for many CTE educators, it has become a "gotcha" moment, a process to be quietly resented.

For evaluation to work across disciplines, policy must reflect the reality of different practices. When professional practice is evaluated against the job a teacher is hired to perform, evaluators can begin noting the differences that make trade education unique. Clear policy language gives evaluators both the permission and the obligation to score differently.

What effectiveness looks like

Effective teaching should be defined by those most impacted, not defined for them. Districts can fund instructor roundtables that bring together CTE and academic teachers with evaluators to define observable effectiveness in each context with the intention of creating a conversion guide tied to specific rubric domains.

New Jersey talks often about workforce readiness, skills gaps and the dignity of skilled labor. Our technical high schools are a point of pride. But evaluation systems send a different message: that "real" teaching only counts when it looks academic. When evaluation reflects the realities of practice, trust and growth follow, benefiting students most.

Public education in New Jersey is facing a defining moment

By Joe Toma

Across our state, educators continue to do extraordinary work under increasingly difficult conditions. Classrooms are more complex. Student needs are greater than ever. And yet the people who make public education possible, educators, counselors, paraprofessionals, nurses, bus drivers, custodians and support staff, are being squeezed by rising health care costs, stagnant resources and a policy environment that too often asks schools to solve every societal problem.

Despite those pressures, one thing remains clear: the strength of public education comes from the strength of our educators. That is why the New Jersey Education Association exists. It is a member-led, justice-centered labor union dedicated to protecting educators' rights, dignity and working conditions while promoting high-quality public education for every student.

Listening to educators

When NJEA members were surveyed about the future of the profession, their message was consistent. Educators value union representation for the job protection, legal protection and economic security it provides. According to the survey results, the issues that matter most to members are fully funding pensions, protecting health care benefits, increasing salaries, fully funding public schools and protecting collective bargaining rights. These are not abstract policy debates. They are the foundations that allow educators to remain in the profession and serve students. Educators are not asking for special treatment. They are asking for stability, respect and the ability to do their jobs without constant uncertainty.

The health care crisis

The most urgent issue facing educators is the skyrocketing cost of health care. Districts and educators are grappling with unprecedented premium increases driven by systemic forces: rising provider charges, insurance carrier costs, increased utilization, expensive specialty medications and lack of transparency. A family plan in

the School Employees' Health Benefits Program can now exceed \$75,000 per year. With the framework under Chapter 44 expiring in 2027, New Jersey must decide how educator health care functions going forward. Educators deserve a system that is transparent, sustainable and affordable, not one that shifts costs onto the professionals keeping schools running.

Investing in public education

Health care is one part of a larger picture. NJEA's priorities outline a broader vision: fully funding the state's school funding formula, making full pension payments, investing in educator recruitment and retention, strengthening the educator pipeline and supporting student mental health and school climate. These investments are not optional. New Jersey's public schools consistently rank among the best in the nation, and maintaining excellence requires sustained commitment from policymakers and communities.

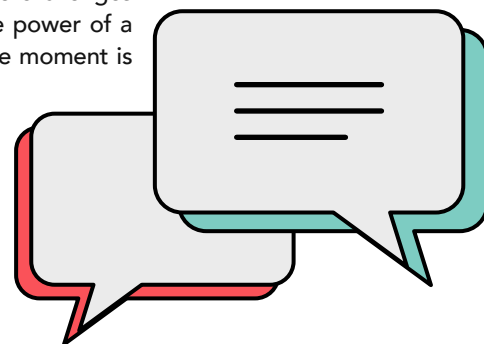
The power of a united profession

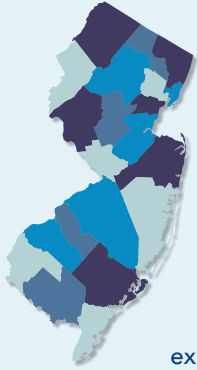
Under NJEA President Steve Beatty, the union has strengthened transparency, deepened communication with members and fought tirelessly for health care affordability, pension security, fair contracts and strong public schools. The future of public education is tied to the broader labor movement. When workers stand together across unions and coalitions, they have the power to shape the future.

The strength of NJEA lies in its members. Nearly 90% are willing to engage in union activities by attending meetings, communicating with elected officials, advocating and sharing the realities of classroom life with their communities.

New Jersey's public schools did not become a national model by accident. It happened because educators organized, advocated and refused to accept less than what students deserve. The challenges are real. But so is the power of a united profession. The moment is now. And together we will meet it.

Joe Toma is the president of the Piscataway Education Association and an NJEA UniServ consultant. He can be reached at jtoma@njea.org.





SUSSEX TO CAPE MAY

Workshops and conferences

SHOWCASE

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

IMPACT SUMMIT: ILLUMINATING TIER 1 IN THE AGE OF AI DELSEA REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT AUG. 4-6 8 A.M.-3:15 P.M.

This summit is dedicated to "Illuminating Tier1," strengthening the core instruction that prevents learning gaps before they widen. Sessions will be focused on moving beyond theory and offering practical "Monday Morning" strategies and tools to improve student outcomes in literacy, mathematics and digital learning environments. Participants will engage in guided exploration of instructional clarity, formative assessment, academic discourse and responsible AI integration.

Registration ends July 31.

The options include:

Single Day: \$100

Two-Day: \$200

Three-Day: \$250



For more information and to register:

2026 NJTESOL/NJBE SPRING CONFERENCE

UNLOCK YOUR POTENTIAL: BE MULTILINGUAL
Intersectionality: Shaping Experiences and Creating Opportunities

The 2026 conference of the New Jersey Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages/New Jersey 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.

The Video Library Conference is a select collection of library 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.

Registration and more information

Registration includes one free year of membership.

Visit 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.

MORE TO LEARN

EDUCATORS THRIVING WORKSHOPS

May 16

The New Jersey Labor Management Collaboration has partnered with Educators Thriving, an organization founded on the belief that every educator can and should experience well-being to reach their full professional potential. They work with schools, districts, unions and regional agencies to empower individuals and transform systems.

Educators interested in a culture shift within their school district can register for upcoming Educators Thriving workshops.



THE AMERICAN LABOR MUSEUM/ BOTTO HOUSE NATIONAL LANDMARK

May 2-23

The American Labor Museum/Botto House National Landmark located in Haledon is offering free labor arts classes on Saturdays from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. for students in Grades 3-5. Pre-registration is recommended. Email labormuseum@gmail.com or visit American-labor-museum.org.

May 2: Girls Who Build by Marisa L. Richards

May 9: My Family Tree

May 16: Voices from the Fields: Children of Migrant Farmworkers

May 23: The Way We Lived and Worked

NEW JERSEY AMISTAD COMMISSION

July 28-30

The New Jersey Amistad Commission invites all New Jersey educators to the 2026 Amistad Summer Institute taking place July 28-30 at Kean University in Union. It's an exciting professional development opportunity for educators to learn to implement high-quality curriculum that accurately reflects the history, experiences and profound contributions of Africans and African Americans to the



United States. This work remains central to ensuring that every student receives a comprehensive and truthful understanding of our nation's story. Space is limited. Register by May 15.

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 a unique Planning Guide to support effective science instruction and assessment and access a 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. For more information, contact Donna Frasca-Brady at donna.frasca-brady@raritanval.edu or 908-526-1200, ext. 8942.

MONARCH TEACHER NETWORK

June 27

South Jersey Firefly Festival

The South Jersey Firefly Festival is a free, family friendly community event celebrating the magic of fireflies. Held at the Tall Pines Nature Preserve in Sewell from 8-10 p.m., participants will explore the world of fireflies, learning about their life cycle and discovering how to protect and attract them while enjoying educational stations along a half-mile self-guided trail. Along the walk, participants will see firefly species lighting up the night. Attendees leave with a deeper understanding of these insects, hands-on strategies to support their populations and the shared joy of a magical summer night with family and community.

Teaching and Learning with Monarch Butterflies

In addition, the Monarch Teacher Network is offering a two-day Teaching and Learning with Monarch Butterflies workshop this summer. The workshop combines hands-on classroom activities with field experiences. Educators who attend gain the skills and knowledge needed to raise monarchs and integrate them into their classroom activities. Participants will receive a teaching guide filled with standards-based lesson plans, a life cycle poster and rearing cages for caterpillars and adult monarchs.

Learn more about these events at MonarchTeacherNetwork.org.



From escalation to support: Using a justice and equity lens to create safer school environments

By Karin Abercrombie and Gayle Nelson

School districts emphasize the necessity of safety for students and staff to community stakeholders. When you hear school safety, what comes to mind? Is it safe school transportation, or is it students not showing aggression to their classmates and school staff? Who is accountable? Is it all of us? How can we all collaborate to define what school safety looks like? Through a social justice and equity lens, how can we ensure everyone feels safe enough to do their jobs? What happens when staff share concerns based on student physical aggression towards peers and staff? Is that student held accountable? Is there justice for those who were negatively impacted or harmed?

As we engage in school safety discourse, the increase in aggression toward staff and students is an issue that warrants attention and proactive intervention. This escalation, manifesting as verbal harassment, physical assaults or altercations and a general atmosphere of unease among educators, reflects deeper societal problems and affects our school community. While the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing tensions, this challenge cannot be solely attributed to its aftermath. The consequences of stress and anxiety among school stakeholders are a growing epidemic that can adversely foster a cycle of negativity that detracts from educational experiences. It is essential to recognize that school safety affects educators across grade levels without exception.

To tackle these challenges, schools must conceptualize a safety policy as a multifaceted concern that begins with investments in new technologies and/or the formation of an advisory committee, which must be supplemented with professional development and implementation of robust policies that reflect the offense with supportive, readable, and mutually agreed-upon language. Policy should follow and support state statutes in place for guidance and be

Karin Abercrombie is a kindergarten teacher in the Trenton Public School District. She can be reached at kabercrombie1025@gmail.com.

Dr. Gayle Nelson is a SPED Science teacher in Franklin Township, Somerset County. She can be reached at gaylenelson122@gmail.com.



Dr. Gayle Nelson



Karin Abercrombie

enforced objectively. The policy should be morally and ethically responsible. Training of staff and administrators must be a joint partnership with ongoing open dialogue and proper documentation procedures, with an emphasis on the needs of students and staff. Union negotiations should be prioritized during policy creation, ensuring that staff and students can thrive in safe learning spaces.

This approach emphasizes authentic accountability, prioritizing a positive and supportive climate within our schools, one that values the input and welfare of every stakeholder, which will alleviate the over-criminalization in schools and biases against marginalized groups. State statutes underscore our obligations in this context, framing our duty as educators to cultivate safe and nurturing environments. The well-being of students and staff hinges on this commitment.

We can reduce incidents of hostility and harm that jeopardize our educational communities and create safer school environments statewide by examining school safety through the lens of social justice and equity. This strategy addresses the symptoms of aggression and acknowledges the underlying factors contributing to a culture of fear and conflict. In pursuing this objective, we can establish healing and hope within our community, which promotes effective educational experiences for school community stakeholders.



Ocean County Vocational Technical students bring design to life

By Nicole Merwin

The Design and Visual Communications program at Ocean County Vocational Technical School (OCVTS) recently celebrated the successful completion of its first Nonprofit Partnership Program, a collaborative initiative with Design 446 that connected students with more than 20 community nonprofit organizations. The pilot program provided OCVTS students with an opportunity to apply their classroom learning in real-world settings while supporting organizations dedicated to strengthening the local community.

Throughout the marking period, students in the OCVTS Design and Visual Communications program worked directly with nonprofit leaders to better understand their missions, branding needs and outreach goals. Through these conversations, students developed customized creative solutions including visual assets, icons and branding concepts that organizations can use to enhance their communications and expand their reach.

Career and Technical Education meets community needs

For students, the experience offered far more than a traditional classroom assignment. By collaborating with real clients and addressing authentic design challenges, students gained valuable professional experience while building portfolio-ready work. The collaboration also strengthened students' communication, problem-solving and project management skills, key competencies for careers in graphic design, marketing and visual communications.

This partnership gave our students something invaluable, the opportunity to work with real clients serving real community needs. They weren't just completing assignments for a grade. They were creating solutions with purpose. The confidence and professionalism they developed through this experience will stay with them long after the semester ends.

The program also demonstrated the impact student creativity can have in supporting nonprofit missions. Several participating organizations have already begun implementing the creative assets developed by the students, helping improve their outreach and visibility across the community.

Leaders from nonprofit partners shared enthusiastic feedback about the program and the students' work.

Nicole Merwin is a design and visual communications multimedia instructor at the Brick Center, Ocean County Vocational Technical School. She can be reached at nmerwin@ocvts.org.



Students at Ocean County Vocational Technical School worked with more than 20 community nonprofit organizations and Design 446 to apply their classroom learning in a real-world setting.

Andrea Amante, marketing and membership director at the Ocean County YMCA, described the collaboration as a rewarding, full-circle experience, noting that the students' designs successfully captured the spirit and mission of the "Y."

Other nonprofit partners expressed similar excitement. Representatives from Lunch Break, Shore House and 21 Plus praised the students' creativity and dedication, with several organizations already planning to incorporate the designs into their marketing and outreach efforts.

Real clients, real challenges, real design experience

The program was initiated by Ann Marie Baker, vice president of Design 446, a marketing and advertising agency in Manasquan. Key contributions were made by Design 446 staff Nick Nagle and Allison Brown. The initiative was designed to build a meaningful bridge between education and professional practice while strengthening community partnerships.

With enthusiasm from nonprofit partners, instructors and students, OCVTS and Design 446 are already exploring opportunities to expand the partnership in future marking periods. Early feedback from post-program evaluations shows overwhelming support for continuing the initiative, with students reporting increased confidence in their career readiness and nonprofits recognizing immediate value in the creative assets produced.

For OCVTS, the program highlights the power of career and technical education to connect learning with purpose. By bringing together students, educators and community organizations, the partnership demonstrates how creativity and collaboration can create lasting impact, both for students preparing for their future careers and for the organizations working every day to serve their communities.

NJEA Delegate Assembly

Saturday, Nov. 8, 2025

The NJEA Delegate Assembly met at the Atlantic City Convention Center, Atlantic City, N.J. on Nov. 8, 2025, at 9 a.m.

The meeting was called to order by President Steve Beatty.

The roll call and the seating of delegates was taken by Vice President Petal Robertson for Secretary-Treasurer Tina Dare, who was away at a national conference. There were 114 members present, and a quorum was met. Alternates were seated as follows: Long for Campisi, (Camden); Pizzuta for Randazzo (Gloucester); Ballard for Montanti (Monmouth); Fandino-Diaz for Leitzel (Morris); and Elliott for Durkin (Warren).

Absent without alternates were the following: Houck (Atlantic); Murrell (Bergen); Mendelson (Bergen); Warren (Bergen); Paprota (Middlesex); Tighe (Salem); and Bakker (Sussex).

Nicky Neeraj Badlani, Somerset County, gave the Inspirational Message and along with President Beatty, led the delegation in the Flag Salute.

President's report

Beatty thanked everyone for their hard work in making the NJEA Convention a success.

Beatty tied the NJEA Convention momentum to NJEA's election victories, crediting members' activism for helping to elect Governor-elect Mikie Sherrill.

Beatty highlighted the following:

- Strategic Plan: Vision, Mission, and Goals
- 2025 election results
- Leadership training and development
- LEE Group update (New Jersey Leadership for Educational Excellence)
- NJ Center for Teaching and Learning
- NJEA – Look back, plan forward
- Tier 1 For Everyone
- NJEA Labor Table Taskforce
- Political landscape update – state and national
- Health benefits update
- Organizing for Education (O4Ed)
- NJ DOE and State BOE Update – assessments
- NEA update

Vice president's report

Vice President Robertson congratulated the Hudson County Community College Professional Association for winning the Jim George Collective Bargaining award.

- Passage of Bill A1675
- Tier 1 for Everyone
- Property and Personnel
- Higher education – representation issues
- Aspiring educators
- No Hunger November

Secretary-treasurer's report

In the absence of Secretary-Treasurer Dare, Robertson delivered the NJEA fiscal report.

Additionally, Robertson advised that the written report of Secretary-Treasurer Dare, which was sent out earlier, was presented as written.

Executive director's report

Executive Director Kevin Kelleher stated that his report was shared via email prior to the meeting. Kelleher thanked staff for a seamless

and successful convention. He spoke to and honored retiring staff member Patrick Rumaker, editor of the NJEA Review. He also noted that the NJEA would prepare policy materials to aid Governor-elect Mikie Sherrill to aid in the transition, helping to continue the strong collaborative approach used with Gov. Phil Murphy.

Deputy Executive Director Denise Policastro gave a Tier 1 for Everyone status update and reported that the campaign had achieved major statewide success and 106,000 petition signatures were obtained as of Oct. 31, 2025. She announced that on Dec. 4, 2025, a Day of Action would be held to deliver the Tier 1 for Everyone petitions to the Legislature.

Nondelegate speakers

Tyeisha Jefferies (Camden County) urged the Delegate Assembly to handle the proposed Affinity Group policy with fairness and equity, asking that it be sent back to committee for additional work and consistency.

Marpessa Bell (Essex County) thanked NJEA for its investment in election efforts and praised the strong convention experience. Additionally, she emphasized the importance of equity and fairness in the proposed Affinity Group policy and urged the Delegate Assembly to refer it back to committee to ensure it fully aligns with NJEA's values.

Shereen Ducasse (Gloucester County) urged the DA to refine the Affinity Group policy by improving clarity and transparency and asked that it be sent back to committee.

Election of Active Supportive At-Large member for Executive Committee

President Beatty called for nominations. Janelle Mungro (Camden County) nominated Rosemarie Casey (Camden County); Angela Cordova (Morris County) nominated Mark Eckert (Union County); and Ann-Margaret Shannon (Union County), nominated Keith Coston Jr. (Essex County).

Candidates were given up to two minutes to address the delegates. Jeannie Long (Camden County) spoke on behalf of Casey who was not present, followed by Coston and Eckert. A balloted election was conducted. Keith Coston Jr. was declared the winner.

Election of Active Supportive At-Large Alternate member for Executive Committee

Nominations were made for the position by Scott Elliott (Warren County) who nominated Mark Eckert (Morris County). There were no other nominations. President Beatty declared Eckert elected by acclamation.

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

Five members were elected to the Hearing Committee on Censure, Suspension, Expulsion, and Reinstatement of Members. One seat was designated for an active professional non-classroom member as constitutionally provided. Angela DeLuccia (Sussex County). There were no other nominations. President Beatty declared DeLuccia elected by acclamation.

Nominations were made for the four seats on the committee by Marquisha Reynolds (Hudson County) who nominated John Senft (Camden County), Karen Hobson (Ocean County) who nominated Ronald Donnerstag (Ocean County), Christine Candarella (Essex County) who nominated Sharon Ortiz (Essex County), Nicole Del Popolo (Middlesex County) who nominated Jarrett Lampkin, Barbara Rheault (Atlantic County) who nominated Alice Carcilli (Atlantic County), and Adam Anderson (Hudson County) who nominated Gene Woods (Hudson County).

Candidates were given up to two minutes to address the delegates. A balloted election was conducted. Donnerstag, Lampkin, Ortiz and Senft were elected.

Reports of committees without recommendations

Elections Committee

The Elections Committee report without recommendations was presented by Joe Toma, Middlesex County, chair of the Elections Committee, who presented the 2026 elections calendar, highlighting upcoming important dates, such as Jan. 22, 2026 (mandatory virtual meeting) for review of rules, procedures, and membership numbers, as well as Feb. 24, 2026 (deadline for county and unit nominating committees to convene and submit Report #1).

Reports of committees with recommendations

Budget Committee

Melba Moore-Suggs, Gloucester County, presented the report of the Budget Committee, and as a member of the Delegate Assembly and the Budget Committee moved the following recommendation:

RULE RECOMMENDATION: that NJEA transfer \$260,000 from cost center 0470 Special Activities into cost center 0520 Computer Center to fund Tableau implementation software license and support the transformative work it enables.

The recommendation was adopted unanimously.

Executive Committee – Affinity Group Task Force

Christine Sampson-Clark, Mercer County, presented the report from the Executive Committee, and Daniel Siegel, Mercer County, moved the following recommendations in block:

RULE RECOMMENDATION NO. 1: that NJEA establish a policy creating the NJEA affinity group application, approval, and funding process.

- a. The NJEA Executive Committee, as the governance body that is tasked with executing the policies approved by the Delegate Assembly, shall review affinity group applications. The mission of all affinity groups must support and align with NJEA's vision, mission, and strategic goals and plan. Affinity group applications must be submitted to the NJEA Executive Committee prior to their annual January meeting. Approval of affinity group applications by the Executive Committee will require a two-thirds majority vote. If an affinity group is not approved or non-renewed, the Executive Committee minutes shall reflect the rationale. If approved, affinity groups shall apply to the NJEA Executive Committee for renewal every three years. To support member collectives seeking to become an affinity group, the NJEA Executive Director shall assign a provisional staff contact to support with the application process. On a yearly basis, the assigned staff contact for approved affinity groups shall submit, in conjunction with a report that illustrates the alignment between the work of the affinity group and NJEA's vision, mission, and strategic goals and plan, a budget to their division director for consideration by the NJEA Budget Committee at the annual retreat in April to accept, modify, or reject.

RULE RECOMMENDATION NO. 2: that NJEA create an application and renewal process for affinity groups to submit a proposal for approval by the Executive Committee. The application shall include the following:

- a. Name or title of the affinity group.
- b. Name of the member(s) who will serve as the point of contact for the affinity group.
- c. Name of the assigned staff contact (provisional for first-time applicants) following consultation with the Executive Director.
- d. A copy of the group's mission statement and written rationale of how it aligns to NJEA's vision, mission, strategic goals and plan.
- e. A copy of the group's community agreements, including the utilization of Robert's Rules for parliamentary procedure should the affinity group conduct official business.
- f. A current roster of active NJEA members in good standing, who identify as members of the affinity group at the time the application is submitted.
 - a. This does not limit the affinity group's ability to recruit additional active NJEA members in good standing.
 - b. Affinity group members must be located in all four zones across the state.
 - c. If the affinity group contains members from fewer than four Zones, then that applicant will be referred to the Regional Zone Directors for organizing support where needed.

RULE RECOMMENDATION NO. 3: that NJEA adopt the following affinity group guidelines to support the success of affinity groups:

- a. Affinity groups shall not collect dues from members or fundraise in support of their budget.
- b. NJEA shall list all approved affinity groups on the NJEA website.
- c. All work of the affinity group must support and align with NJEA's vision, mission, and strategic goals and plan.
- d. Affinity groups shall be open to all members.
- e. Affinity group members must abide by the NJEA's governing documents and the affinity group's mission and community agreements.

After debate, Maryam Sarhan, Atlantic County made a motion to refer the report back to the committee. Brenda Brathwaite, NEA Director, Atlantic County, seconded the motion. The motion was adopted, and the report was referred back to the committee.

New Business

None

For the good of the order

Dr. Tiffanie ThrBak, Cumberland County, asked NJEA to reestablish the Amistad Task Force and support an educational member trip to Ghana, similar to the Holocaust Commission's annual trip.

Janelle Mungro, Camden County, requested follow-up regarding a committee study she submitted on March 29, 2025.

Kerri Lee Farrell, Morris County, presented two checks, each for \$5,000 one to the NJEA Disaster Relief Fund and one to the Paul Dimitriadis fund on behalf of Morris County members.

Lakhia Carter-Blocker, Union County, asked about missing Delegate Assembly minutes from the May and September 2025 meetings and requested an update on their status.

Adjournment

Peter Helff, Higher Education, moved to adjourn. The motion was duly seconded, and the meeting was adjourned at 11:30 a.m.



VISIONS L VES EDUCATORS

Visions loves educators and all they do for our kids and our communities. We're proud to support your personal finance and professional teaching with **exclusive programs and resources.**



Committed to Our New Jersey Communities

Visions has partnered with the NJEA and committed \$1 million to support their members and mission in New Jersey Public Schools.

VISIONS
FEDERAL CREDIT UNION

Visit
visionsloveseducators.com
to learn more



LMC peer coaching: the evolution of leadership

By Kimberly Crane

How has LMC peer coaching changed you as a leader?

Laura Zagorski is the principal of School 17 in Clifton Public Schools

Participating as an LMC peer coach has helped elementary school principal Laura Zagorski structure collaboration strategies that have strengthened her leadership practice. A key part of that structure is examining conflict and communication more intentionally.

Through the LMC peer coaching process, leaders reflect on how they personally approach conflict and learn to listen more deeply. "LMC peer coaching has helped my approach to listening and developing solutions with the group," Zagorski said.

Rather than viewing challenges as barriers, she sees them as opportunities for improvement. "Peer coaching has helped me move away from the idea that because I'm the leader, I must have to have all the answers," she said. The process has encouraged her to focus intensely on creating space for others to contribute. "LMC peer coaching has helped me create conditions for others to provide sustained input."

Anissa Strong is the Rahway Education Association executive board member for Madison School in Rahway Public Schools

Serving as an LMC peer coach has reshaped how Anissa Strong approaches leadership. Peer coaching has grounded her work in reflection, collaboration and intentional facilitation. "Peer coaching introduced me to new strategies," she said. Strong has transformed how she facilitates meetings and engages colleagues through tools such as four-fold practice and other practices.

Strong's leadership vision emphasizes shared dialogue and collaborative problem-solving. She credits LMC peer

coaching with boosting opportunities to build relationships with colleagues. "Sometimes educators feel isolated in our classrooms even though we may be in the same building," Strong said. "We are most unified, supported and effective when we solve problems as a team."

For Strong, solving problems begins with personal growth. "The process has to start with me," she said. "I continuously practice self-reflection." As her leadership evolves, she hopes the teams she leads will evolve with her, building a culture rooted in reflection and collaboration.



Peer coaching has helped me move away from the idea that because I'm the leader, I must have to have all the answers.

Anjanette Highsmith is the program supervisor for Math and Science in Rahway Public Schools

LMC peer coaching has prompted Anjanette Highsmith to rethink leadership norms. While collaboration is often discussed in leadership, Highsmith said the coaching experience has helped her understand its deeper meaning in practice.

"As leaders, we know it's important to collaborate, but at times the structures to support collaborative methods haven't been built yet," she explained. Through peer coaching, she has learned to view challenges as opportunities for growth. "Sometimes things are not going to be okay. Sometimes there are going to be conflicts and there are going to be issues, but it doesn't mean that it's a disaster. You can't grow from that," she said.

Highsmith also emphasized that the process has reinforced the idea that leadership challenges are rarely final or insurmountable. "There is no dead end," she said. "If you get caught in what we call the reaction loop, you can get out of that loop." Seeing how other districts implement collaborative strategies has further strengthened her confidence in the model. "Talking to LMC practitioners from other districts helps you to see that LMC practices do work," she said, noting that meaningful collaboration requires patience, commitment and time.

Kimberly Crane is an NJEA Communications Consultant and former president of the Highland Park Education Association. She can be reached at 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.



2026 New Jersey K-12 Educator Virtual Job Fairs

All Current and Aspiring New Jersey Educators are Welcome.

May 21, 2026 • 4:30 - 7PM ET



Register Today @ virtualcareerfairs.njschooljobs.com

Presented by



WE HELP NJEA MEMBERS SAVE BIG ON MAJOR PURCHASES

www.BuyersEdgeInc.com

Username: **3386** Password: **NJEA**

NJEA SPONSORED MEMBER BENEFIT

SAVINGS ON MANY MAJOR PURCHASES!

Appliances - TV'S	800-377-3700	Mortgage Financing	800-971-7721
Cars - New & Used	800-543-8381	Moving & Storage	800-356-7771
Credit Counseling	(see website)	Pet Insurance	(see website)
Furniture-Mattresses	800-631-0286	Real Estate-Buy/Sell	(see website)
Home Security Sys.	888 995-2661	Solar Electricity	800-558-1920
Jewelry-Diamonds	800-635-9136	Travel-Cruises	800-634-8538
Kitchen Cabinets	800-327-3599	...and many more!	

NEED HELP M-F, 9-5: 800-755-5008

APPLIANCES



CARS



FURNITURE



KITCHENS



HOME SALE & MORTGAGES



HOME SECURITY



JEWELRY



MOVING & STORAGE



PET INSURANCE



SOLAR



CRUISES & TRAVEL



BUYER'S EDGE INC.

LOW PRICE GUARANTEED!



SCAN ME



BUYERSEGEINC.COM
USERNAME: 3386 PASSWORD: NJEA



The NJEA Member Benefits program is saving members hundreds to thousands of dollars.

Are you taking advantage of your NJEA/NEA membership savings?

Here are a few examples from members just like you:

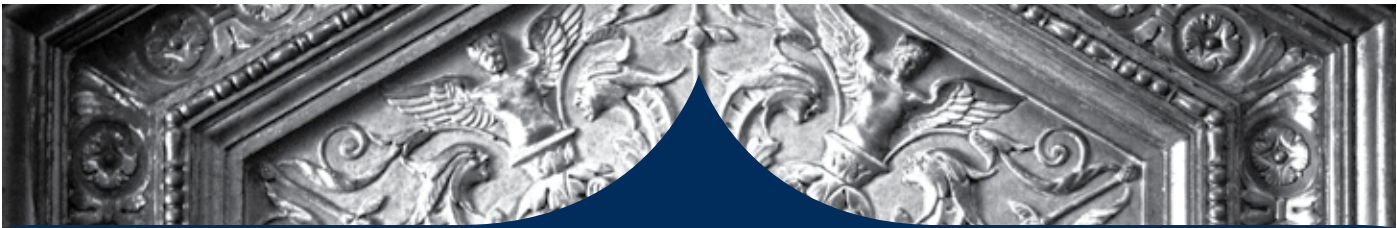
- ✦ Paul F. is saving \$1,699 per month with a 15% discount at Care One and Harmony Village Assisted Living Facility.
- ✦ Fran G. used her 30% discount on personal legal services to save \$750 on a will, advanced directive and power of attorney through an NJEA Network Attorney.
- ✦ Mike S. saved \$300 on Discovery Cove tickets using Plum Benefits.
- ✦ Sharita M. saved \$78 with her NEA Travel Dollars on a car rental through NEA Travel.
- ✦ Beverley S. saved \$3,243 on the purchase of a new car through Buyer's Edge.
- ✦ Pamela M. saved \$500 on furniture and \$300 on an appliance through Buyer's Edge.

Questions? Call NJEA
Member Benefits at
609-599-4561, ext. 2222.



For even more information,
resources, and discounts:
memberbenefits.njea.org

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






Your next degree. More affordable. More online.

Whether you're recently certified or a veteran educator, we have a graduate program or endorsement for you!

Counseling






- School Counseling
- Director of School Counseling
- Student Affairs & College Counseling
- Student Assistance Coordinator (SAC)

Curriculum & Instruction

- Early Childhood P-3 Education 
- English as a Second Language 
 - Bilingual, Bicultural, TESOL
- Initial Teaching Certification (MAT)
- Literacy
- Master of Education (MEd) 

Speech-Language Pathology

Special Education

- Applied Behavior Analysis 
- Autism 
- Autism + Applied Behavior Analysis 
- Learning Disabilities Teacher-Consultant
- Special Education with Supervisor Endorsement 
- Teacher of Students with Disabilities 

Leadership

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



Explore Our Programs!



MONMOUTH
UNIVERSITY

May & beyond

Visit njea.org/events for a full schedule NJEA meetings, conferences and workshops.



WEDNESDAY

Membership
Chairs
Conference



SATURDAY

NJEA Members of Color
(MOC) Empowerment
Conference



FRIDAY

Executive
Committee
meeting



FRIDAY

Executive
Committee
meeting



TUESDAY

Primary
Election Day



SATURDAY

NEA RA
Statewide
Caucus



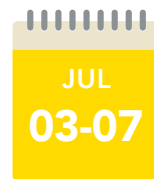
SATURDAY

Delegate
Assembly
meeting



SATURDAY

NJEA Carol Watchler
LGBTQIA+ Advocacy
Conference



SAT-TUES

NEA
Representative
Assembly

For more information go to NJEA.org.

Stay informed
with njea.org



Apply for grants



Register for
conferences



Read the education and
political news that affects
you, your families and
your students



DON'T GET BODY SLAMMED BY ANTI-UNION AGITATORS

While the Trump administration continues its attack on the U.S. Department of Education (ED), U.S. Secretary of Education Linda McMahon is making videos to persuade educators across the country that they don't need to join a union. Instead of protecting programs that will support students, families and educators, she has fired experienced federal public employees, moved programs (without Congressional approval) into inappropriate federal agencies, promoted school choice national voucher programs and championed union busting organizations like My Pay My Say. These actions should surprise no one, after all, McMahon, the former CEO of World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) has always despised unions. Ask Jesse "The Body" Ventura and former governor of Minnesota about his blackballing by the multibillion-dollar wrestling empire when he dared to organize members to form a union so that they could bargain for much-needed health care and a pension.

If anyone believes that McMahon or this administration and their anti-union, anti-public education, anti-labor millionaire donors are going to do anything but dismantle public education, consider this a wake-up call. Their goal is to carry out the well-funded 50-year attack to undermine, underfund and destroy public education so they can privatize and profit from public education.

Groups like My Pay My Say and the Freedom Foundation have one goal: the elimination of public employee unions. They try to convince members that unions are no longer necessary. They have unlimited funds to persuade members to opt out. They even provide individual state sample drop letters, so you don't have to think for yourself. Union-busting groups promise you will still be able to enjoy the benefits and salary you have now without any union participation in negotiations. That's partially true thanks to a partisan decision by the U.S. Supreme Court in the 2018 *Janus v. AFSCME* case which ended the collection of mandatory agency fees from public-sector employees and undermined union membership. But as

union membership drops, so does union power. Without dues-paying members fueling union advocacy, your rights could be in name only.

The Economic Policy Institute (EPI) reports that more than 68% of Americans have a favorable view of unions. In 2025, the number of workers represented by a union increased by 463,000 for a total of 16.5 million workers. Another 50 million workers wanted to join a union but were denied. Numbers like that scare union-busters like McMahon but it doesn't stop them from using their influence to stop unionization.

In Minnesota, educators are working with parents to protect their students and communities from overzealous federal agents.

In Florida, members and the community are fighting back against SB1296, legislation that could eliminate public sector unions in the state.

The state of Alaska is facing a severe teacher shortage because educators don't have public employee pensions or Social Security. Parts of the state are recruiting teachers from the Philippines because they cannot find teachers who are willing to work under such poor financial conditions.

Educators in West Virginia and Oklahoma are fighting the expansion of private school vouchers.

New York, Illinois and New Jersey all have current campaigns to fight harmful pension tiers that have divided public employees based on their date of hire.

Do you know who isn't fighting for public education? McMahon and her union-busting allies. They know if they can starve public schools of needed funds, resources and dedicated educators, they can privatize and profit from what is one of democracy's greatest success stories. Don't believe the gimmicks and bravado. They're afraid of the power you wield, in and outside the ring.

Hiding behind their WWE antics, the truth is they fear the power that union members build when we stand together. That's why they are working so hard to silence you. 🇺🇸

Summer Meals:

Because Student Success is a Year-Round Effort.



Children in your community rely on the essential nutrients of school meals, 12 months a year. Offering a robust Summer Meals program helps ensure positive outcomes for every student.



Scan the code to download our Summer Meals Marketing Resources for valuable guidance and promotional ideas, or visit americandairy.com to learn more.



AMERICAN DAIRY ASSOCIATION NORTH EAST

Contact us: schools@milky4u.org

NJEA Convention

Nov. 5-6, 2026

Book your hotel room for a discount rate

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

- Borgata
- Caesars
- Golden Nugget
- Hard Rock
- Harrah's
- Resorts
- Tropicana
- Sheraton

Shuttle service will be available from the hotels listed here.

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

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

