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NEA salutes public education’s unsung heroes on Education Support Professionals Day
Annual event highlights role of ESPs in students’ lives

WASHINGTON—Schools across the country are joining the National Education Association and its nearly 3 million members today in celebrating Education Support Professionals Day. Among the day’s events and activities are appreciation breakfasts, luncheons and other celebrations to honor the individuals who work behind the scenes to support students and help schools run smoothly.

Education support professionals (ESPs) are critical members of the education workforce. They include paraeducators, secretaries, custodians, tradespeople and technical staff. They also include school security officers, school bus drivers, food service workers, and those who work in health and student services. ESPs meet the most fundamental needs of students, enabling them to reach higher levels of knowledge, achievement, and student success. Even though this critical group of employees makes up more than one-third of all public school employees, their role in ensuring that students are mentally, physically and emotionally ready to learn is often overlooked.

“Education support professionals are public education’s unsung heroes,” said NEA President Lily Eskelsen García. “The public rarely hears about the positive impact they have on a school community. But the students get it. They know they can depend on the school nurse, the bus driver, the custodian and other school staff who care deeply about them.”

Eskelsen García returned home to Utah to honor ESPs at Odyssey Elementary School in Woods Creek, Utah. Alongside National ESP of the Year Paula Monroe, Utah School Employees Association (USEA) President Jerad Reay and other state and local leaders, Eskelsen García listened to students read thank-you notes to their favorite school staff member. Earlier in the morning they hosted an appreciation breakfast for school support staff. Other notable attendees, including Salt Lake City Bee’s broadcaster Steve Klauke, PBS’ Mary Dickson and Davis School District Superintendent Dr. Bryan Bowles, were paired up with an ESP to experience a day in the life of these underappreciated educators.

“It was such an honor to welcome Lily Eskelsen García, a former ESP herself, home to Utah to recognize our unsung heroes during American Education Week,” said USEA President Jerad Reay.
More than 78 percent of ESPs are responsible for student and staff safety. On average, each has more than a decade of experience and works more than 40 hours a week. Of NEA’s almost 3 million members, almost a half million are ESPs. Divided into nine job categories, paraeducators are the largest sub-group with almost 250,000 members.

Education Support Professionals Day is part of NEA’s 93rd annual American Education Week celebration, taking place this year November 16-22. Education Support Professionals Day was first celebrated in 1987 after NEA’s Representative Assembly, the Association’s decision-making body of nearly 10,000 member delegates, called on the Association to honor the contributions of all school support staff. ESP Day is observed on Wednesday of American Education Week.

About American Education Week

Celebrated the week prior to Thanksgiving, American Education Week began in 1921 with the NEA and the American Legion as cosponsors. The goal was to generate public awareness and support for education because of concerns over illiteracy. A year later, the U.S. Office of Education signed on, and the PTA followed in 1938.

American Education Week’s 2014 tagline, *Raise Your Hand for Student Success*, is a reminder that all Americans must do their part to help create great public schools for every student. To find out more about American Education Week, visit [www.nea.org/aew](http://www.nea.org/aew) or contact your local public school.

“This week, we are recognizing the important role that public education plays in the future of our students,” said Eskelsen Garcia. “We must continue to be the champion for the teachers and staff who are working so hard on behalf of our students. Let’s make sure we acknowledge every member of the team that works so hard to help the whole child succeed.”

To help plan and promote AEW celebration days, go to [www.nea.org/aew](http://www.nea.org/aew) for tips and ideas. Be sure to follow AEW on Facebook and Twitter with #aew2014.

For more information on education support professionals, visit: [www.nea.org/esphome](http://www.nea.org/esphome)

Follow us on twitter at [www.twitter.com/NEAMedia](http://www.twitter.com/NEAMedia)

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*The National Education Association is the nation’s largest professional employee organization, representing nearly 3 million elementary and secondary teachers, higher education faculty, education support professionals, school administrators, retired educators and students preparing to become teachers.*