

REVIEW

DECEMBER
2022

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an education and advocacy resource

*Christine
Girtain*

**2022-23 Teacher
of the Year**

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2022-23 TEACHER OF THE YEAR

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Equity Alliance Conference

January 13 & 14, 2023

The Delta Woodbridge in Iselin, NJ

LEARNING PATHWAYS - Pick 1

1. The History, Purpose & Contemporary Relevance of the NAACP

– To infuse the history, purpose and relevance of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) as an equity framework to assist educators in cultivating a cultural and historical approach to rebuild the educational landscape from the perspective of BIPOC communities. This session focuses on educators infusing NAACP history to create learning goals and lesson plans, scaffold ways for students to be engaged, share their thoughts and become thinkers, in addition to, implementing best practices by applying the four learning goals called the Historically Responsive Literacy Framework for Teaching and Learning created by Gholdy Muhammad.

2. Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) in Practice

– To disrupt the default dominant culture narratives, the “CCW” framework created by Dr. Tara Yosso focuses on the cultural capital born from the creative resilience of historically marginalized communities to shift our mindset and practices. This session focuses on aspirational capital, linguistic capital, navigational capital, and resistance capital of students and educators of the global majority.

3. Community Organizing

– How do we begin to build and sustain relationships within our communities to grow our collective power for justice and equity? In this session, we will share compelling examples of sustainable community organizing to help members enhance their own efforts in our movement. Power to the people!

4. Humanizing to Healing

– We live in a racist, sexist, classist, oppressive systems that operate in ways that harm and dehumanize us. It is especially vital within our public school system that we create spaces that are both healing and humanizing for ourselves and our children. This session series will invite the collective wisdom to guide us toward the ways we can become more effective healing-centered practitioners and invite us to reflect and liberate ourselves through practices of breathing and movement.

5. Inter-generational Organizing

– From Baby Boomers to Gen X and Millennials to Gen Z, our generational worldviews are largely shaped by the historic events of our time. In this session, we will take a close look at the nuances between the generations in order to expand our relationship-building skills toward a stronger, more inclusive union.

6. Issues-based Organizing

– The issues that spark national movements, build community connections, or inspire individual activism are all grounded in a local context. In this session, we will share compelling stories and examples on how to organize around a local issue toward strategic victories determined by you. Participants will reflect and prepare an organizing action plan to map your pathway to victory.

7. Power of the Pen (POP) Writing Circles

– Writing circles enable us to amplify the power of our pens as educators advancing our movement for racial literacy, equity and affirmation. Set your intentions—will you deepen your curriculum, write a compelling op-ed, craft equity-driven policies, or embark on free-written reflection? The choice is yours. The power is ours!

8. Racial Literacy Circles

– As public school educators, we have a commitment to building a more just and racially literate world for our students. In addition to sharing best practices for hosting reading circles, we have added a dynamic variety of multimedia resources to ignite some critical dialogue around issues of racial and social justice. In this session we will model and engage in discussion with documentary clips and song lyrics for a deeper dive.

9. Understanding Your Union: Governance Fundamentals

– (LIMITED SPACE!) Knowledge is power. Understanding the organizational structure of our local, state and national affiliates help to empower both new and seasoned union members. In this training, participants will unpack their understanding of the fundamentals including knowing your constitution and by-laws, parliamentary procedure, and equity-centered policies.

Register at njea.org/eac-hcr



njea

Human and Civil Rights,
Equity, and Governance



1: With representatives from every county as well as higher education, NJREA, NJEA Preservice, the NJEA Convention Committee oversees convention programming.

2: NJEA members Melissa Walsh (Mount Laurel) and David Walsh (Rancocas Valley) brought their daughters to the NJEA Convention to hear David Hogg’s keynote. Ava Walsh, after attending two March for our Lives rallies in Washington, D.C., was inspired to found Burlington County March for Our Lives. During the keynote’s Q&A, Ava asked Hogg to send a message of encouragement to her chapter. From left: David and Chloe Walsh, David Hogg, Ava and Melissa Walsh.

For more photos from the NJEA Convention, turn to pages 38-43, and visit [flickr.com/njea/albums](https://www.flickr.com/photos/njea/).

FEATURES



26 | MEET CHRISTINE GIRTAİN: 2022-23 TEACHER OF THE YEAR

Christine Girtain appears to be in constant motion. She races down the halls at Toms River High School North and Toms River High School South, two of the three high schools in Toms River, Ocean County, while juggling her responsibilities as a science teacher and the director of Authentic Science Research, a three-year program that allows students to earn college credit while conducting independent research. Now, Girtain will have to find a way to fit in being the 2022-23 New Jersey State Teacher of the Year.

BY KATHRYN COULIBALY



30 | CELEBRATING NEURODIVERSITY

Neurodiversity is a lens through which we can shift our mindset from viewing naturally occurring—and common—variations of human cognition such as autism, attention deficit hyperactivity “disorder” (ADHD) and dyslexia not as handicaps to be pitied or cured, but differences to be celebrated, just as we celebrate our diverse cultures, bodies and talents.

BY JENNIFER RUSS



34 | SPEECH-LANGUAGE SERVICES AND THE PANDEMIC

The Jersey City Public Schools speech-language pathologists (SLPs) were faced with a dilemma as the COVID-19 pandemic swept the nation. On March 13, 2020, school buildings closed for what was first thought to be a brief period that ultimately lasted much longer. The pandemic forced school districts to reevaluate student learning almost overnight. The SLPs were challenged to carry out therapy services via a remote platform—a completely uncharted territory.

BY TIFFANY SMOLANSKY AND KATHLEEN DE GREGORIO



38 | NJEA CONVENTION PHOTO GALLERY

The annual NJEA Convention is the largest educational gathering of its kind in the world. Hundreds of professional learning programs, aisle after aisle of educational exhibitors, meetings of professional affiliated organizations and student talent all came together for two days in Atlantic City. Check out a selection of photos from the photo gallery found online at [flickr.com/photos/njea/albums](https://www.flickr.com/photos/njea/albums).

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Distinguished service

The number

14,913

Decline in NJ public school enrollment since before the pandemic.

Source: New Jersey Department of Education, nj.gov/education/doedata/enr/index.shtml


GOOD NEWS

Leading the Nation in the Number of Children Attending Preschool

New Jersey is one of the top 2 states in the nation in the percentage of 3- and 4-year-olds who are enrolled in preschool.

Source:
Education Week. Quality Counts 2021: Chances for Success. January 2021.

edweek.org/leadership/quality-counts-2021-chance-for-success




Christine Girtain, the 2022-23 New Jersey State Teacher of the Year, is proud of Toms River, her hometown. She is a science teacher and the director of Authentic Science Research at Toms River North and Toms River South high schools.

PHOTO BY
Kathryn Coulibaly

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REVIEW

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Organizational Directory

NJEA headquarters, Trenton

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

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

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

Communications Division: responsible for all aspects of the association's communications efforts, both internal and external.

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

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

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

UniServ regional offices

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

UniServ South

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

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

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

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

UniServ Central

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

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

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

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

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

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

UniServ Northeast

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

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

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

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

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

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

UniServ Northwest

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

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

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

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

MEMBERSHIP

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





PRESIDENT'S *Message*

Recognizing and celebrating excellence

I hope that you are all still feeling energized after the 2022 NJEA Convention. It's a wonderful way to build new skills, meet with colleagues and be inspired by the many impressive speakers on the program.

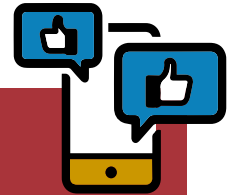
One of my favorite parts of the convention is hearing from the newest New Jersey State Teacher of the Year and the ESP of the Year. This year's honor is held by Christine Girtain, a high school science teacher and the director of Authentic Science Research. This three-year program allows students to earn college credits while conducting independent research at Toms River South and Toms River North high schools.

Christine is a 28-year veteran of the profession, and her energy is impressive. She is constantly looking for new ways to engage her students and further their career prospects. I really enjoyed hearing her speak at the convention, and I look forward to all that she will do over the coming year. There's a profile on Christine in this issue of the magazine, which I hope you will enjoy.

2022 NJEA ESP of the Year Nancy Cogland joined Christine and spoke at convention about her career in education. A paraprofessional at Old Bridge High School in Middlesex County, Nancy shared her perspective on meeting the needs of all students and providing a safe, secure, and nurturing environment where our students can thrive.

These two educators are emblematic of the heart of education: pushing students to achieve and succeed, while providing them with the security they need to take risks. Thanks to this duality, New Jersey's public schools have consistently been named the best in the nation.

Our members do not seek out the limelight, but their accomplishments are worth celebrating today, and every day. As the calendar year winds down, I want to thank you for all that you do for public education and for the students we serve. Your work is valued and appreciated by all your colleagues in education.



SEAN M. SPILLER

Instagram

@SpillerforNJEA: Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! To the thousands of NJEA members who joined us for our 2022 NJEA Convention in Atlantic City: you've made this week truly unforgettable! We learned, we laughed, and we improved our educational practices so we can better serve our schools, students and communities! #wearenjea #njeaconvention

On Nov. 11, NJEA President Sean M. Spiller shared photos from various features at the 2022 NJEA Convention. He thanked the thousands of NJEA members who attended and praised them for making it successful.

STEVE BEATTY

Facebook

@Steve BeattyNJEA: Time to rally the troops and get out the vote! And not many better than President Bill Clinton—revving up the crowd at the Rep. Josh Gottheimer labor gathering in Bergen County. We all know what is at stake, and the fact that we can't look back after Tuesday with any regrets! Do all you can between now and then to volunteer, get friends and family out, and of course—vote!!! Everything is at stake—educators will always be the difference if we just organize and GOTV!

On Nov. 5, NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty shared photos of NJEA members at a Get Out the Vote (GOTV) rally for Congressman Josh Gottheimer (CD-5). Beatty encouraged all NJEA members to make sure they vote during the critical midterm election cycle. Gottheimer went on to win reelection.

PETAL ROBERTSON

Facebook

@petalfornjea: Voting is for the community so get your community voting! I walked around NJEA Headquarters to be sure we were all doing our civic duty. Check it out! Then check with your own village to be sure they're voting too. Every election changes your life. #njea #petalforthepeople #getoutthevote

On Nov. 7, NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson shared a video of various NJEA staff members sharing their reasons for voting during the midterm election cycle. Robertson encouraged all NJEA members to remember that each election can directly impact public education, and she encouraged all members to vote for NJEA-endorsed candidates.

OFFICERS ONLINE

KNOW. LEAD. ACT.

SPILLER, BEATTY AND ROBERTSON REELECTED BY ACCLAMATION



From left: NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty, NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson and NJEA President Sean M. Spiller.

NJEA's officers, President Sean M. Spiller, Vice President Steve Beatty and Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson, have each been elected by acclamation to a second term in their offices, which will run from Sept. 1, 2023 to Aug. 31, 2025. Election by acclamation occurs when only one candidate files the petitions required to run for an office. This year, the deadline, as reported in the NJEA Review in June and September, was Oct. 17. The NJEA Election Committee met on Oct. 19 and certified that result.

Each of the three officers expressed appreciation to NJEA members for the opportunity to serve and excitement about the work ahead.

"I'm honored to have the opportunity to serve a second term as president, representing NJEA members across the state," said Spiller. "Steve, Petal and I share a commitment to justice-centered unionism, and we are going to use every day of our time in office to advocate for members, students, New Jersey families and our great public schools."

"I'm excited for the chance to keep advocating alongside NJEA members," said Beatty. "With Sean and Petal as my partners in the work, I know we are going to succeed in addressing the challenges ahead, like engaging every member, rebuilding the educator pipeline and restoring the respect that New Jersey educators deserve every day."

"I'm thrilled that I'm going to have another two years to work with Sean and Steve to build a stronger, more-inclusive and more-just union," said Robertson. "I have been grateful for the opportunity to meet and work alongside members all across the state to help ensure that their voices and their value help drive our union forward."

NJEA ELECTIONS: VOTING REGISTRATION FOR NON-CLASSROOM TEACHERS

All NJEA members who are not classroom teachers or active supportive (ESP) members must identify themselves in order to vote in the appropriate unit in NJEA's spring 2023 elections. A "classroom teacher" is any person who is certified, where required, and a major part of whose time is spent in direct contact with students or who performs allied work that places that person on a local salary schedule for teachers.

NJEA members who were considered classroom teachers in last year's elections, and who now consider themselves non-classroom teachers must complete and return a registration form in order to be included in the non-classroom teacher unit of representation.

Go to njea.org/NJEAelections to download the form.

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

Do you want to learn more about running campaigns? Every year, Rutgers' Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) offers campaign training to help women run and win elective office at its Ready to Run program. Ready to Run is back in person and is scheduled for March 17-18, 2023.

NJEA offers scholarships for women who are interested in the program. This includes a dinner meeting in New Brunswick and hotel accommodations (double occupancy) for those who are interested in staying overnight.

The conference will take place at the Douglass Student Center in New Brunswick. To ensure that there is diversity among the women running, Ready to Run-New Jersey offers programs designed by and for Latinas, Black women, and Asian American women. Those programs begin at noon on Friday, March 17. The main Ready to Run program begins at 4:15 p.m. on Friday with a welcome and plenary session addressing digital strategies for candidates, campaigns and advocates, followed by a networking reception.

Saturday's program offers two tracks: "I'm Ready to Run, Now What?" and "I'm Not Ready to Run Yet, But..." A luncheon plenary will focus on conquering the camera with an interactive media training. More information is available at njea.org/readytorun. If your schedule does not permit you to arrive on time on Friday, you are still eligible to apply for a scholarship and attend the program.

COOL STUFF

A+ EFFORT

REFINSKI NAMED VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL FOUNDATION TEACHER OF THE YEAR



Joseph Refinski, a history teacher at East Orange STEM Academy, has been named the 2022 Teacher of the Year by the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans Memorial Foundation. Refinski is working on an oral history project on the Vietnam era with his students. He is an avid visitor to the museum and memorial and has brought classes to visit the site whenever possible.

“There is no space quite like the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans Memorial and Museum,” Refinski said. “It encompasses all of the necessary ingredients to provide a wonderful learning experience, and deep reflective areas to ponder the whys and hows of the conflict. It’s always a

favorite with my students.”

The Vietnam Era Museum is the first of its kind in the United States. Dedicated in September 1998, the museum provides political, cultural and historical context for the memorial. It helps visitors gain an understanding of the conflict in Southeast Asia and the surrounding political strife in America and its lasting impact on American culture, with an emphasis on experiences in New Jersey.

The Vietnam Era Museum enables all visitors to learn about myriad forces that produced the conflict abroad and the dissension at home. It provides an atmosphere where appropriate materials and exhibits help visitors understand the significance of the memorial, the reality of the conflict, and the social, political and cultural complexities of the Vietnam Era.

To learn more about the memorial and the museum, visit njvvmf.org.



REQUEST A SPEAKER FOR YOUR CLASS

The New Jersey State Bar Foundation offers a free Speakers Bureau, where volunteer attorneys address school groups throughout the state on numerous areas of the law—and on career days. Attorneys typically speak for approximately 60 minutes, including time for questions. Please allow at least 60 days for the arrangement of your request. Flexibility in date selection is appreciated. In-person and virtual options are available. To request a speaker, visit njsbf.org/speakers-bureau.



NJSBF FALL ISSUE OF RESPECT

The fall 2022 edition of Respect, the New Jersey State Bar Foundation’s diversity newsletter is now available. Written for grades 6 and up, it is free to download and free to order for your classroom. The NJSBF offers more than 30 publications to educators and the public. The issue contains articles on voter suppression, the tragedy of Indian boarding schools and transgender sports bans, with a sidebar on 50 years of Title IX. A PDF of the fall issue can be downloaded at bit.ly/njsbf-respect or individual articles can be read and printed from Respect’s blog at njsbf.org/the-respect-rundown.

Free print copies go to njsbf.org/publications and click on “Order Publications.”



TEACHING TIP

THE ABCS OF K.L.M.

By Glenn Houthuysen

Prior to the start of my teaching career in 2003, I was an enlisted crewmember in the U.S. Air Force and N.J. Air National Guard. I flew in a KC-135 and offloaded gas midair to receiver airplanes such as fighter, bomber or cargo jets. During my years in this highly technical and sophisticated position, I came up with a useful acronym of K.L.M.

Simply put the letters stand for knowledge, leadership and mentoring. The acronym served me well as an instructor during my 29 years in the military when training young crew members. I have since applied the concept in my position as a third-grade teacher.

Knowledge

During my years in the military, I expected myself to be a subject matter expert. I demand the same of myself in my career as a teacher. We must be adept in our communication skills to be able to share our knowledge with our students. I often seek out professional development to stay on the cutting edge of our field.

I also encourage my students to become knowledge masters. I might have students create their own flash cards to quiz other students on a specific topic, skill or concept. The students can use these cards to help you create the end-of-course assessment. Allow the students to pick 20 of the most important facts and then the teacher selects perhaps 15 of them to use on the assessment with a few teacher-made questions.

Leadership

I pride myself on being a building leader in not only my union role but also in allowing myself to be open to questions and concerns of colleagues. If I am unable to find an answer I will seek it out whether by asking another colleague, the union or researching the issue on the internet. If I am unable to find an answer within a reasonable amount of time I will give a rough time frame to the questioner and get back to him prior to that date.

Glenn Houthuysen is a third-grade math and science teacher at P.S. #27 in Paterson. He is a member of the Paterson Education Association.

“ The acronym served me well as an instructor during my 29 years in the military when training young crew members.

It stands to reason that we are also leaders to our students. Our students, whether or not you realize it, see you as a leader in not only their education but also as a role model. Leadership skills can be taught to all students, not just those with a natural talent. Spend a few minutes with each student every few weeks to guide them in the proper direction.

Mentoring

As a teacher in an urban area, I found myself being the parental and positive male figure in some of my student's lives. During my years I found that providing guidance and assurance to my students made a difference in their home lives. Although I have lost track of most students over the years, I do know the advice that I provided helped many students in difficult situations.

Students can also peer mentor in the classroom but what does peer mentoring look like? Let's say that a student comes to you with a situation that they need help with. You can create a Google Form with the situation and then allow the students to respond to the form. Of course, the students cannot see each other's responses, so anonymity is assured. Select results can be shared with the student who originally came to you.

I hope that the K.L.M. method can be utilized in your classroom. The skills are simple to implement and can be used from pre-K to 12th grade and even through secondary education. By keeping knowledge, leadership, and mentoring in mind, you will become an even more effective teacher and co-worker. 🏠

“I Feel Like I’m Making Such a Difference in My Community”

Meet Salem County ESP of the Year Amy Tighe

For Amy Tighe, 2022 Salem County Educational Support Professional (ESP) of the Year, family is everything. Although she started her career in nursing, her main priority has always been her family. Once her children started school in the Penns Grove-Carney’s Point School District, she became more interested in education. The principal at her children’s school suggested that she work in the district. The superintendent—who happened to have been the principal when Tighe was in high school at Gateway Regional in Woodbury Heights—was thrilled that Tighe wanted to work in the schools.

Twenty-four years later, Tighe still loves working as a paraprofessional in Penns Grove-Carney’s Point. In fact, she is now the president of the Penns Grove-Carney’s Point Regional School Employees Association.

“I’m proud to be the first ESP president of an all-inclusive local in our county,” Tighe said. “I’m very old school; my father was a union member; my brothers are union members. I was brought up to believe that unions fight for workers’ rights, benefits and wages.”

Tighe takes her career as a paraprofessional very seriously. She knows the difference she makes in her students’ lives.

“There are kids living in my community who are getting a strong foundation because of me,” she said. But she also knows that paraprofessionals, and other ESPs, are not paid in proportion to the impact they have on their schools and their communities.

“I was fortunate that my husband had a good job and made a good living,” Tighe said. “I didn’t have to worry as much about the low pay. I could focus on the difference I make in children’s lives.”

But Tighe knows that not every ESP—or teacher—can afford to stay in the profession.

“I believe that everyone should have a job that lets them support their families; they shouldn’t need two or three jobs,” Tighe said. “One of my goals right now is to make sure that we’re raising wages, so members don’t need so many jobs to make ends meet.”



Salem County ESP of the Year Amy Tighe at the 2022 NJEA ESP Conference. From left: NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty, Tighe, NJEA President Sean M. Spiller.

At the same time, Tighe is concerned about ongoing health and safety issues and the impact of a potential consolidation of school districts in Salem County on members’ livelihoods.

“I’m doing a lot of fighting right now,” Tighe laughed.

“ESP are the backbone of every school district,” Tighe continued. “To be put in a position to represent ESPs as the Salem County ESP of the Year makes me ecstatic. I’m so proud to represent such a wonderful group of people who are working hard every day.”

Even after her year as the Salem County ESP of the Year concludes, Tighe is committed to continuing her advocacy for all of her members.

“We represent everyone, and we are all in this together: all job categories, certified, uncertified,” Tighe said. “We are brothers and sisters in our union.” 🗳️

esp njea | Educational Support Professionals

NJEA Report

Consider National Board Certification Coming together as advocates for NBCT candidates and educators

by Lisa Hirkaler, NBCT and Dr. Rebecca McLelland-Crawley, NBCT

National Board Certification is considered the “gold standard” in education. Throughout the certification process, teachers must demonstrate knowledge of students, standards and content. A portfolio of accomplished teaching contains video footage of classroom teaching and a reflection of the lesson. The entire process is built on the five core propositions of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), which state:

- Teachers are committed to students and their learning.
- Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.
- Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring students' learning.
- Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.
- Teachers are members of learning communities.

A core group of educators with experience as National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) has been reborn out of the previous New Jersey NBCT Network and is now called the Advocates for Candidates and Educators of New Jersey (ACE-NJ). The goal of this group is to offer support and acknowledge educators who are going through the process of achieving certification. We know that the process is difficult at times, especially when looking at one's practice and reflecting on your success as an educator in the field.

Why should one consider this personal journey? Your reasons are your own. There may be financial incentives or stipends, but that can vary from district to district. Accomplished teachers typically seek out ways to level up professionally where it benefits students. NBCTs are aware of how their practice impacts student learning and they make intentional choices to benefit their students now and in the future.

Lisa Hirkaler is an art educator with the Vernon Township School District in Sussex County and Dr. Rebecca McLelland-Crawley is a gifted and talented teacher resource specialist with the West Windsor-Plainsboro Regional School District in Mercer County.

Teachers who have gone through the Board-certification process say that it is the most valuable and transformative professional development they have ever received. The opportunity to connect professional learning with classroom practice brings to life a teacher's experience, helping them reflect on individual student learning needs. It can also reinvigorate your passion for teaching!

In a time when teacher shortages are nationwide and many voices outside of the education world recommend loosening standards, we argue that our students need highly accomplished professionals in their schools. Setting higher standards for teachers and demonstrating accomplished teaching means better learning by students.

According to NBPTS, “Students of Board-certified teachers learn more than their peers without Board-certified teachers. Studies have also found that the positive impact of having a Board-certified teacher is even greater for BIPOC [Black, Indigenous and People of Color] and low-income students.”

The process is highly reflective and compels the candidates to evaluate instructional practices and professional development plans unlike any other. Achieving the advanced credential does not make NBCTs better than other teachers, it simply makes them better at what they do. The process offers you a chance to grow as a professional while investing in your craft.

Without question, the state of New Jersey has exceptional educators. Our school system is consistently ranked in the top 3 in our country—achieving the Number 1 ranking for the last several years. New Jersey is home to hundreds of National Board Certified teachers, and there is always room for more.

Curious about where to get started and how to connect with the New Jersey network of NBCTs? Reach out to any of the members of the network by searching the NBPTS directory or email the Advocates for Candidates and Educators of NJ directly at acenjbcts@gmail.com. A great place to start researching the process is by visiting nbpts.org. We would love to have you join us!

Push to Walk honors Spiller

NJEA President Sean M. Spiller was the guest of honor at Push to Walk's 15th anniversary celebration gala on Sept. 29. The mission of Push to Walk is to provide individualized workouts and resources to people with spinal cord injuries and other forms of paralysis to optimize their current quality of life and to prepare them for future medical advancements. Nearly 250 guests gathered to mark the milestone and share in the evening's theme: Celebrate the Journey.

Push to Walk was the official NJEA Convention Charity at the NJEA Convention this year and in 2021.

The event had a variety of speakers, kicked off by Co-founder Darren Templeton, whose speech was dedicated to Spiller, his former high school hockey coach.

"Throughout your life, you meet people along the way that redefine things that you thought you already knew," Templeton said. "This could be in athletics, academics, career or family. These people allow you to raise the expectation you have of yourself. To push you to do better and be better. For me, Coach Spiller was one of those people, and he continues to be today."

Spiller, for his part, admired his former student.

"In my capacity as a teacher and coach, Darren was destined for something special—that I knew," Spiller said. "I just did not realize that his journey would be so complicated yet so rewarding."

Spiller went on to say that Push to Walk "is a worthy cause for clients that are underserved, misunderstood and often neglected."

Later in the evening, client speaker Stefan Yurica shared his story about his spinal cord injury and journey at Push to Walk. He shared how it is not always the big milestones that impact someone with a spinal cord injury but the small ones, such as being able to scratch your face or brush your teeth. These can make all the difference to someone with a spinal cord injury. Stefan said that Push to Walk plays a much-needed role in a patient's road to improvement—taking over and pushing forward when traditional therapy ends and insurance runs out.



NJEA President Sean M. Spiller with Push to Walk's Co-founder Darren Templeton. In the early years of his career, Spiller was Templeton's teacher and hockey coach.

NJEA-endorsed candidates succeed at the polls

Nov. 8 was a successful Election Day overall for NJEA members. NJEA, NJREA and NJEA Preservice members and leaders across the state made 29,236 phone calls in support of NJEA-endorsed candidates. They also knocked on thousands of doors, mailed postcards, sent texts and attended dozens of town halls and rallies among other activities.

NJEA staff from every division and in the association supported members in these efforts with both organizational expertise and by engaging in campaign activities as well.

A record number of NJEA members were on the ballot: 233 for boards of education, 73 for municipal offices, and three for county offices—the highest number of members on the ballot since NJEA began tracking member-candidates in 2013. Of the 309 total candidates, 220, or 71%, have won so far. As of press time, several races were still being tallied.

Of school board and municipal candidate endorsed at the local level 51 out of 86 were elected with one race still undecided at press time.

At the congressional level, nine of NJEA's 11 endorsed candidates were successfully elected.

- CD 1 – Donald Norcross
- CD 2 – Andy Kim
- CD 3 – Josh Gottheimer
- CD 6 – Frank Pallone
- CD 8 – Robert Menendez Jr.
- CD 9 – Bill Pascrell
- CD 10 – Donald Payne Jr.
- CD 11 – Mikie Sherrill
- CD 12 – Bonnie Watson-Coleman

Lakewood EA wins 2022 NJEA Jim George Collective Bargaining Award



The Lakewood Education Association (LEA) is the 2022 winner of the NJEA Jim George Collective Bargaining Award. From left: NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty, NJEA UniServ Field Rep Mike Mannion, LEA member Kathy Hall, LEA President Kimberlee Shaw, LEA member Lisa Moody-Anderson, and NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson.

For years, the Lakewood Education Association (LEA) has been advocating for its members and fighting for its students through challenging circumstances. Thanks to their fierce advocacy and hard work, they were able to secure a five-year settlement with salary improvements for certificated staff that averaged 21.9% and 22.4% for support staff. They negotiated a starting salary of more than \$60,000 in year four, which is a more than \$9,000 increase in the district's starting salary. For this, they were recognized with the 2022 NJEA Jim George Collective Bargaining Award.

LEA President Kimberlee Shaw and members Kathy Hall and Lisa Moody-Anderson accepted the award on behalf of the negotiations team and the entire association.

LEA has made improving the relationship among the association, the administration and board of education a priority, while continuing to demonstrate that LEA is a force deserving of respect.

Prior to the start of the collective bargaining process, LEA filed more than 20 Public Employment Relations Commission (PERC) dockets and 10 grievances.

At the same time, the association reached out to community members and worked with them to address their issues, both in the schools and in the community.

Community members spoke at the virtual board meetings to express their concerns with the staff shortage and the number of substitutes being used. They also voiced their support for increasing staff salaries. The association kept meticulous records about the number of staff who were leaving the district.

Their efforts were so successful that the memorandum of agreement concerning salary increases reads, "For the purposes of recruiting and retaining staff, as well as reducing steps on the salary guides."

Organizing around community concerns

The association took action on issues unrelated to the schools to show their connection to the community. They worked with community stakeholders to improve communication flow to the public regarding monthly vaccination sites, rent hikes on local tenants, and other issues.

The association shared that staff shortages in the school district stemmed from the district's inability to retain staff on a long-term basis, as well as attract new staff to replace those who have left. The community stakeholders who participated in Zoom meetings organized by a local civil rights activist included town council members, local

religious leaders, local business owners, the chief of police, American Legion Post 166, Latino Action Network, Community Services Corporation, New Labor and Voz Latina.

LEA also brought in NJEA staff from multiple divisions to join them in engaging with community stakeholders in Zoom meetings organized by the governor's office.

Building a stronger union

These community connections and member organizing reenergized the culture of their union, leading to five new building representatives, one new senior building representative, nine new negotiations team members, and two new members of NJEA's Members of Color (MOC) Network, with one member working on forming a local Lakewood MOC Committee.

Jim George Collective Bargaining Award finalists

The NJEA Jim George Collective Bargaining Award is presented annually to an association that has accomplished one or more of the following:

- Bargained one or more new contractual provisions not already found in another affiliate's contract.
- Conducted an extraordinary community organizing effort that resulted in a contract settlement.
- Used the bargaining experience to propel new members into association involvement and leadership positions.
- Achieved a particularly good settlement, in comparison to the state average, in salary increases, health benefits, professional development, and/or member protection.

This year, after reviewing the nominations, five finalists were selected. They were:

- Atlantic County Special Services Bus Drivers/Aides Association
- Cumberland Regional Paraprofessional Association
- Lakewood Education Association
- Paterson Charter Education Association
- South Orange-Maplewood Education Association

Following ratification, LEA continues to press the administration and board to change the climate in the community and the schools. They have compelled the board to participate in both NJEA's Labor Management Collaborative and the NEA's Labor Management Pilot Program with a shared vision of improving district morale. This relationship continues to trend in a positive direction, while LEA remains unyielding in their staunch advocacy for its members and students.

Who was Jim George?



Jim George speaking in Asbury Park at the 1967 Rally for Teacher Rights.

Jim George was a driving force in NJEA's quest to secure collective bargaining rights for public school employees. His long relationship with NJEA began when he was a teacher and union leader in Cinnaminson. An activist at heart, he served the Cinnaminson Teachers' Association as its treasurer and then local president.

At the forefront in the fight for member rights, George is best known for his stirring remarks at the 1967 Asbury Park Rally for Teacher Rights. It was then that George spoke the words that would become the inspiration behind NJEA's Collective Bargaining Summit: "A new order is at hand. A new generation has been conceived—and we are not afraid."

George joined the NJEA UniServ staff in 1967 and served members in Burlington County until 1986 when he became a UniServ coordinator serving the southern portion of the state. For 28 years prior to his untimely death in 1995, George inspired NJEA members, leaders, and staff. It was George who first suggested that NJEA hold a collective bargaining summit to invigorate the association's commitment to bargaining. His legacy lives on through the summit and award that bear his name.

Local associations set trends in bargaining

By Crystal Inman

Settlement percentages are increasing

NJEA kicked off the 2022-23 school year by hosting Collective Bargaining Council (CBC) workshops in each county. At the CBCs, NJEA staff presented recent contract settlement data and bargaining teams discussed current bargaining trends across New Jersey. A few of the key trends emerging out of these conversations are an influx of higher settlement percentages, an increase in the ratification of five-year agreements and an emphasis on contract language changes that support quality-of-life issues.

At the beginning of the 2021-22 school year, the average settlement percentage (inclusive of increment cost) for certified staff across the state was 3.12%. That number has increased to 3.26% as reported to the NJEA Research and Economic Services Division.

For educational support professionals (ESPs), who typically report higher settlements than certified staff, the average settlement percent was 3.19% in 2021 and has now reached 3.61% with transportation staff seeing the highest settlement average of 4.12%.

See Tables 1 and 2 for the most recent averages by county. An important note for locals who are entering into bargaining this year, is that the requirement to meet the state minimum wage is the responsibility of the school district and should be in addition to any agreed upon settlement percentage. Additionally, due to the increase in the consumer price index (CPI), the minimum wage beginning Jan. 1, 2023, was raised from \$14.00 per hour to \$14.13 per hour.

Length of settlements are increasing

At the close of 2021, 3.81% of reported district settlements were five-year agreements, and 5.71% were four-year agreements. By November of 2022, 17.89% of reported settlements were five-year agreements, and 14.74% were four-year agreements. The rise in four- and five-year agreements can be attributed to the following factors:

- Longer settlement terms are locking locals into the upward trend of higher settlement percentages.
- With the passage of P.L. 2020, Chapter 79, which prohibits employers from entering into a subcontracting agreement during the term of an existing collective bargaining agreement, locals are preventing the privatization of ESP members for the next few years.

- For locals that have a low increment cost, a longer settlement term can allow a local to fix problematic salary guides by decreasing any existing bubbles between steps, reducing the number of steps and thereby maximizing cumulative earnings, or by placing additional dollars at the starting salaries and at the top of the guide.

See Tables 3, 4 and 5 for an overview of reported salary information by county.

Locals bargaining family illness days

While salary and health benefits continue to rank as top concerns for members at the bargaining table, members are also calling attention to the importance of having adequate time off to attend to personal matters. During discussions at the CBC workshops, increasing the number of family illness and/or personal days often came up as a key priority at the bargaining table. As a result of the pandemic, many day care facilities and schools have changed their rules surrounding when children must stay home—putting an additional burden on working parents who are forced to take unpaid leave.

Where employees in many other professions can work remotely when children or other family members are sick, an increased number of family illness days are necessary for continuing to attract and retain school employees.

An emerging topic of discussion this year is the addition of pregnancy loss, miscarriage, failed assisted reproduction procedures and failed adoption as qualifying reasons for taking bereavement days.

NJEA offers negotiations training

NJEA offers several different workshops focused on bargaining. If you were unable to attend one of the CBC workshops and would like to learn more, consider attending one of NJEA's Winter Leadership Conference workshops, which you can register for at njea.org/wlc, or stay tuned for information on more comprehensive workshops offered at the NJEA Jack Bertolino Summer Leadership Conference held every August.

Advocacy workshops are posted on the NJEA website at njea.org/advocacy-training.

Crystal Inman is an associate director in the NJEA Research and Economic Services Division. She can be reached at cinman@njea.org.

2022-23 Average Settlement Percent for certified staff	
Atlantic	3.46
Bergen	3.19
Burlington	3.41
Camden	3.39
Cape May	2.93
Cumberland	3.15
Essex	3.22
Gloucester	3.22
Hudson	3.28
Hunterdon	3.01
Mercer	3.37
Middlesex	3.75
Monmouth	3.29
Morris	3.10
Ocean	3.51
Passaic	3.05
Salem	3.12
Somerset	2.02
Sussex	2.86
Union	3.32
Warren	3.27

Table 1 Percentages reflect what has been reported to the NJEA Research and Economic Services Division by press time.

2022-23 Average Settlement Percent for ESP	Secretarial	Custodial	Paraprofessional	Cafeteria	Transportation	Security
Atlantic	3.51	3.56	3.76	3.59	13.32	3.43
Bergen	3.69	3.61	3.35	--	--	--
Burlington	3.57	3.69	3.91	2.95	6.44	--
Camden	3.20	3.38	5.01	4.75	2.65	3.96
Cape May	2.94	4.00	3.08	4.89	6.68	2.95
Cumberland	3.97	3.50	3.69	2.70	--	NA
Essex	3.22	3.06	3.35	--	3.01	3.01
Gloucester	4.09	3.27	3.37	3.57	3.34	3.20
Hudson	3.06	3.04	2.99	--	--	--
Hunterdon	2.95	3.12	2.98	--	2.88	--
Mercer	3.50	3.50	3.50	--	--	--
Middlesex	3.65	3.69	4.01	3.10	3.67	3.10
Monmouth	3.25	3.47	3.44	--	3.41	2.92
Morris	3.02	3.12	4.02	--	3.13	3.40
Ocean	3.89	4.43	3.69	3.65	3.70	3.50
Passaic	3.32	3.11	3.17	3.00	--	--
Salem	3.51	3.22	3.36	3.20	4.00	3.25
Somerset	3.13	2.97	3.23	--	3.00	--
Sussex	3.26	2.88	3.04	--	2.7	--
Union	3.03	3.23	4.60	2.85	3.00	3.16
Warren	3.68	3.40	3.30	--	--	--

Table 2 Percentages reflect what has been reported to the NJEA Research and Economic Services Division by press time. If the field is blank, it is because information for that job category in that county has not yet been reported to the Research and Economic Services division.

County	Percentage of Districts Reporting a Starting Salary of 60k or Higher in 2022-23
Atlantic	21%
Bergen	9%
Burlington	22%
Camden	13%
Cape May	18%
Cumberland	60%
Essex	13%
Gloucester	14%
Hudson	15%
Hunterdon	12%
Mercer	55%
Middlesex	12%
Monmouth	21%
Morris	38%
Ocean	17%
Passaic	24%
Salem	20%
Somerset	37%
Sussex	19%
Union	39%
Warren	13%

Table 3 Percentages reflect what has been reported to the NJEA Research and Economic Services Division by press time.

County	2021-22 Average Salary for Certified Staff
Atlantic	\$78,470
Bergen	\$81,896
Burlington	\$76,898
Camden	\$74,764
Cape May	\$76,061
Cumberland	\$70,684
Essex	\$81,720
Gloucester	\$72,248
Hudson	\$83,545
Hunterdon	\$74,448
Mercer	\$79,104
Middlesex	\$78,889
Monmouth	\$77,344
Morris	\$78,587
Ocean	\$71,804
Passaic	\$81,312
Salem	\$68,669
Sussex	\$78,720
Union	\$79,847
Warren	\$74,295
State	\$78,407

Table 4 In each county, the average years of experience is 10-12 years.

2021-22 Average Salary for ESP	12-mo. Secretarial	12-mo. Custodial	10-mo. Paraprofessional	10-mo. Cafeteria	10-mo. T Transportation	10-mo. Security
Atlantic	\$51,331	\$46,798	\$34,771	\$27,150	\$32,438	\$43,094
Bergen	\$58,466	\$59,053	\$33,948	--	\$48,171	\$25,190
Burlington	\$48,436	\$46,722	\$27,759	\$31,881	\$29,817	\$42,451
Camden	\$45,824	\$41,276	\$26,114	\$22,606	\$28,076	\$37,479
Cape May	\$44,365	\$42,982	\$28,314	\$26,136	\$32,744	\$37,651
Cumberland	\$40,664	\$47,333	\$30,187	\$27,907	\$30,634	\$28,113
Essex	\$58,405	\$54,573	\$31,341	--	\$43,093	\$39,071
Gloucester	\$48,831	\$44,410	\$26,654	\$26,293	\$32,025	\$38,536
Hudson	\$60,862	\$56,812	\$39,533	\$48,331	\$52,169	\$65,063
Hunterdon	\$52,244	\$49,212	\$29,814	--	\$31,690	\$24,185
Mercer	\$52,671	\$52,709	\$33,566	\$26,380	\$43,472	\$31,895
Middlesex	\$53,436	\$57,635	\$30,516	\$28,729	\$37,614	\$22,690
Monmouth	\$50,954	\$52,077	\$31,684	\$22,993	\$36,069	\$47,915
Morris	\$56,267	\$52,718	\$29,551	\$30,212	\$41,040	\$40,416
Ocean	\$44,618	\$42,011	\$28,226	\$28,608	\$31,836	\$39,305
Passaic	\$54,948	\$56,942	\$39,015	\$33,130	\$28,160	\$46,253
Salem	\$49,685	\$54,690	\$25,457	--	--	\$38,500
Somerset	\$57,276	\$53,033	\$33,220	\$38,463	\$40,908	\$42,359
Sussex	\$45,934	\$49,973	\$23,860	--	\$32,151	--
Union	\$55,263	\$59,648	\$36,095	\$32,118	\$53,793	\$44,643
Warren	\$50,220	\$50,027	\$26,482	--	\$24,661	\$35,023

Table 5 If the field is blank it is because information for that job category in that county was not reported by the state.

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Willingboro Education Association helps stuff the bus for students

By Rodney Lane, NJEA Communications Consultant

On a warm and sunny late August day, the Willingboro Education Association (WEA), NJEA and iHeart Media joined together for a “Stuff the Bus” school supply event.

Acme supermarkets provided a space outside of its store to collect donated supplies from individuals and organizations. A school bus was parked in the Acme lot. The goal was to stuff it with school supplies. The event focused on community participation, so donors walked onto the bus itself and placed their contributions anywhere they could fit them. Backpacks, notebooks, writing implements and almost anything a school-aged child would need was donated.

Power 99 FM, featuring DJ Cappuccino, broadcast the event live to the South Jersey and Philadelphia region.

Donations were primarily given by community stakeholders who represented a large and diverse population, including members of the Delta Sigma Theta and Zeta Phi Beta sororities and the Phi Beta Sigma fraternity. Others included Sen. Troy Singleton, Burlington County Commissioner Dan O’Connell, Willingboro Superintendent Dr. Malcolm Outlaw and other administrators, the Burlington County Education Association, and DSW. Grace Baptist Church, Parkway Baptist Church, and Building Kings & Queens, Inc. also made significant donations.

“As a union, we were honored and blessed beyond measure to take the lead in this event,” said Willingboro Education Association President Sabrina Austin. “The outpouring of donations from community members, businesses and organizations made this a profound day for the children and families of Willingboro. We could not have done it without the support of the community. We called out, and they came.”

Several sororities were particularly enthusiastic to participate.

“The Rancocas Valley Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. was glad to support this significant act of selfless giving in the local community,” said President Iraina



Willingboro EA members prepare to lead the way in stuffing a school bus with supplies for students. From left: WEA Vice President Roxanne Jackson, WEA member Megan Sanders, UniServ Field Rep Jessica Cook, WEA President Sabrina Austin, WEA Secretary Glenda Smiley and a representative from Delta Sigma Theta, Inc.

Witherspoon. “Buying school supplies can be a heavy burden for families, and anything we can do to unlock a student’s potential is worth the effort.”

“We are about helping to pave greater advancements for all scholars,” said Pauline Gibson, from the Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., Zeta Delta Zeta Chapter. “As an organization whose emphasis is on service, this helps to keep us honest and humble.”

“Seeing the community support for the NJEA/Willingboro Education Association ‘Stuff the Bus’ event was exciting and inspiring!” said Kecia Parham Cook. “As a proud member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., it gave me great joy to be in service and solidarity for this great purpose.”

“Nothing is more rewarding than supporting the kids in our community and contributing to them having everything they need for a successful school year!” said Khary Davis from Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc.

What made this event extra special was not only the large organizational donations, but the contributions from individuals in the Willingboro community: a pack of pens donated by an unknown Acme shopper, the children who donated their own notebooks, and many others who supported the cause all point to the community’s support for the children of Willingboro.

Celebration of Excellence honors HIPP Grant recipients, State and County ESPs and Teachers of the Year



The Visions Grant for Social Justice went to the Social Justice Art and Book Club in Vernon Township. From left: NJEA Deputy Executive Director Kevin Kelleher, Vision's Business Development Manager Liz McDonough, Vision's Business Development Officer Mary Borrelli, Vision's Community Development Liaison Shari Leone, NJEA President Sean M. Spiller, Grant Recipient Lisa Hirkaler, NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty, Branch Manager Teresa March, New Jersey AVP / RMSO Ada Myteberi, and NJEA Executive Director Steve Swetsky.

NJEA honored the 2022-23 Frederick L. Hipp grant recipients, the 2022 NJEA County Educational Support Professionals (ESPs) of the Year; Nancy Cogland, the 2022 NJEA ESP of the Year; the 2022-23 NJ County Teachers of the Year; Christine Girtain, the 2022-23 NJ State Teacher of the Year; and Awards for Excellence recipients Congressman Andy Kim and Olympian Athing Mu.

The event was sponsored by Visions Federal Credit Union (FCU). In 2021, Visions committed a \$1 million grant to NJEA to be used for the benefit of NJEA members and their students. The grant helps support the work of NJEA's Racial and Social Justice Institute, and funds an annual Hipp grant to a project that aligns with Visions FCU's work on racial and social justice.

NJEA President Sean M. Spiller greeted the audience and shared, for the first time, a video honoring Dr. Frederick L. Hipp, the legendary NJEA executive director for whom the Hipp grants are named.

"Dr. Hipp was one of the people who have had the strongest influence on the course of our organization, and helped build it into the powerhouse it is today," Spiller said. "Twenty-nine years ago, NJEA created the Dr. Frederick L. Hipp Foundation for Excellence in Education and began the grant program that we celebrate today. Since it was

established, the Hipp Foundation has awarded more than \$2.3 million to 443 innovative educational projects that represent a bold, fresh approach by public school employees."

Hipp grants recipients honored

NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson announced the names of the 2022-23 Frederick L. Hipp grant recipients. Eight teams were honored and those present received their commemorative plaques and took photos with NJEA President Sean M. Spiller, Vice President Steve Beatty, Executive Director Steve Swetsky, and Deputy Executive Director Kevin Kelleher.

The Visions Grant for Social Justice went to the Social Justice Art and Book Club. Vernon Township Education Association member Lisa Hirkaler was awarded an \$8,500 grant to meet the interests of middle school students in this rural community who have asked for more multicultural art and literature. This art and book club will identify and provide more opportunities for students to read and examine art and literature that is age appropriate but also explores different perspectives. Hirkaler wants to give them an opportunity to discuss these ideas, create their own art inspired by what they have seen, and visit

an art museum.

Vision's Community Development Liaison Shari Leone spoke about the partnership between NJEA and Visions and the Visions Loves Educators program, a collection of products, services, and grants tailored to the needs of educators. Visions also offers free Zoom workshops to high school students and their families about how to finance college.

To learn more about NJEA's Frederick L. Hipp Grant program, view the Dr. Hipp video, read more details about the winning grants, and to apply for a grant of your own, go to njea.org/hipp.

2022 ESP of the Year speaks

2022 NJEA Educational Support Professional Nancy Cogland spoke about her connection with her students as a paraprofessional at Old Bridge High School. Alongside her other paraprofessional colleagues, Cogland is one of the first members of the school community to greet students each day as they wait outside the school building to usher students off their buses and out of their parents' cars, gently but efficiently ensuring they get the day started off on the right foot.

Alongside Cogland, NJEA recognized the achievements of the 2022 NJEA County Educational Professionals of the Year.

2022/23 Teacher of the Year speaks

2022-23 New Jersey State Teacher of the Year Christine Girtain next addressed the audience and spoke about her journey as an educator. A science teacher and the director of authentic science research in the Toms River Regional School District, Girtain was named the New Jersey State Teacher of the Year in October. She was joined by several past State Teachers of the Year, eager to welcome her into their ranks.

Girtain, who has been teaching for 28 years, all of them in Toms River, is full of energy and eager to jump into the experience of being the State Teacher of the Year. She plans to work with teachers and students to help people better understand where our food comes from, a particularly interesting platform for the Garden State.

Awards for Excellence conferred

Spiller also presented the Awards for Excellence, which honor an outstanding graduate of New Jersey's public schools. This year recipients were Congressman Andy Kim, a graduate of Cherry Hill High School East who represents New Jersey's Third Congressional District, and Athing Mu, a graduate of Trenton Central High School and the youngest woman in history to win Olympic and world titles in an individual track and field event.



Top: Berniece Mitchell, track coach, accepts the NJEA Award for Excellence on behalf of Olympian Athing Mu. From left: Retired Trenton Public School Teacher Thomas Harrington, Mitchell, and NJEA President Sean M. Spiller.

Middle: NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson and 2022-23 New Jersey Teacher of the Year Christine Girtain.

Bottom: 2022 NJEA ESP of the Year Nancy Cogland.

NJEA honors ESP excellence

NJEA hosted its first in-person Educational Support Professionals Conference in three years on the weekend of Sept. 23-25. The last in-person ESP Conference was in February 2020 and was the last large-scale NJEA event prior to pandemic shutdown. As a result, this year's ESP Conference not only honored the 2022 NJEA ESP of the Year but recognized the honorees from 2021 as well.





1. 2022 NJEA ESP of the Year Nancy Cogland accepts congratulations from NJEA's officers. From left: President Sean M. Spiller, Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson, Cogland, and Vice President Steve Beatty.
2. The 2022 County ESPs of the year and the 2022 ESP Career Achievement Award recipient with NJEA's officers. From left: Eugene Wojna (Bergen), Trent Johnson (Passaic), President Sean M. Spiller, Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson, Robert Lilly (Warren), Nancy Richeda (Sussex), Debra DiJohn (Gloucester), Nancy Cogland (Middlesex and 2022 NJEA ESP of the Year), Stacie Smith (Career Achievement), Marijean Andl (Burlington), Damita White-Morris (Cumberland), Amy Tighe (Salem), Linda McRae (Mercer), Susan Berardinelli (Morris), Tricia Butts (Essex), Vice President Steve Beatty. Not pictured: Ashley Vitullo (Atlantic), Debra Falck (Cape May), Theresa Bruno (Hunterdon), Michael Byers (Monmouth), Lori Paton (Ocean), Laura Page (Somerset), and Susanne Waldt (Union).
3. Kimberly Scott-Hayden, now an NJEA associate director for Organizing, was the 2021 NJEA ESP of the Year and the 2021 NEA ESP of the Year. Prior to joining NJEA's full-time staff, Scott-Hayden was an inventory control clerk and president of the East Orange Maintenance Association.
4. NJEA ESP Committee Chair Joann Houck opens the 2022 ESP Conference.
5. ESP Committee member Scott Elliott leads the invocation.
6. The honorees from 2021 were lauded only virtually last year, so the 2022 conference gave them the opportunity to be congratulated in person. From left: NJEA President Sean M. Spiller, NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson, 2021 NJEA/NEA ESP of the Year Kimberly Scott-Hayden, 2021 Friend of Education Ruth Cahill, Union County ESP of the Year Tonya Scott-Cole, Mercer County ESP of the Year Patricia Jones and NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty.
7. NJEA's officers congratulate Stacie Smith as she receives the NJEA ESP Career Achievement Award. Smith, a secretary to the principal at Schuyler-Colfax Middle School in Wayne, also served the secretarial representative to the Wayne Education Association and served on the local association Elections Committee among many other roles in WEA. From left: President Sean M. Spiller, Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson, and Vice President Steve Beatty.
8. NJEA Executive Director Steve Swetsky addresses members at the 48th annual ESP Conference.
9. Gov. Phil Murphy was named the 2022 Friend of ESP for his unwavering support for Job Justice for ESPs. He signed bills protecting ESPs from subcontracting and affording ESPs due-process rights. Unable to attend in person because the conference had been postponed from February 2022, Murphy addressed the conference remotely.
10. The core of the ESP Conference are workshops that strengthen ESP members as advocates and as educators. Latieffa Mackey, a paraprofessional in Matawan Aberdeen, during the workshop, Understanding Your Union and Its Importance to You.
11. ESP Committee member Mark Eckert leads the Pledge of Allegiance.

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NJEA's quick action gets Deptford transportation workers **PAID**

by Daniel R. Dowdy, Esq.



Under the New Jersey Employer-Employee Relations Act, it is unlawful for a school board to change the negotiated pay schedule for employees without warning, and without first negotiating that change with the local association. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the 2022-23 school year, that is precisely what the Deptford Township Board of Education tried to do to its transportation workers.

Without any notice or negotiations, the board changed the pay schedule for these employees. As a result, they would not receive their full first paycheck for the school year on Sept. 15, despite having been paid in equal installments based on scheduled work for decades prior. Worse yet, it did so at the very last moment, only informing the Deptford Education Association of this change on Aug. 31, 2022, less than a week before classes began.

As soon as it became aware of the change in pay schedule, DEA contacted NJEA Region 2 UniServ Representative Lou Randazzo.

"You can't just suddenly change the way you pay these employees," Randazzo said. "They have bills that come

due on the 15th, and they expect a full paycheck. They have mortgages, automatic withdrawals, car payments. They have to buy groceries."

Randazzo referred the matter to two NJEA network attorneys at Selikoff and Cohen, P.A., Keith Waldman and me. We immediately contacted impacted members and swiftly filed for an injunction before the Public Employment Relations Commission (PERC). In doing so, we argued that Deptford transportation workers would suffer irreparable harm because of the board's unilateral change in the pay schedule.

This claim was backed up by certifications from the transportation workers themselves, who were willing to stand up for their right to be paid the way they had every reason to believe they would be paid. Some of these transportation workers had been employed in the school district for 20 or 30 years. With these certifications in hand, Waldman and I asked PERC to issue an order requiring the board to pay its transportation workers in full and to do so without delay.

On Oct. 5, PERC issued a decision agreeing with DEA. In doing so, PERC cited the transportation workers' individual certifications and issued an order requiring the board to return these employees to the pay schedule they had been on for decades. The decision also required that the board pay its transportation workers in full for any payments they had not received prior to the decision, as well as to make them whole for any late fees or other costs they had incurred as a result of their not being paid on time.

Notably, this decision from PERC also discussed the devastating impact a sudden change in pay can have on employees and adopted DEA's argument that even if pay is not reduced overall, a change in the pay schedule itself can hurt workers. Noting that 64% of working families live paycheck-to-paycheck, PERC reasoned that "to an employee whose bills are due today, it is of little consolation to know that, weeks or months from today, he or she will receive a pay bump." This is undoubtedly true.

Quick action and quick thinking by the local association and UniServ, with the full support of NJEA and its legal services team, led to a great victory for these transportation workers, who could have been negatively impacted by the sudden and unplanned changes in their pay structure. 🏆

Daniel R. Dowdy is an attorney with Selikoff & Cohen, P.A. in Mount Laurel. Dowdy is one of NJEA's network attorneys.

EDUCATOR ON THE MOVE

Meet 2022-23 NJ State Teacher of the Year



Christine Girtain

By Kathryn Coulibaly

Christine Girtain appears to be in constant motion. She races down the halls at Toms River High School North and Toms River High School South, two of the three high schools in Toms River, Ocean County, while juggling her responsibilities as a science teacher and the director of Authentic Science Research, a three-year program that allows students to earn college credit while conducting independent research.

Somehow, with her packed calendar, Girtain will have to find a way to fit in being the Ocean County Teacher of the Year and the 2022-23 New Jersey State Teacher of the Year.

“My love of learning—and leading—displayed itself early on,” Girtain remembered. “I used to make my two cousins and my brother, Paul, do leg lifts and repeat after me, ‘ $E = mc^2$.’ We still laugh about this and have no idea why I had them do that, or why they listened to me! But today, my brother Paul is a history teacher at Toms River North, and both of my cousins worked in the schools—one as a teacher, now assistant superintendent, in Stafford Township and the other was a school psychologist who now runs her own family counseling practice.”

Girtain was heavily influenced by both of her parents. Her mother, Judy, was a secretary in the main office at Toms River High School North, which both Girtain and her brother Paul attended.

“She was like the mom of the school,” Girtain said. “She worked there for 18 years. She was always looking out for the new teachers and giving them advice on how to save time.”

Girtain’s father, Paul, worked for American Express and commuted daily into New York City, but he loved astronomy, geology and the sciences. He passed this on to Girtain who remembers the gift of a chemistry set as an early encouragement of her interest in the sciences.

Girtain began her education career in earnest when she received a Governor’s Teaching Scholarship from Gov. Jim Florio, who passed away earlier this year. The scholarship helped her to earn a bachelor’s degree in biology with a concentration in education from The College of New Jersey. She later went on to earn a master’s degree in earth science instruction and curriculum from Kean University.

Girtain applied for teaching jobs but held out hope that her first-choice district, her hometown of Toms River, would come through with an offer of a position. One thing people learn quickly about Girtain is her love for her community. She shares the history of Toms River and is arguably its biggest booster. Girtain was disappointed



Girtain's fellow teacher friends in between classes at Toms River High School North. From left: Jody Parchment, Leslie Withstandley, Kyle Seiverd, Christine Girtain and Jen Huey.

when she did not hear back from the district, and she accepted another position.

At a principal’s meeting shortly after Girtain accepted the other position, Ray Ryan, the principal of Toms River High School North at that time, told the other administrators that another district had already offered Girtain a job. The Toms River assistant superintendent, John Garrabrant, immediately got in touch with Girtain’s mother and asked her to call her in to sign a contract. A thrilled Girtain hurriedly left the beach on the Friday of Memorial Day Weekend and signed the contract.

Always learning

For the next 28 years, Girtain has built an impressive resume. She was named the New Jersey Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Pathways 2019 Teacher of the Year, the National Association of Biology Teachers 2022 Genetics Educator of the Year, 2021 Army Education Outreach Educator of the Year, and the 2021 New Jersey Finalist for the Presidential Awards for Excellence in Math and Science Teaching. In addition, Girtain has brought in more than \$185,000 in grants to fund student research projects and STEM camps. She is

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now seeking funding to bring students to Costa Rica this summer to do research.

"I love the bonds I build with my students, especially teaching the research class," Girtain said. "I am always trying to meet new people and learn new things that I can bring back to my students. The more I learn, the more I can help my students find fulfilling careers. After all, I love my job, and I want the same thing for my students."

Girtain has formed partnerships with the United States Army and Navy to establish a K-12 STEM pipeline with the goal of ensuring the sustainability of the STEM workforce in the United States. In the spring of 2022, she and a colleague took students to Europe for a research and cultural trip. In 2017, they went to Costa Rica with Seeds of Change, an international charitable organization that provides education and resources around health and sustainable farming.

Bioprospecting

In addition, Girtain has worked with teachers from six different states on a bioprospecting workshop. The focus of bioprospecting is to find new potential antibiotics to protect humans, crops and animals.

"It is estimated that ten million people may die annually

“ I am always trying to meet new people and learn new things that I can bring back to my students. ”

by 2050 due to antibiotic resistance," Girtain said. "During the bioprospecting workshop, teachers use leading-edge microbial genetic analysis and bioinformatics tools to learn how to discover novel antibiotic candidates to fight microbes that are resistant to current antibiotics."

Through Seeds of Change, Girtain is helping to establish an East Coast bioprospecting lab that Toms River schools will use to help train more teachers in the area. Part of the training will include how Seeds of Change will facilitate the school's application for intellectual property rights. If a potential antimicrobial candidate is found by Toms River schools, they will be able to monetize it.

"Through this program, our students and teachers will be doing amazing cutting-edge work, and potentially

Authentic Science Research students explore corn leaf angle and prepare to extract DNA from the samples.



fundraising for our schools at the same time," Girtain said.

Girtain and her students have built a global STEM Wolbachia project with Dr. Pirchi Waxman from Giv'atayim, Israel. The students get support from the Bordentstein Lab at Penn State University to run their project looking for the prevalence of a bacterium called Wolbachia in insects. The bacterium has been found to be a sustainable means of blocking the spread of the Dengue and Zika viruses. Girtain's students presented their final work to a panel of scientists from the U.S, Israel, and Switzerland.

"I truly believe that teachers are the farmers of education, growing the next generation of citizens in a global economy," Girtain said.

Eliminating food insecurity

Girtain is interested in using her platform as the New Jersey State Teacher of the Year to help students understand where their food comes from, and why it is important to know that information. She has shared her message on increasing agricultural literacy by working with organizations such as Nourish the Future, the National Corn Growers Association, the United Soybean Board, the Beef Checkoff and The American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture.

"To ensure an equitable education for all our students, we first must ensure that their basic needs are being met," Girtain said. "That means improving access to food and eliminating food insecurity."

A family embedded in Toms River

Girtain credits her success to the efforts of everyone in the district working together as a team to make the best educational experience for students.

"My family has been part of the Toms River school team for many years, from my aunt working in the bus garage and later, at High School East, to my mom in the main office at North, to my brother and I teaching," Girtain said. "My own experiences as a student in Toms River were wonderful. I had so many teachers who believed in me, encouraged me, and sometimes pushed me to succeed. I can remember my third-grade teacher, Virginia White, giving me extra math books to help me raise my math scores so I could qualify for the gifted and talented program. When she passed away, I was given her brass classroom bell."

Girtain's family is extremely proud and supportive of her achievements. When Girtain was named the New Jersey Teacher of the Year, her husband, Andy, who co-owns Girtain Sign Company with his two sisters, posted a billboard celebrating her across town. Several local McDonald's restaurants have changed their signs to join in celebrating Girtain.

Girtain's children, Josh, a freshman at High School

North, and Jaime, a student at The College of New Jersey studying mechanical engineering, are unsurprised but delighted at the recognition their mother is receiving. As they have seen, her boundless energy and enthusiasm keeps things interesting, in- and outside the classroom.

As the New Jersey State Teacher of the Year, Girtain is entitled to a paid, six-month sabbatical from January through June 2023 to attend national and state conferences, to tour the state visiting classrooms and to work on various initiatives at the New Jersey Department of Education, courtesy of program sponsor ETS. ETS will also provide her with \$3,000 worth of technology equipment.

NJEA will provide a new leased car, equipped with EZ Pass, to help her travel to speaking engagements and meetings across the state. NJEA also will provide complimentary access to all major NJEA workshops and training opportunities, a \$500 clothing allowance, media training and communications support, and funding for a trip to Washington, D.C. to meet with the other state teachers of the year and the president of the United States.

"I'm excited to collaborate with other teachers and learn more about what they're doing in their classrooms," Girtain said. "I'm eager to bring all of that back to Toms River and my students once this year is over."

Clearly, Girtain's constant motion is unlikely to change any time soon. 🚗



Three steps to creating a classroom that celebrates **NEURODIVERSITY**

By Jennifer Russ

What is neurodiversity?

As teachers, we know that a diverse community is a strong community. We take time to celebrate our students' varied cultures, languages and traditions. We make bulletin boards and plan activities for Black History Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, Women's History Month, and LGBTQIA+ History Month, recognizing the many contributions and achievements of marginalized people in American history.

So why don't we have an Autistic History Month that celebrates the many contributions and achievements of autistic people?

I know what you're thinking—we have April, Autism Awareness Month. Take a moment, however, to think about the difference between an awareness month and a history month. An awareness month suggests that autism is a malady, while a history month celebrates its existence.

In his book *We're Not Broken*, autistic author Eric Garcia recounts a public service announcement he saw as a teenager in which some of his favorite musicians rallied to "put an end to autism."

"I think about the irony of the fact that Kiss, a band that taught me that being aggressively bombastic can be a good thing, saw autism as a disease on par with cancer," Garcia says. On the contrary, Garcia credits his neurodivergence as beneficial in his field of expertise: political journalism. He

says that when he found the field, he loved "the fact that I was working ... in a profession where my encyclopedic knowledge of politics was celebrated."

Neurodiversity is a lens through which we can shift our mindset from viewing naturally occurring—and common—variations of human cognition such as autism, attention deficit hyperactivity "disorder" (ADHD) and dyslexia not as handicaps to be pitied or cured, but differences to be celebrated, just as we celebrate our diverse cultures, bodies and talents.

Neurodivergence in our students and peers is more common than you might think. The American Psychological Association (APA) estimates 8.5% of students have ADHD, the Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity estimates that 10-20% of the world has dyslexia, and the CDC says that 1 in 44 children have diagnosed autism. Those numbers don't take into consideration the many people who have yet to receive a diagnosis—and those who never will.

So, how do we, as educational professionals, participate in the movement to celebrate neurodiversity?

Step 1: Shift your mindset and help students shift theirs

A third grader calls herself an idiot for needing modifications. A middle schooler refers the kids pulled for small group instruction as "the stupid group." A group of teenagers jokingly call each other "special ed" as a pejorative.

Have you witnessed any of these scenarios?

In his book, *Neurodiversity in the Classroom*, author and educator Thomas Armstrong writes that his former student, now an adult, described their experience in a special education setting like this: "They thought I was bad at something, so they tested me to find exactly how bad I was at it, and then spent the next years of my life making me do what I was bad at as much as possible."



Armstrong points out that in special education, schools start out by identifying what's "wrong" with a student and classify them based on their weaknesses.

The remedy? We must shift our mindsets. Before we address a students' weaknesses, we must first know and celebrate their strengths.

Consider the benefits to being neurodiverse. In their book, *The Dyslexic Advantage*, Fernette and Brock Eide highlight the advantages of being dyslexic. In a 2011 interview for *Wired* magazine, Fernette Eide explains that dyslexic brains are especially good at processing the big picture. She says, "They establish a different pattern of connections and circuitry, creating a different kind of problem-solving apparatus," which, Brock says makes them "more in touch with or mindful of the tasks they're engaged in, and as a result makes them more likely to innovate and tweak and modify."

More and more professionals are noting the advantages of having a neurodivergent brain, and powerful companies are taking note of these advantages. In the Harvard Business Review article, "Neurodiversity is a Competitive Advantage," writers Robert D. Austin and Gary P. Pisano point out that companies like Hewlett Packard Enterprise, Microsoft, Ford, IBM, and JPMorgan Chase all have programs seeking neurodiverse talent. Managers say that these practices are paying off on many levels.

Sigrid May Shelton-Stiefel, a licensed practical nurse from Cape May Court House who was diagnosed with ADHD and obsessive-compulsive "disorder" (OCD), says that her neurodivergence is a gift in her workplace, an assisted living facility.

"I think some of my strengths are my attentiveness and my high energy personality," Shelton-Stiefel says. "It really helps me with my career as a nurse. I'm never being told that I'm not productive at work. I'm a leader, and co-workers look up to me if there's an issue."

A word of caution: don't assume that just because a student has a specific diagnosis they'll fit any of the profiles of advantages above. Likewise, students shouldn't need a diagnosis to deserve their strengths highlighted. Instead, educators should provide opportunities for all students to think about, share, and cultivate their strengths. Know your students' strengths and take every opportunity to remind them that you know and value them as individuals.

For some ideas on some activities that highlight student strengths, check out the sidebars.

Jennifer Russ is a seventh and eighth grade English/language arts teacher at Hackettstown Middle School. She is a union representative and the recording secretary of the Hackettstown Education Association. Russ can be reached at jennifer.lynn.russ@gmail.com.

“ They thought I was bad at something, so they tested me to find exactly how bad I was at it, and then spent the next years of my life making me do what I was bad at as much as possible.

Step 2: Create welcoming spaces for the body and mind

The second step is to assess the physical and mental space of your classroom and how it might affect someone with a neurodivergent brain. This means taking the time to listen to neurodivergent people tell you what helps and hinders them.

If students know what they need, by all means, provide them with those resources; however, it's likely that most students will need help exploring techniques. Thankfully, there are many neurodiverse adults with advice to give if you're willing to listen.

"Meet your students where they're at," begs Hannah Lappin, who graduated in August from American University with her master's degree in counterterrorism.

Lappin, always a motivated student, was diagnosed with dyscalculia in high school, but prior to that, struggled to understand the basics in math class. She remembers a teacher who became frustrated with her for not understanding simple calculations, and often chalked it up to Lappin not paying attention. On the contrary, Lappin was paying rapt attention, although she admits that a kind student sitting next to her explained it in a more helpful way, so she sometimes asked her for help.

Later, a different teacher addressed her weaknesses before and after school without shaming her. They went back to the basics. The teacher was patient and allowed Lappin the extended time she needed to learn concepts. Lappin says she wishes that more teachers tried teaching her in different ways when she didn't understand something instead of blaming her for not paying attention.

Similarly, Ellis Jasenovic, NJEA member and high school band director at Montville Township High School, says that teachers who kindly refocused him when he was drifting off and encouraged him to hand-write his notes instead of typing them were game-changers for him.

"Later, I found the reasoning behind this, which I still share with my students today," Jasenovic says. "It allows

you to not only remember your information better, but makes you slow down and focus more intently.”

Jasenovic was diagnosed with Tourette’s, OCD, and ADHD in elementary school, and is now a professional musician in addition to being a teacher.

“We all process information differently,” he says, “and the same study strategies do not work for everyone. Try to teach the same concept in different ways and encourage your students to explore their own learning strategies. The better we know ourselves, the better chance we have at being successful learners.”

The article, “Valuing Differences: Neurodiversity in the Classroom” authored by three neurodivergent professionals and published in 2017, shares some helpful tips for teachers of students with autism, ADHD, and dyslexia. Barb Rentenbach, an autistic woman who does not communicate using spoken language, urges teachers to “make room for nonverbal communication.” Her thinking, she says, is not language-based, but when she learned to type, she was able to take her time to break her thoughts down and translate them into language. Now, she is an eloquent writer.

“Listen [to your students],” she says. “If students are not talking or typing, find other ways to observe them.”

The woman who taught Rentenbach how to write, and the second author of the article, Lois Prislowsky, an educational psychologist with ADHD, says she learns best when listening to podcasts at 1.5 or two times the speed on a treadmill.

“Students with ADHD work best when their bodies are active,” says Prislowsky, “rather than assuming they ought to sit still, look for opportunities to get them moving.”

She also advises teachers to lean into the ADHD brain’s need for intense stimuli, providing students with opportunities to exercise, juggle or complete physical tasks while they complete their work.

For students with dyslexia, Prislowsky advises teachers to think critically about the texts they will assign.

“Given that it will take extra effort, skill, and courage for some students to consume printed texts independently, create reasons for reading that are truly compelling and linked to students’ goals and interests,” she writes.

Step 3: Celebrate the ‘weird’

Finally, turn “weird” into the most desirable trait in your classroom.

Many traits or behaviors common in neurodivergent people are dismissed by others as “weird.” Other students may roll their eyes at “strange” or “annoying” behavior, while well-meaning adults will try to convince students to normalize.

Take stimming, for example, referred to in the medical community as “stereotypy.” All people stim to some

Activities that highlight student strengths

Take a multiple intelligence test

You can take the test, too—share your weaknesses and find students who excel in the areas that challenge you. You can find a good one here: literacynet.org/mi/assessment/findyourstrengths.html

Encourage journaling

Journals are great opportunities to encourage kids to create time and space to think positively about themselves. You can also integrate reflection on personal strengths in formal writing assignments, as well.

Integrate career exploration, especially nonacademic careers

There are many careers outside of academic fields, but students tend to be told that if school is a struggle, they’ll never succeed. Take time to discuss and allow student exploration of these careers that would utilize their strengths and capitalize on what thrills them.

Compliment and praise

As a general rule, try to praise a student twice as often as you point out a need for improvement.

extent—“stim” is short for stimulation, and almost everyone taps their feet or twists their hair around their fingers—but autistic people and other neurodivergent people are more likely to stim frequently and expressively. While some stims can be harmful or disruptive, the vast majority are harmless. Many neurodivergent people will tell you that they hand-flap, spin, flick their fingers, or repeat phrases to self-soothe and express joy.

Meanwhile, a Google search for “stimming” reveals serious article titles like, “What You Need to Know About Stimming and Autism,” “Stimming: Why it Happens and How to Manage It.” In many classrooms, educational professionals will discourage and even punish stimming. Recent educational research suggests that this practice is more harmful for neurodivergent people than helpful, and that we should turn our focus away from “managing behaviors” to developing environments that accept and understand those behaviors as integral parts of what makes neurodivergent students unique and excellent.

Because of this, consider how you can turn “weird”

into a compliment in your classroom. Engage students in their special interests, even if society says those interests are strange, or if you're worried the interest is obsessive or immature.

In her article "Pressure to be 'Age Appropriate' Can Harm Autistic People," Christine Motokane, an autistic woman, says, "Telling autistic people they shouldn't like certain things because it's not 'age appropriate' is one way of denying them choice and control over their own lives ... a child's happiness is more important than fitting in. They will find people who will accept them the way they are."

Barb Rentenbach, the nonspeaking autistic author from *Valuing Differences* says that tapping into those unusual interests may be the key to learning for some students.

"Having discovered one interest, at least, teachers can tap into it as a source of learning opportunities and socialization," Rentenbach says. "Favorite and familiar themes create fertile ground for us to initiate and sustain efforts to practice academic and social skills that do not come easily."

Finally, if you really want to create an accepting, nurturing environment for neurodivergent students, you will need to assess your personal definition of the word "weird." Challenge yourself to accept the things in students that you find unusual—and not just in the students who you know are neurodivergent. Remember that many neurodivergent people don't receive diagnoses until later in life, and some will never be officially diagnosed.

Often, students with gender variance, or a gender identity or expression that is outside cultural norms, struggle to be accepted. They are also often neurodivergent. In *We're Not Broken*, Eric Garcia points out the connection: gender variance is almost eight times more common in autistic people, and children with autism are four times more likely to experience gender dysphoria. Failing to respect students' gender expression, identity or preferred pronouns may be what creates a hostile environment for neurodivergent students.

Regardless of diagnosis, all students benefit from an environment where differences are celebrated.

"What hindered my progress as a student was definitely the pressures of being 'normal' and fitting in. As you get older, you learn to accept yourself and differences," says Shelton-Stiefel. "When you're younger you just kinda fight them because you want to fit in."

In the meantime, though, she has this advice for teachers: "Kind words are everything."

Jasenovic says that if he could tell the young version of himself anything, it would be this: "It's OK to be different! Life would be pretty boring if we all acted the same."

If you start to feel overwhelmed, remember the adage that students may not remember what you taught but will always remember how you made them feel. Because

“**Educators should provide opportunities for all students to think about, share, and cultivate their strengths.**”

of the world we live in, neurodivergent students need advocates who validate and support them.

"Small moments within everyday classroom interactions shape students' understandings of school, of themselves, and of others," the authors of *Valuing Differences* remind us. Find ways to remind your neurodiverse students that they are lovable and valuable just the way they are, and that our classrooms are stronger and better because they are in them. 🧠

Ways to celebrate the 'weird'

Make collages

Put out a stack of magazines and have students cut out pictures and make weird collage art out of whatever strikes their fancy. Decorate the room.

Engage in conversations

Strike up conversations about students' special interests, even if you find them unusual or have no background in them. Ask questions. Show interest—even if you're not interested. Assign projects that give students a chance to research their special interests.

Highlight celebrities or others who thought outside the box

Many entrepreneurs, artists and pioneers in their fields are neurodiverse. Highlight people who thought differently and excelled because of that, not in spite of it.

Model acceptance

Your students watch you for your reactions. When a student does something other kids think is weird, show your acceptance, or better yet, approval!

JERSEY CITY SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS

Keeping speech and language services alive during the COVID-19 pandemic

by Tiffany Smolansky and Kathleen De Gregorio



Jersey City's speech-language pathologists collaborated to enhance at-home learning during the pandemic.

The Jersey City Public Schools speech-language pathologists (SLPs) were faced with a dilemma as the COVID-19 pandemic swept the nation. On March 13, 2020, the Jersey City school buildings closed for what was first thought to be a brief period. School supplies, books, and therapy materials were left behind. The pandemic forced school districts to reevaluate student learning almost overnight. The SLPs were challenged to carry out therapy services via a remote platform—a completely uncharted territory.

Tiffany Smolansky is a special education supervisor in Jersey City Public School, where she previously served as a speech and language pathologist. Kathleen De Gregorio is a speech consultant who works with the district. They can be reached at jcboespeech@gmail.com.

The challenge

While districts scrambled to get remote learning platforms in place, it became apparent that communication with teachers, parents and students was going to be the key to the success of any effective distance learning initiatives. Related service providers were also going to be challenged to explore new and innovative ways to address the specific needs of students in a remote learning environment.

SLPs collaborated with each other and accepted this challenge. They networked to determine ways to enhance speech and language learning at home, supplement services that students were receiving remotely, provide therapists with resources to share with their colleagues and give parents access to additional resources that they could use for their children.

“Educators and related service providers across the country have visited the site and expressed appreciation for the information provided.



Assistant Superintendent for Special Education Dr. Gerry Crisonino, Jersey City Superintendent Dr. Norma Fernandez, Special Education Supervisor Tiffany Smolansky and Speech Consultant Kathleen De Gregorio.

Since Jersey City Public Schools had over 1,600 students receiving speech and language services, including 144 special classes for students with autism spectrum disorder districtwide, this would be an enormous challenge. How would the speech pathologists be able to meet student needs remotely?

The solution: A website is born

The SLPs knew something had to be done, so they sprang into action. Since communication is their specialty, a team of SLPs collaborated to generate new ideas and potential solutions for ways to reach all the students who needed speech and language therapy services. This sparked a unique, and ultimately award-winning idea.

Two SLPs and NJEA members Tiffany Smolansky, MS, CCC-SLP and Colleen Kenny, MS, CCC-SLP, created the district's very first speech and language website, *jcboespeech.com*. The SLPs received unwavering support from Dr. Gerry Crisonino, assistant superintendent of Special Education, and Danielle Gitlin, their Special Education supervisor, at the time.

The website was up and running on March 29, 2020, just 15 days after the announced school closings. In addition to the district sending home packets of speech and language activities and therapists providing teleservices, the parents, teachers and therapists now had another effective and creative resource at their disposal to assist their children during this pandemic. The JCBOE speech website is designed to address and provide lessons and resources

for all areas of speech and language in the public schools.

Since its launch, the website has been utilized by many families and educators across the district. In addition, educators and related service providers across the country have visited the site and expressed appreciation for the information provided. The Jersey City speech website was submitted to the New Jersey School Board Leader Exemplary Programs during COVID, in 2020 by Kathleen De Gregorio, a speech consultant to the district. It was declared a winner and we are proud to say that we now have an award-winning platform for our therapists, teachers, parents and the community to access.

Teamwork is dreamwork!

To maintain the most up-to-date and research-based speech and language content, over 30 Jersey City SLPs continuously contribute original materials, including YouTube videos, live lessons, and interactive activities for the students. Summer activities are also provided for students to maintain their communication skills when school is not in session.

All resources and materials found on the website, including original content and submissions, are intended for use by the public and updated on a weekly basis by Smolansky and Kenny. We hope that all NJEA members will access the website and provide feedback to us, so we can continue to evolve.

SLPs and their contributions

A website was one way to connect students with educators during the pandemic. But the return to in-person instruction presented its own challenges. Students needed to learn how to reconnect. Three Jersey City Education Association members, Maggie Cecchini, Linda Miller, and Alex Nikodem, share how they helped students reconnect and communicate from a speech-language perspective.

Communication boards for Jersey City Public Schools

Contributed by JCEA member Maggie Cecchini, M.A., CCC-SLP

As I was browsing online, I found a fellow New Jersey speech therapist, Molly Cervini from Eat Play Learn LLC, who unveiled a communication board in her local park.

A communication board is a sheet of symbols, pictures or photos that a child will learn to point to, to communicate with those around them. This sparked my interest. It was a wonderful idea to support inclusivity for nonspeaking children within their local community.

When I presented the idea of obtaining a community communication board for our district, the administration whole-heartedly supported my vision. We are extremely grateful that Subaru's "Share the Love" was able to fund seven communication boards for the Jersey City Public Schools. Each board will be placed near cafeterias or in outdoor courtyards at schools that have a high population of students on the autism spectrum.

The boards will enable nonspeaking students to have access to language support during lunch and recess. Not only will the boards benefit the students with functional communication skills, but they will also promote interdisciplinary collaboration for speech-language pathologists and teachers.

Bridging the Gap: The Auditorily Impaired Program

Contributed by JCEA member Linda Miller, M.A., SLS

I work at P.S. #27 in Jersey City and while I provide service to all students, my focus is with Deaf and Hard of Hearing students. In 2013, I was a part of the first class to graduate from the interpreter training program at Passaic County Community College. Before coming to Jersey City, I used my interpretation skills as a job coach for Deaf adults at Goodwill Industries in Harrison.

I am also a part of a Newark-based organization called Deaf Advocacy Group. We are currently training police

officers and other first responders on how to communicate with Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals of all ages. We are also working with various state lawmakers to make improvements to laws that will improve the lives of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

A vital program for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Jersey City Public Schools generally, and P.S. #27 in particular, has yielded many great opportunities, including:

- Workshops teaching basic sign language to the Speech Department.
- Weekly basic sign language training to building staff at PS #27.
- In 2018, I brought in a speaker for Black History Month to discuss being Black and Deaf to our middle school students.
- In 2019, I started teaching basic sign language to hearing students after school.
- In 2019, we had our first-ever "bridging the gap" social event for our Deaf and hearing students from the after-school program. The following year, we invited members of the community. And in 2022 the event included special guests: Deaf Advocacy Group of NJ founder Thyson Halley, JCEA Executive Member Colleen Kelleher and NJEA President Sean M. Spiller.
- In 2021-22 the Sign Club resumed.

I truly enjoy working with my students and their families. I enjoy helping our staff communicate better

The MTG Club at Academy 1 Middle School: An Opportunity to Reconnect after Remote Learning

Contributed by Alex Nikodem, M.S., CCC-SLP

It is 2:55 p.m. at Academy 1 Middle School in Jersey City. Two students sit across from each other in the life-skills room, shuffling their sleeved cards. To unsuspecting observers, they might think that they were witnessing an over-glorified version of solitaire. But to the wise and knowing, these two individuals were in fact caught in an epic struggle for resources and power.

This was not the Hunger Games, but instead, Magic the Gathering, the very first trading card game. Magic the Gathering was created in 1993 by mathematician Richard Garfield. Unlike many games of its time, it has lasted decades and has become a part of pop culture and

The two players were both members the Academy 1 MTG, and after-school club. One student was utilizing



Jersey City speech-language pathologist and JCEA member Maggie Cecchini led the effort to place communication boards in public areas in the schools to enable nonverbal students to communicate.

an aggressive strategy that tried to win quickly at all costs, while the other student was waiting patiently for an opening to play their counter spells. The students wore smiles on their faces and appeared like they were having the time of their lives.

At its heart, Magic the Gathering is a social game. Two players each bring a deck of at least 60 cards. The players greet one another, extend handshakes, and what follows is not so much a card game as it is a conversation. Both players need to communicate what they are doing for the game to proceed. Players each signal when their turn is over and acknowledge each other's actions. There is surprise, disagreement, feats of power, shows of mercy, and above all, mutual respect.

I first played Magic the Gathering in college, and I quickly became enamored with the design, mechanics and lore involved in the game. It takes the very best features from chess and Dungeons and Dragons and molds them into an addictive and satisfying trading card game. I knew that I wanted to share this game with the next generation of young players. I saw a need that was going unfulfilled and realized how much good this game could do for young minds that were being over-saturated with technology. Coming out of the pandemic, having been trapped in their rooms, staring maniacally at their computer screens, many

students had unknowingly suffered from social skill atrophy.

Being a speech and language pathologist who was both passionate and concerned, I knew that students needed a chance to exercise their social and linguistic muscles. I opened the club and almost immediately about 14 students joined. It was trying at times because besides having to learn the complex rules involved in the game, students had to recall what it was like to once again be a part of a gathering as the name of the card game proudly proclaims. The guiding principle of the club is to promote social-emotional learning, good etiquette, and a sense of belonging and community.

Fast forward to June 2022. Students who were once timid and sitting by themselves at sparsely spaced tables counting their fingernails, were now confident and bold "planeswalkers" (among the most powerful beings in the multiverse) seated together, spell-slinging and just having a fantastic time. I saw students who never smiled or cracked a joke find a place where they could be both silly and serious.

A core premise of the world of Magic the Gathering is to find your spark—that unique enigmatic quality that defines a person. In that dusty, poorly lit classroom, wrapped in a world of fantasy and fellowship, I get the impression that students had found their sparks. 🌟



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1: NJEA President Sean M. Spiller (center), NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty (r), and NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson (l) cut the ribbon to open the 2022 NJEA Convention, joined by national, state and local leaders in the association and public education.

2: March for Our Live Co-Founder David Hogg discusses his experiences at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School and as an advocate for gun safety.

3: NJREA President Joan Wright at the Members of Color Brunch.

4: The New Jersey All-State Jazz Ensemble and Honors Choir performance at the Claridge Theater.

5: Deaf activist, model and actor Nyle DiMarco with NJEA President Sean M. Spiller and NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson.

6: NJEA President Sean M. Spiller hosted a panel discussion with, from right: LeVar Burton, Rebekkah Bruesehoff, Orion Jean, Kate Lee and Larry Abrams.

7: Gov. Phil Murphy visited the Educational Support Professionals Pavilion on Main Street NJEA.

8: Leaders of unions representing staff at Amazon, Apple, Starbucks and Shop-Rite during a panel at the convention: Derrick Palmer, Sean M. Spiller, Jacob Nardone, Chris Smalls, Hailey Kenney, Petal Robertson, and Didier Jimenez.



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9: The reception hosted by the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Committee attracted national and state leaders, including, from left: NEA Vice President Princess Moss, NEA Secretary-Treasurer Noel Candelaria, NJEA Secretary-Treasurer Petal Robertson, NJEA President Sean M. Spiller, NEA Executive Committee member Christine Sampson Clark (4th from right in back) and NEA Director Kevin Deely.

10: Nikole Hannh-Jones discusses the 1619 Project.

11: Goat yoga was a feature of the Health and Wellness Area.

12: Members anticipating Nikole Hannh-Jones' keynote address.

13: The Early Career Member Network.

14: The New Jersey All-State Chorus and Orchestra performed on Friday in Boardwalk Hall.

15: Lauren Spiller with Gov. Murphy.

16: Assemblywoman Linda Carter, an NJEA member, addresses the Higher Education Luncheon.

17. Gov. Phil Murphy at the Thursday morning panel with NJEA's officers and LeVar Burton, Rebekkah Bruesehoff, Orion Jean, Kate Lee and Larry Abrams.

18: Talena Queen, the poet laureate of Paterson and a Paterson EA member, leads "Healing Through the Written Word" in The NJEA Consortium Area.





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19: An African drumming team performed throughout the convention center and especially at the beginning of each keynote address.

20: In the NJEA Consortium Area of the convention floor, presenters read and discuss inclusive texts, the 1619 Project's *Born on the Water*, was among them.

21: NJEA Preservice Vice President Matthew Yuro with 2022-23 Camden County Teacher of the Year Michael Weppler during the Hot Topics with County Teachers of the Year workshop.

22: The NJEA Patriots Alliance met for breakfast on Thursday morning.

23: NJEA member Margie Muir Shylock at the LGBTQIA+ Banned Books Drag Queen Story Hour with Astala Vista and Vinchelle.

24: New Jersey First Lady Tammy Murphy with members from Passaic County. From left: PCEA Secretary Dennis Carroll, Wayne EA 2nd Vice President Kerriann Palmieri, Wayne EA President Eda Ferrante, Murphy, Wayne EA 1st Vice President Donna Reaver, PCEA and Wayne EA Treasurer Robert Sarti and NJEA President Sean M. Spiller.

25: Therapy dogs were a feature of the Health and Wellness Area, including Alma. Humans from left: NJEA Convention Committee members Jaclyn Conahey, Sturrae Meyers, Susan Davis, and Robert Sheridan. Davis chairs the committee.

26: Acting Commissioner of Education Angelica Allen-McMillan discusses education policy with NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty.

27: ESPAN, the Educational Support Professionals Advocacy Network, seeks to strengthen the voice of ESP members in the association and at the local, state, and national levels. From left: Jacqueline Kruzik, KelleyAnn Morris, and Adam Sheridan

For more convention photos, visit [flickr.com/photos/njea/albums](https://www.flickr.com/photos/njea/albums).



TOILET RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS

Yet school bus drivers have no place to go

By Dorothy Wigmore

Imagine a job where you aren't sure if or when you can use a bathroom. Where you have to line up with lots of others to use one washroom in a short time. Where studies show guys pee in a bottle at the side of the road, while women try to find appropriate devices to do the same.

Too often, that's normal for bus drivers, according to a 2020 report (see Resources). The 60-some drivers at West Milford township's school bus transportation department are one example of those dealing with bathroom access.

"We struggle with this every day," says Dana Bekiers, chair of the West Milford Bus Drivers Association's (WMBDA) newly formed health and safety committee. Bekiers is also WMBDA's vice president. The district's bus transportation yard trailer has only one bathroom.

"If you need to use the bathroom—which pretty much everybody usually does—you go to the trailer, and there's a very long line to try to get into it," Bekiers says. "Some people don't have enough time. Depending on your route, you might have five minutes, some people might have 20, some might have 10."

Drivers end up peeing at the side of the road, not drinking liquids, avoiding heart meds, and more. It's particularly problematic for pregnant and menstruating women, or anyone with incontinence, irritable bowel syndrome, conditions requiring urgent access, or taking some medications. The short- and long-term health effects can be serious. (See graphic.)

Anxiety is another consequence, says Brianna O'Connor, another WMBDA member. She's seen it at least once in her short tenure as a bus driver.

Without a contract clause or policies, drivers have few options.

"There are times during the winter when the bathroom pipes freeze," Bekiers adds. "So we have to beg and plead

to get into our supervisor's office to use her bathroom. At times during COVID, they wouldn't allow us to use her bathroom because they were concerned with the number of people coming through that building."

Sometimes drivers can dash into a school. That's difficult when parents are dropping off children at the same doors, or with limited time on packed runs. It's impossible when schools aren't open. Without keycard access, drivers depend on someone in the building letting them in.

At the local's October meeting, drivers reported that once inside, they often are directed to student washrooms; with union support they're now heading for an adult-only one, although it can take more time.

This is a long-time issue for transit operators around the world. That led the International Transport Federation (ITF) to issue the Transport Workers' Sanitation Charter in 2019. They also supported the United Nations declaration of World Toilet Day on November 19.

The hazard also is a common public health issue, Lezlie Lowe says in her book, *No Place to Go. How Public Toilets*

What can health and safety committees and locals do?

- Get stories: survey bus drivers and other "mobile" workers about bathroom access, asking about health effects and solutions too.
- Use the results, OSHA rules, the ITF charter and NAS report's tools and best practices to develop gender-sensitive solutions that accommodate all members.
- Negotiate and enforce agreements about bathroom access for whenever members need it.
- Support efforts to ensure all members have easy bathroom access as needed.

Dorothy Wigmore is a consultant to the New Jersey Work Environment Council and a long-time health and safety specialist, trained in occupational hygiene, ergonomics, and "stress." She has worked in Canada, the U.S. and Mozambique, focusing on prevention and worker participation to solve job-related hazards.



Inadequate restroom access ... not only impacts operators' well-being but threatens their ability to perform essential job functions safely. Practical, simple approaches have been adopted but are not in use at all transit agencies. Even when effective policies and procedures are in place, operational demands can override safety and health directives.

– National Academies of Science, Improving the Safety, Health, and Productivity of Transit Operators Through Adequate Restroom Access

Fail Our Private Needs. She argues public bathroom access “is about cities, society, design, movement, and equity.”

The 2020 National Academies of Science (NAS) report “Improving the Safety, Health, and Productivity of Transit Operators Through Adequate Restroom Access,” agrees. The report makes clear that time to go is a key equity issue.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Sanitation Standard, adopted by New Jersey Public Employees Occupational Safety and Health (PEOSH), recognizes this. It is designed, “to ensure that workers do not suffer adverse health effects that can result if toilets are not sanitary and/or are not available when needed.”

That means employers must:

- Let workers leave their work location to use a restroom when needed.
- Prevent long lines with enough restrooms for the size of the workforce. (60 workers need four “water closets.” (Equitable gender access is a concern too.)
- Avoid imposing unreasonable restrictions on restroom use.
- Ensure restrictions (e.g., locking doors, requiring workers sign out a key) don’t cause extended delays.)

When the job site of a mobile worker—like school bus drivers—doesn’t have a bathroom, employers must provide “readily available transportation” that gives “prompt access (i.e., less than 10 minutes)” to those facilities somewhere nearby. That could be a restaurant, store or office building, where there’s an access agreement for bus drivers.

The NAS report provides a walking-time calculator, checklists, tools and solutions including union contract clauses. Their best practices make clear drivers need to be involved in planning, there’s not a one-size-fits-all solution, and it’s about the quality as well as quantity.

It also includes agreements to let bus drivers use the facilities in stores, restaurants, etc. That’s difficult in rural areas, Bekiers says. So the board of education office directly across the street from the West Milford bus yard is on their list for discussion with the district. As a result of the local’s meeting, members are ready to support drivers with that request and more. 🏠

Restricted restroom access can affect operator health

- Urological
- Central nervous system
- Gastrointestinal
- Reproductive
- Multi-organ involvement

What results are possible?

Urological problems

- UTIs
- Kidney stones

Gastrointestinal problems

- Constipation, impaction

Cognitive impairment

- Reduced attention, awareness
- Motor vehicle accidents

Cardiovascular disease

- Hypertension
- Atherosclerosis
- Heart Attack
- Stroke

Reproductive Health

- Male fertility
- Low birth weight

Cancer

- Bladder
- Colorectal

Toxic shock syndrome

- Multiple organs affected

Many likely mediated by dehydration

What increases urination needs?

- Drinking
- Eating
- Pregnancy
- Age
- Illness
- Job stress
- Colder temperature
- Whole body vibration

What are the job stress & strain concerns?

- Harassment
- Anxiety
- Scheduling issues
- Vigilance
- Increased runtime
- Lost productivity
- Dignity
- Humiliation
- Distraction
- Long working hours

What is the public health impact?

- Passenger safety
- Reduced hand washing
- Use of containers
- Voiding in vehicles or public areas



Figure 1-9 Connections between restroom access and operator health and safety.

Image developed by D. Wigmore

From: National Academies of Science, Improving the safety, health, and productivity of transit operators through adequate restroom access.

Resources

International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF)

“ITF Sanitation Charter,” 2019
bit.ly/3W0nmXs

Lezlie Lowe

No Place to Go: How Public Toilets Fail Our Private Needs
lezzielowe.com/books

National Academies of Science

“Improving the Safety, Health, and Productivity of Transit Operators Through Adequate Restroom Access,” 2020
bit.ly/3FneLZg

Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)

“Restrooms and Sanitation Requirements”
osha.gov/SLTC/restrooms_sanitation.

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Everyone belongs at the policy table

By Elisabeth Yucis

Recently, I reread Brené Brown's 2017 book *Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and The Courage to Stand Alone*. Viewed through a 2022 lens, Brown's insights about community, connection, trust and self-knowledge are more relevant now than ever. The book's central concept is that the feeling of authentic belonging—defined by Brown as “the innate desire to be part of something bigger than oneself”—can only be experienced when we are true to ourselves. As Brown says, “You will always belong anywhere you show up as yourself.”

I've been thinking a lot about Brown's definition of belonging and how it relates to my work. As NJEA's policy liaison to the State Board of Education (SBOE), I analyze regulatory proposals and coordinate our official written testimony. I also work to collect and submit compilations of member testimony on selected issues.

The SBOE is required to allot time for a public comment on any regulations or amendments to regulations under its consideration. The public comment period is intended to foster transparency and engage with stakeholders. The belief behind this process is that the regulations will be better when policymakers consider diverse perspectives. It is an acknowledgement that broad input is valuable and that everyone's voice matters.

When I consider NJEA's response to regulatory proposals, in addition to drawing on the association's organizational values and belief statements, I bring all my past experiences as a student, teacher, parent and community member: everything is relevant. Through this work, I have begun to dig into the power of bringing our whole selves to the table in conversations around policy.

Even though we are all imperfect and move through life with blind spots, internal biases and a lifetime of anecdotal data, our experiences and insights have intrinsic value at the policy table. We all have a duty to educate ourselves by exploring different perspectives, and then use our voices to work collectively toward a more just and equitable world through the implementation of inclusive policy.

This powerful outside work starts with us doing the inner work of knowing who we are, understanding the

Elisabeth Yucis is an associate director in the NJEA Professional Development and Instructional Issues Division. She can be reached at eyucis@njea.org.

“**The belief behind this process is that the regulations will be better when policymakers consider diverse perspectives.**”

forces that shaped us, and being brave enough to speak and live our truths. Everyone's perspective matters and can serve as a building block for consensus that drives positive change.

On a broader level, the concept of belonging is crucial to our work as unionists and educators. All our past experiences, our gained wisdom, our constantly evolving worldviews and our personalities, make us unique and uniquely qualified to lead and serve from anywhere. Those who make the brave decision to show up as themselves in their union work strengthen their association by creating a culture of belonging that helps everyone to be better. Similarly, those who embrace their uniqueness at school help create a school culture that nurtures diversity and mutual respect.

In a world where we face unrelenting pressure to fit in and be seen as utterly perfect, it's scary to consider moving through the world as a uniquely flawed work in progress. This is generational work, because many of us grew up thinking we needed to fix things about ourselves, to fundamentally alter our personalities, in order to be happy and successful adults.

It's not easy, but I think it's worth it. Brené Brown's research shows us the way forward: we need to let our true selves step into the light. If we feel at home within ourselves, we will be at home anywhere—including the places where we speak our truths about educational policy. 🗣️

Want to know more?

Do you want to learn more about the State Board of Education's process for accepting public testimony?

Go to nj.gov/education/sboe. Click on “meetings” and select “Public Testimony.”



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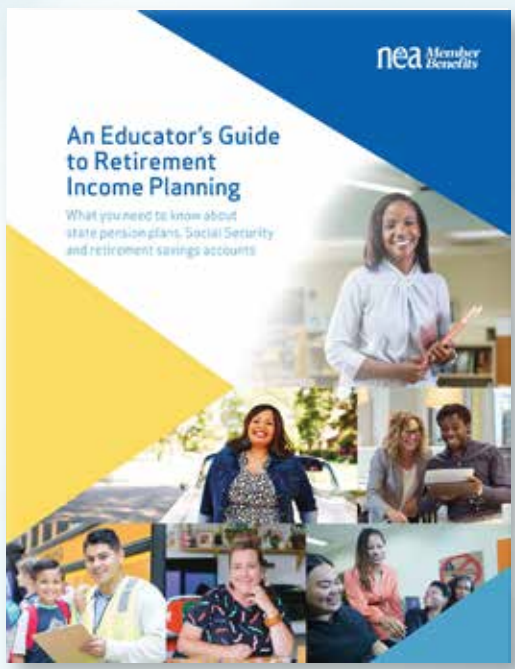
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NJEA Preservice members share their convention experiences

NJEA Preservice represents college students preparing for a career in education. While all NJEA Convention programs are open to every member, several workshops are specifically planned with NJEA Preservice members in mind. In addition, NJEA Preservice staffs a booth in the Atlantic City Convention Center. To learn more about NJEA Preservice, visit njea.org/preservice.

Angelina Maffei, Stockton University, Class of '24

Getting to experience the NJEA Convention for the first time was truly a moving and beneficial experience. Working with NJEA Preservice has been an absolute privilege, as I have been able to experience leadership opportunities and work behind the scenes in helping with this year's convention. As an aspiring educator, the knowledge that I have gained valuable insights from the various professional development workshops. They were incredibly helpful and will continue to aid me in my future career in education.

Alyssa Magliaro, Rowan University, Class of '23,

This is my first NJEA Convention, and I am so happy I attended. I experienced new learning resources, techniques, educational technologies and a seemingly infinite amount of educational strategies. Overall, the convention was an amazing experience that allowed me to gain a new perspective as a future educator. As a preservice teacher, having the opportunity to communicate, collaborate and gain knowledge from experienced teachers was inspiring. The NJEA Convention makes me eager to become an educator. I can see how welcoming and encouraging the educational community is, something I dedicate my future to.

Ashley Finocchio, Rowan University, Class of '23

This was my first NJEA Convention, and my experience was beyond what I thought it could be. Not only did I get to see new learning resources and techniques, but I also learned about companies that benefit the classroom and my teachings such as BookSmiles and Osmo. It was clear that all vendors at the convention were dedicated educators or dedicated to the future of teaching and learning! I left the convention with many new materials and resources to further my teaching journey and give myself and my future students the educational journey they deserve and will truly enjoy.

Preservice members discuss career readiness during an NJEA Convention Preservice workshop.

Jenna Cooper, Stockton University, Class of '23

I had a great time at this year's NJEA Convention. It was a great opportunity to network and meet current and former educators. My favorite part of the event was the BookSmiles truck. I was able to pick out two books for my future classroom for free.

Matthew Yuro, The College of New Jersey, Class of '25

While representing NJEA Preservice as the vice president and Membership and Local Outreach chair, it was great to meet so many aspiring educators at the convention from across the state. My favorite part of the convention was the keynote speakers, especially Nikole Hannah-Jones and David Hogg. It was a great experience to see how powerful our voices can be as future educators.

Kayla Kanarkowski, Rider University, Class of '24

Between the great keynote speakers, the professional development workshops, and the networking opportunities, the NJEA Convention never fails to amaze me. Attending a convention lets me feel like I belong in the education community and that teaching is what I am really destined to do. Many of these workshops are geared toward full-time teachers on a variety of topics, but it is also so good for preservice members to attend so we can use the information in our future careers. You can never go wrong with the free resources as well! Whether you are a Preservice member or full-time member, I definitely recommend attending convention. 📍



NJEA CONVENTION **GLOW-UP!**

By Amy Moran, Ph.D. and Kate Okeson



Drag Queen Story Hour, hosted in the NJEA Consortium Area, was a hit. From left: Amy Moran, Astala Vista, Chris Cannella, Kevin Deely, Susan Waldron, Vinchelle and Steve Koumoulis.

The LGBTQIA+ representation at the NJEA Convention made us PROUD! For starters, the first annual SOGI [Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Committee] hosted cocktail hour was a huge success. It was widely attended by members, and the delicious drinks, hors d'oeuvres and conversations were flowing. Likewise, ideas were flowing within and beyond. Likewise, the ideas were flowing within and beyond the walls of several must-attend workshops.

"Planning for Change: LGBTQ-Inclusive Lesson Design" was a facilitated discussion for educators seeking sustainable methods and support being intentionally LGBTQIA+ inclusive in their course materials and lessons. Kate Okeson shared ways to formalize inclusive approaches through updated syllabi, curriculum documents, and course documents. There was an emphasis on connecting the mandates to real-world applications for students and finding authentic solutions that address inclusive educational mandates.

In **"LGBTQ+ Issues and Content in the History Classroom,"** Steve Koumoulis emphasized how critical it

is for history students to understand that they are part of the story. Truly authentic learning happens in myriad ways, including through storytelling that centers intersectional perspectives about lived experiences. This allows students to understand there were and are people like them in this world, making history feel relevant and affirming for their identities.

In **"Creating Safer Spaces for LGBTQ+ Youth,"** Tazmine Weisgerber echoed Steve, emphasizing that when examining our bulletin boards, discussion questions, photos, videos, cultural references, assignments, and everything else, we must ask, "Who is being seen here?" and "Who is missing from this conversation?" and then work together to fill in the blanks.



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

In **"Healthy Teen Sexuality in 2022,"** Erica Smith shared that New Jersey was the first to require sex education in 1980, noting the sex education landscape has evolved tremendously ever since. Currently, the U.S. has one of the highest teen pregnancy rates (age 12-19) of other comparable countries because of policies that push an ineffective abstinence-only approach. Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) data (2019) indicate that 38.4% of U.S. high school students are sexually active (down from previous decades), with teen pregnancy dropping, especially in states where long-acting birth control and abortion access are readily available.

While YRBS data centers on unwanted sexual health outcomes, there are other vital concerns such as consent, desire and pleasure, affirmation about sexual orientation and gender, and whether a relationship is healthy. Teens want to know about things like healthy relationships, pleasure, intimacy, communication, boundaries, LGBTQIA+ identities, saying "no" and accepting "no," confidence, responding to new situations, in addition to what sexual health support measures to use. Also, educators must acknowledge and support LGBTQIA+ youth who are coming out at younger ages, have more LGBTQIA+ public figures and increased representation in media, may attend GSAs and queer proms, and be using ever-evolving

terminology to describe queer teen sexualities.

Finally, in a historic convention first, drag queens Astala Vista and Vinchelle hosted **"LGBTQIA+ Banned Books – Drag Queen Story Hour"** to answer questions from the audience, take photos, in all their dazzling iridescence, with NJEA members, and to read *And Tango Makes Three*, *Prince and Knight*, and *I Am Jazz*. These wonderful books had been banned in various U.S. communities for what these glorious queens could only assume is their acceptance and affirmation of characters of all kinds, including those who identify as LGBTQIA+. Read-alouds of queer-affirming children's books helps kids who are beginning to understand themselves as LGBTQIA+ to see positive representations and drag read-alouds model that extra unabashed pride that we can all be our unique and wonderful selves.



This is a condensed version of the full Rainbow Connection column. Type njea.org/rainbow-connection into your browser for the full article

Use this QR code for book recommendations and resources.

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Together, we'll do this.

The effects of the pandemic on children and adolescents

By Jacqueline Giordano, SAC, LPC, ACS

COVID-19 has impacted the lives of children and adolescents in unprecedented ways. The increased use of the internet, social media and technology has resulted in a significant decline in face-to-face conversations and a direct decline in social skills. Adolescents are more anxious about how people perceive them. Many don't like going out as much as they once did, and others refer to having a "limited social battery."

In addition, schools are seeing a lack of student motivation and engagement across the board. Last year, more than all of my combined years as a counselor, I assisted high school students in their physical education classes and lunches "find a friend" to talk to or sit with. This is because they were overwhelmed with anxiety and unable to socialize on their own. While some students tried to avoid lunch altogether, others asked faculty members if they could eat with them.

These patterns have continued into this year.

This does not even take into account the deplorable attendance records of other students who suffer from overwhelming anxiety and depression, unable to make it into school regularly.

What do we do?

In New Jersey and many other states, we are in the midst of a mental health crisis and obtaining mental health services has become a critical problem. Suicidal youth are filling emergency rooms and are waiting hours, or even days, to be seen. Depressed teens are waiting months for mental health appointments and parents often put off seeking help until a crisis arises—all this, when in fact we know that the earlier the intervention the better the outcome.

Both children and adolescents need to develop coping, problem-solving, and conflict resolution skills. They need

Jacqueline Giordano is a student assistance counselor (SAC) at Colonia High School in Woodbridge Township. In addition to her NJEA membership, she is a member of the American Counseling Association, the New Jersey Counseling Association and the Association of Student Assistance Professionals-NJ.

“ I have always believed it comes down to one simple fact: you can either pay now and invest in these essential programs or pay later with a society plagued by increased dropout rates, high unemployment and rising disability benefits.

to learn to overcome adversity at a younger age. These are skills that can easily be taught to elementary school aged children and continued throughout their education.

School counseling programs have always been important, but parents and educators may now realize that counselors must introduce comprehensive mental health programs from the bottom up and not the top down. Starting at a young age and building every year, programs that teach social skills, mindfulness, distress tolerance, and social and emotional learning will improve students' knowledge and strengthen their skills as they progress from elementary through high school.



Mental health professionals are vital

Schools must employ a licensed professional with experience in the mental health field who will take charge of the mental health and wellness of children. They must lead the counseling department and possess clear objectives and goals regarding the psychosocial well-being of students. It is also essential that ongoing professional development is provided annually to educate school counselors on current mental health trends and interventions. These are essential components of an effective school counseling program.

Yet, many school districts employ supervisors with no mental health experience, thus no vision, and offer fewer counseling programs and community partnerships than they once did. This is unacceptable during a time when more services are needed.

The traumas of COVID-19, including the loss of family members, school closures, increased anxiety, social isolation and other traumas associated with it will affect many for years. The overwhelming rates of anxiety, depression, overdoses and grief will only continue to plague our youth until significant changes in our mental health system and changes to our outlook on the necessity of trained school counselors evolves.

It is essential that we address the detrimental effects the pandemic has had on society. We must remember that it takes a village—parents, schools and community—to raise a child. Spending my entire career in both education and mental health, I have always believed it comes down to one simple fact: you can either pay now and invest in these essential programs or pay later with a society plagued by increased dropout rates, high unemployment and rising disability benefits. I say we pay now. 🙏



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BALANCING YOUR LIFE

Tips for better time management

BY KIMBERLEE DOKTOR



After spending 14 years home as a full-time mom and part-time, community-based preschool teacher, I found myself reentering the work force full time as a high school special education teacher in a self-contained multiple disabilities classroom last year.

Those first few months are a complete blur. My days would run from 5 a.m. and go until easily one the next morning. Between parenting, taking care of a household, teaching, and planning, I was finding myself with very little time for the fun things in life, let alone sleep. I knew that burnout was looming and pretty much guaranteed unless I found a better way to manage my time to create more balance in my life.

The following are some ways I've found to create a better balance, feel more fulfilled, and get some sleep!

Create a schedule—and stick to it!

Creating a daily and weekly schedule has become a critical part of my life. I spend some time every Sunday night outlining everything that needs to be accomplished throughout the course of the week. I can then identify the days that they need to be accomplished by. This allows me to incorporate all the areas of my life onto one page and ensure that there are no overlaps. I also set a time by which my day will end, allowing time for self-care, including adequate sleep.

Create time limits and use timers

When I become engrossed in an activity or project, I can often lose sight of other things that need to be accomplished. There have been more than a couple of instances where I promised that I was only going to spend a

half hour at home working on something for my classroom, only to find that several hours have gone by!

Now, I've become a person who sets timers, and lots of them! I know that when the timer goes off, it's time to call it a day on whatever I'm working on, regardless of where I am in that project. As silly as this sounds, it makes sure that I keep a balance in my day between everything I need to accomplish.

Keep an organized workspace

I find that keeping my desk organized is incredibly helpful. It saves a lot of time looking for materials that I need. Moreover, it can eliminate becoming overwhelmed by all the things I need to get done in the future. Even better, it helps me stay on task because I don't get distracted by future projects or task that, although need to be completed, are not on my agenda for that day or time.

Learn to say NO!

This is possibly the most difficult time management skill that I have had to learn. I like to help people and have always felt guilty when I said no to somebody who asked me to take something on for them. However, I have come to learn that by saying no to activities or tasks when I already have a lot on my plate, I am able to focus on what I need to accomplish. Saying no doesn't mean you don't care about what someone else wants, it just means that you are able to set limits for yourself and balance your life.

It is important to make sure that you have some form of a time-management plan. It helps create a balance in your life to make sure that you're not overextending yourself and finding time to enjoy life.

There are only 1,440 minutes in a day. Make sure that you use them all wisely. 🏠

Kimberlee Doktor is a special education teacher at Garfield High School, working in an 11th/12th grade classroom for students with multiple disabilities. She is a member of the NJEA Early Career Member Network. For more information, visit njea.org/early-career.



How to *write* for the NJEA Review

What can I submit for publication?

Feature article

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

Letter to the editor

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

I Am NJEA

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

Toolbox

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

Speak out

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

How do I submit for publication?

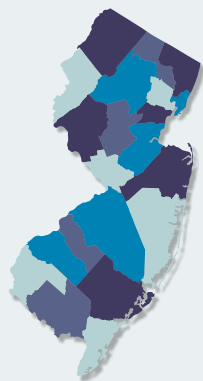
Submitting content

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

The review process

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

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



SUSSEX TO CAPE MAY

Workshops and conferences

2023 NJTESOL/NJBE SPRING CONFERENCE

Strengthening Collaboration

The 2023 conference of the New Jersey Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages/New Jersey Bilingual Educators will have two components: an in-person conference and a video library conference.

In-person conference

The in-person conference will take place at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in New Brunswick on May 23, 24, and 25. You can register for one, two or all three days. The conference will feature three keynote speakers: Dr. Andrea Honigsfeld, Dr. Edward Fergus and Jacquelyn León.

In addition, you'll select from many presentations approved for the continuing education requirement, network with your colleagues, and obtain the latest information on state and national initiatives. You can also meet with representatives at the sponsors' and exhibitors' booths to find the latest and greatest teaching tools.

Video library conference

The video library conference is a select collection of library presentations you will have access to view starting on May 26 using the conference platform. There is no set schedule, and you will be able to view the workshops from May 26 to Sept. 1. By using your unique login, your hours will be tracked so that you can earn professional development hours through Sept. 1. Please note that the select collection of presentations will not include the keynotes or special invited guest speakers.

Presentation topics will include: General Interest, Content Area Instruction, Bilingual/ESL Pre-K through 12, Higher Ed, Teacher Ed, Adult Ed, and K-12 Administrators, and Dual Language/Biliteracy.

Register early for a discounted rate. 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.



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HOLIDAY SHOPPING

- Buyer's Edge, Inc. – Save on major purchases like appliances, furniture, cars and more. Visit buyersedgeinc.com (Group#: 3386/Password: njea)
- NEA Discount Marketplace powered by Rakuten – Get the lowest discount and earn cash back at over 3,500 top retailers like Kohls, Macy's, Ulta, and more. Visit <https://www.neamb.com/products/nea-discount-marketplace>
- NJEA Member Discount Program – Shop local and save on retail, services and more. Visit memberbenefits.njea.org/search-discounts/



HOLIDAY HOSTING

- BJs – NJEA members can join BJ's today or renew their BJ's membership, regardless of when they last renewed—it's added onto your expiration date, with special savings before Dec. 31, 2022. Visit memberbenefits.njea.org for your NJEA member form.
- Costco – NEA members obtaining a new Costco membership will receive a \$30 Costco Shop Card.
- Join at www.neamb.com/costco.



HOLIDAY TRAVEL

Check out the NJEA Travel page for car rentals, hotel discounts and special travel offers.

Visit memberbenefits.njea.org/travel.



Visit our newly redesigned website at memberbenefits.njea.org for even more information, resources, and discounts.

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



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PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

2023-25 NJREA ELECTION REGULATIONS

This spring, NJREA members will elect officers, NJEA Delegate Assembly (D.A.) members and NJEA DA alternates for the 2023-25 term. In addition, members will elect delegates to the NEA-Retired Conference (NEA-R) and NEA Representative Assembly (NEA RA) for 2023 and 2024.

To provide voters with candidate information, the March NJREA Newsletter will contain a color 2-inch by 2-inch passport photo and a statement from each candidate—this applies to both NJREA officer and NJEA DA/DA Alternate candidates. As per election policy, candidates must supply the required size and style photograph and a brief statement (50 words or less) before the Jan. 17 deadline. Please note: Any statement exceeding 50 words will be shortened up to the last complete sentence, and any content following this will be eliminated by the NJREA Editorial Committee.

If a candidate does not supply a color 2-inch by 2-inch passport photo and statement, only the candidate's name and office will be printed. If an office or position is not contested, no biographical information or statements will appear.

Officer nominations

NJREA's constitution stipulates that a person running for an NJREA office must be a unified member of NJREA (national, state and county).

In a normal election year, 15 signatures are required on any candidate's nominating petition. However, in light of the ongoing COVID-19 concerns, NJREA will again be using the following policy for this 2023 election:

"Until such time as the officers and Executive Board determine that in-person meetings can be safely held, there shall be no requirement to obtain member signatures on nominating petitions. Candidates may self-nominate by filing the appropriate petition."

Each candidate's signature and PIN on the petition for NJREA officer, NJEA D.A. and D.A.-alternate positions must match the name and PIN as it appears on their NJEA/NJREA membership card to be valid.

Association officers' terms run from Sept. 1, 2023 through Aug. 31, 2025. Offices include *president, *first vice president, *second vice president, *treasurer, *secretary, NJEA D.A. delegate, and NJEA D.A.-alternate

***All NJREA officers are automatically elected as delegates to NEA-R and the NEA- Retired Conference in 2023 and 2024.**

The constitution permits officers to serve for two consecutive two-year terms.

Completed officer petitions must be received in NJREA's office no later than 5 p.m. on Jan. 17, 2023. Forms may be mailed only to the address on the petition. All forms were made available on the NJREA website by the week of Nov. 14, 2022. Candidates are responsible for verifying that petitions have been received by the deadline.

National delegates

Candidates for delegate to the NEA-R and NEA RA may self-nominate. Individuals may run as a delegate, ethnic-minority concerns delegate or both. Petition forms are available on the NJREA website only. All forms and photos must be mailed and received in the NJREA's office no later than 5 p.m. on Jan. 17, 2023. All candidates must submit the correct petition for the NEA-R/NEA RA. Any incorrect forms will be disqualified.

A candidate's name on self-nominating forms must reflect the name and PIN as it appears on they/their NJEA/NJREA membership card.

Those elected will serve as delegates to the 2023 and 2024 NEA-R, held in Orlando, Florida and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania respectively. Delegates to NEA-R must also attend the NEA RA that follows. You will need to allow for 10 days to attend both. This includes travel time.

Candidates who run for both categories (delegate and minority-concerns delegate) and are elected in both categories when election results are made public, but cannot be contacted within 48 hours following the announcement of the results, will be declared elected in the category in which they received the greater number of votes. Successor delegates shall be chosen in order of the number of votes received after delegates determined by NJREA's Elections Committee.

Candidates must mail completed forms to the address provided, and a 2-inch by 2-inch passport photo must accompany the form. Again, candidates are urged to call to confirm receipt of their petitions before the Jan. 17 deadline.

Balloting commences March 17 and ends March 31, 2023. All ballots must be received by the deadline. Watch for candidate statements, photos and balloting details in the March NJREA Newsletter.

For a complete description of officers' duties, a self-nominating form or a petition for NJREA officer, visit the NJREA website at njea.org/njrea. Should you have an issue, contact Cathy Raffaele at 609-599-4561, ext. 2300.

Around the counties

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

CUMBERLAND COUNTY REA

Mar. 1: Winter luncheon/meeting at New Jersey Motorsports Park in Millville (GPS: 8000 Dividing Creek Rd.). Topic: Pension update by Sarah Favinger, NJEA staff. Cost is \$30. To attend, call Irene Savicky at 856-863-8424 by Feb. 10.

GLOUCESTER COUNTY REA

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

MIDDLESEX COUNTY REA

Mar. 9: Spring meeting/luncheon at the Grand Marquis in Old Bridge. Cost is \$43. Topic will be a Member Benefits Fair. To attend, contact Susan Jaysnovitch at teachtheinternet@aol.com or 732-925-1606 by Mar. 2.

MONMOUTH COUNTY REA

April 18: Spring meeting/ luncheon at Jumping Brook Country Club in Neptune. Meeting will be a member benefits fair. Cost is \$35. To attend, call Sue Shrott at 732-995-7754 by April 7.

OCEAN COUNTY REA

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

PASSAIC COUNTY REA

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

UNION COUNTY REA

Feb. 28: Winter luncheon/meeting held at Gran Centurions in Clark. Cost is \$30. To attend, call Pat Alt at 732-382-6261 by Feb. 21.

Save the Date!

Spring luncheon is April 27, 10am

at the Nottingham Ballroom,
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WINTER VACATION GIVEAWAY

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5. Grieve, Don't Gripe—Contract Enforcement
6. Preparing for Negotiations—Collective Bargaining
7. Salary Guides—What All Members Should Know
8. District Changing Carriers? How to Avoid the Benefits Bait and Switch **NEW**
9. Passion. Purpose. Power. **NEW to WLC**
10. Professional Practice as an Organizing Tool **NEW**
11. Advocating for Women's Rights in the Workplace **NEW**
12. Successful Organizing 101 **NEW**

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NORTH

FEB. 24-25, 2023
SHERATON - PARSIPPANY
REGISTRATION DEADLINE: JAN. 13

CENTRAL

MAR. 31 - APR. 1, 2023
HILTON - EAST BRUNSWICK
REGISTRATION DEADLINE: FEB. 10



 njea.org/WLC

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

DECEMBER & *beyond*

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

DEC 07	WEDNESDAY Executive Committee meeting	JAN 13-14	FRI & SAT NJEA HCR Summit and Equity Alliance Conference	FEB 01	WEDNESDAY Executive Committee meeting
JAN 06	FRIDAY Executive Committee meeting	JAN 14	SATURDAY Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Human Rights Celebration	FEB 18	SATURDAY NJEA FAST Showcase
JAN 07	SATURDAY Delegate Assembly meeting	JAN 27-28	FRI & SAT Winter Leadership Conference – South	FEB 24-25	FRI & SAT Winter Leadership Conference – North

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

deadlines

- 12/9** Winter Leadership Conference-South
Event date: Jan. 27-28
Go to njea.org/WLC.
- 1/13** Winter Leadership Conference-North
Event date: Feb. 24-25
Go to njea.org/WLC.
- 2/10** Winter Leadership Conference-Central
Event date: March 31-April 1
Go to njea.org/WLC.



Employment Opportunities at NJEA

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

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

YOUR DISTINGUISHED SERVICE TO EDUCATION

The hallmark of the NJEA Convention continues to be the hundreds of opportunities for professional and career development. But it is also a place where members take time to recognize excellence among their ranks and in the community.

At the convention's Celebration of Excellence, the NJEA Educational Support Professional of the Year Nancy Cogland and the New Jersey State Teacher of the Year Christine Girtain were recognized. Also lauded were the county teachers of the year, the county ESPs of the year and the recipients of grants from the Frederick L. Hipp Foundation for Excellence in Education. At that same celebration, NJEA recognized public school graduates who are leaders in their profession with the Award for Excellence. Olympic gold medalist and Trenton Central High School graduate Athing Mu and Congressman and Cherry Hill East graduate Andy Kim were this year's honorees.

Another award typically presented at the NJEA Convention is the Ruthann Sheer Award for Distinguished Service to Education. The award is designed to call attention to those who greatly serve New Jersey public schools and children. That service may take any form that the Distinguished Service Award Committee believes most merits recognition.

It's one of the association's oldest awards. It was first presented in 1934. In the 1990s, it was renamed in memory of Ruthann Sheer, an educator from Hackensack who was its 1994 recipient.

Past award recipients have included state and federal lawmakers, reporters and editors, newspapers, statewide and local organizations, former NJEA presidents and staff, State Board of Education members, local school board members, and others who have promoted public school employee rights and public schools.

Members of the Distinguished Service Award Committee reviewed various outstanding nominations. But as we appear to enter a new phase in the pandemic this year, the committee could not ignore the difficult challenges and extraordinary reality of the last three school years and the impact that those years have had on all NJEA members. Nor could they ignore the service and sacrifice of members for their students and communities. Ultimately, the committee decided that this year, the Ruthann Sheer Award for Distinguished Service to Education belongs to all members.

In the words of Danielle Clark, the chair of the Distinguished Service Award Committee, "You have



Members of the Distinguished Service Award Committee and NAEA President Sean M. Spiller present all NAEA members with the Ruthann Sheer Award for Distinguished Service to Education. From left: Argine Safari, Brenda Carswell-Avery, Stacy Morgan Santo, Danielle Clark, and Spiller.

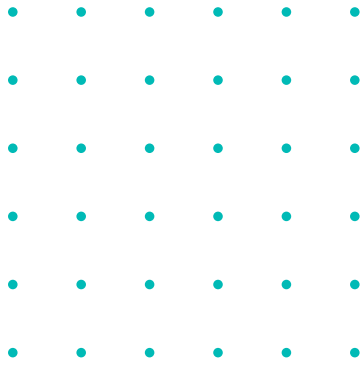
endured years of an uncomfortable reality. COVID-19 caused all of us to stretch our minds, rethink how we interact, and find new ways that we all could complete our varying tasks every day. We became leaders. We conquered the fear of doing something new. We broadened our horizons to better reach our students. We ensured the safety of everyone that entered our school buildings. We came together. Yes, we stood for everything that Ruthann Sheer would have valued."

The award was announced at a dinner in the Atlantic City Convention Center on Nov. 9, the night before the 2022 NAEA Convention opened. A plaque recognizing members will ultimately be displayed in NAEA's headquarters in Trenton as a permanent reminder of how New Jersey's public school employees rose to the challenge of these extraordinary times.

Of course, members deserve so much more than a plaque. Your service to the children and the public is extraordinary even in ordinary times. That is why NAEA will never rest when it comes to making sure that you earn the salary, benefits, and working conditions you deserve. After all, NAEA members' working conditions are our students learning conditions.

Still, it is good every now and then to step back, look at the big picture and take pride in what you have accomplished. It is your distinguished service, every day and every year, that makes our schools the best in the nation. And it is your efforts, every day and every year, that make a difference in the lives of our students. 🌟

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Visit njea.org/Hipp for a grant application and tips for applying.

APPLICATION DEADLINE IS MARCH 1, 2023.