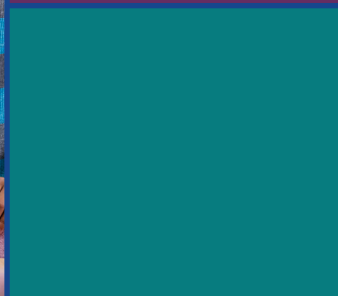




# Understanding and Advocating for Equity in Education

PROGRAM REPORT 2021



## **NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION**

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

### **NEA EXECUTIVE OFFICERS**

Rebecca S. Pringle, President  
Princess R. Moss, Vice President  
Noel Candelaria, Secretary-Treasurer

### **NEA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

Mark Jewell, North Carolina  
Gladys Fátima Márquez, Illinois  
Ron "Duff" Martin, Wisconsin  
Robert V. Rodriguez, California  
Christine Sampson-Clark, New Jersey  
Hanna Vaandering, Oregon

### **NEA OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Kim A. Anderson, Executive Director  
Karen M. White, Deputy Executive Director

### **NEA EDUCATION POLICY & PRACTICE**

Daaiyah Bilal-Threats, Senior Director  
Alexis K. Holmes, Manager  
Elic A. Senter, Manager  
Christine DonFrancesco, Senior Policy Analyst  
Shyrelle Eubanks, Senior Policy Analyst  
Caitlin Geiger, Senior Writer/Editor  
Antwan Perry, Senior Policy Analyst  
Michael Scott, Senior Policy Analyst

No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without the permission of the NEA, except by NEA affiliates or members.

# INTRODUCTION

**The Leaders for Just Schools program was created by educators for educators.**

In 2018, the National Education Association (NEA) launched **Leaders for Just Schools** (LJS) to increase equitable outcomes in public schools by equipping NEA members with the skills and resources to address implicit bias, cultural gaps, and institutional inequities. With generous support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the program was created and led by seven NEA member leaders, known as the LJS Leadership Team, from across the country who were identified and selected by NEA based on their participation in past racial and social justice training and policy advocacy work, which laid a solid foundation for the development of the curriculum.

Through this program, the NEA is building a nationwide network of educators who cultivate equitable and just learning environments for all students, regardless of where they're from, what they look like, where they live, or what they believe. Educators learn how to recognize their own bias to address inequities, broaden their understanding of racial and social justice in education, and discover how they can take action to improve learning conditions, promote equitable outcomes, and leverage restorative justice principles and practices inside and outside the classroom.

Leaders for Just Schools was designed to make the opportunities for education justice, under the Every Student Succeeds Act, accessible and actionable for educators throughout the country. By leveraging requirements for educator voice and input on key decisions around school improvement to ensure more equitable outcomes for students, the program prepares educators to take informed action to advocate for students. As cohorts of educators move through the program, they are encouraged to return to their school communities and deliver curricular material and program activities through local and state efforts. These educators also advocate for and build student-centered inclusive plans so that every student has the opportunity to succeed, grow, and thrive in an equitable and just learning environment.



## Program Mission

The Leaders for Just Schools program helps NEA member leaders better understand how they can cultivate just schools for students of every race, place, background, and ability. The NEA's vision is a great public school for every student. The core values of the Association are centered on this vision.

## Program Goals

**Create a national network of educator equity leaders** who have the knowledge and experience to apply provisions in federal policy to advocate and lead school, community, and district-based efforts that will advance equitable outcomes for all students.

**Identify and train educators to take on local leadership roles** to address a wide range of problems created by institutional racism.



.....  
"If I had to describe Leaders for Just Schools in one word, I would say 'empowerment.' It's given me resources that are presentable to people new to this work, and it makes me feel empowered to help people understand why this work is so important."  
—Leona Alexander, Idaho

**Strategically equip leaders to utilize education policy**—particularly, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)—to advance solutions that will positively affect students for years to come.

**Expand and connect NEA's current leadership development offerings** for educators who want equity and racial and social justice at the center of their advocacy.

**Engage in ongoing performance assessment and improvement** of the Leaders for Just Schools program by cultivating a continuous feedback culture with an impartial, external evaluator that specializes in program evaluation for socially conscious organizations.

## Background

For several decades, the NEA has focused on human and civil rights and racial and gender diversity. The Association has helped thousands of educators deepen their cultural self-awareness, identify and implement culturally responsive teaching practices, and feel empowered to apply principles of social and racial justice to achieve equitable outcomes. In addition, the NEA has advocated on behalf of its members for equity-oriented policy changes that would improve teaching and learning for all educators and students, not just the wealthy few.

In 2015, the NEA made a deliberate association-wide decision to address institutional racism when its highest leadership body—a congress of roughly 8,000 educators—took a formal position and established programs to support the idea. Since that time, the NEA has deepened its commitment to explicitly address racism and its effects on education experiences and outcomes.

Also, in 2015, President Barack Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) into law. This reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act reformed the federal education policy landscape in a way that explicitly aims to close achievement gaps and improve equitable education outcomes for all students. The NEA, which advocated for ESSA's passage, developed tools and resources to help educators leverage the new law—particularly, in regard to educator voice—to ensure the successful and equitable implementation of education policy across the country. The NEA has also hosted Educator Voice Academies for affiliates across the country and created educator voice grants to work with state and local affiliates in support of this work.

In 2018, NEA's leadership body voted to put racial and social justice at the forefront of NEA's work, adopting a policy committing the NEA to "actively advocate for social and educational strategies fostering the eradication of institutional racism and white privilege." Leaders for Just Schools fits into the larger NEA professional learning portfolio by creating opportunities for educators to learn about the manifestations of racism and other injustices. The program guides participants on how they can use education policy levers, including those provided in ESSA, to advocate for policy changes to interrupt and reduce the prevalence of racism in classrooms and communities nationwide and identify solutions to ensure that every student can learn in a safe, just, and equitable learning environment.



# PROGRAM OVERVIEW: CULTIVATING EQUITABLE AND JUST LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Leaders for Just Schools examines the sources of systemic education inequities at the individual, community, and institutional levels, and it is grounded in real-life experiences that are happening in schools across the country. Participants learn to advocate on behalf of their students using education policy levers—particularly, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)—to promote public schools that are racially, socially, economically, and educationally just for all students, no matter their race, background, ZIP code, or ability.

## Curriculum Abstract

Through this three-year cohort-based program, participants connect previous learning to new concepts, creating a strong foundation and understanding of equitable policies and practices. By using scaffolding techniques, participants can connect positive practices with high levels of engagement among participants and their facilitators.

### Year 1: Exploring Individual Bias



The Year 1 professional learning experience guides educators through an examination of self to discover individual bias and its role in hindering equitable education policy. The curriculum takes a deep dive into understanding equity and its impact on learning environments, beginning with a look into who each participant is and how they have formed the thoughts and opinions that impact not only their dispositions and relationships but also their instructional planning and content delivery.

### Year 2: Examining Structural Inequities in Education

Year 2 explores the role of structural inequities and its impact on student success. Inequity is structural when policies keep some groups of people from obtaining the resources to better their lives. Structural inequities are deeply woven into the fabric of society, and structural racism poses fundamental challenges to America's schools. Participants first explore how individual biases perpetuate structural inequities and the historical contexts of structural racism. Then, they examine the role of families, communities, and partners in advocating for equity. Throughout the Year 2 professional learning experience, participants learn how stakeholders can—consciously and unconsciously—disrupt or perpetuate structural inequities.



## Year 3: Organizing and Advocating for Just Schools



The link between individual biases and structural inequities is often manifested through institutional inequities. The Year 3 professional learning experience highlights tools and strategies to help participants organize and advocate for change by using education policy levers to create equitable and just learning environments at the institutional level. These institutions may include schools, districts, states, state and local affiliates of unions, and federal institutions. In this culminating year, participants identify a problem of equity in their school or community and create a comprehensive plan to address it.

### Capstone: Problem of Equity

Leaders for Just Schools trains educators to advocate for policy and practice changes that will create more equitable environments for students and educators across the country. This final component of the program ensures that participants have a well-defined description of a problem of equity in their school community and a comprehensive action plan to address it. Upon returning to their school communities, LJS educators put their plans into action as they work to address their problem of equity over several months based on what they learned throughout the three years of the program. Each cohort reconvenes to share progress on their plans while also working and learning from one another, which is an essential step for participants as they continue their journey as leaders for just schools.



### Curriculum Development and Improvement

The LJS curriculum was designed by seven educator leaders, known as the LJS Leadership Team, from across the country in consultation with the NEA and the Arizona K12 Center, a consultant organization. The LJS Leadership Team met regularly to brainstorm the objectives and activities of each year's program. The Arizona K12 Center facilitated the writing for the first two years based on these in-depth conversations, and NEA staff facilitated the writing for the third year of the program.

As each year of the program was developed, the LJS Leadership Team facilitated the curriculum for the participants from the Pilot Cohort. Following this event, the LJS Leadership Team worked with NEA staff to make improvements to the curriculum. The curriculum is viewed as a dynamic document, with updates made based on continuous reflection and feedback. This includes conversations with NEA leadership; H&H Strategies, LJS's external evaluator; and LJS facilitators as they engage with the program.

## External Evaluation

In October 2019, the NEA retained H&H Strategies—an external evaluator—to collect data and other information to assess the program, analyze strengths and weaknesses, and make recommendations for improvement. H&H Strategies is a socially conscious consulting firm that specializes in evaluating programs and organizations committed to improving life conditions of historically underserved children, families, and communities. Their work with Leaders for Just Schools is centered around evaluating whether and how the program is making an impact.

Initially, the identification of an external evaluator was a requirement of the Kellogg Foundation grant; however, NEA staff and the LJS Leadership Team believed that H&H Strategies' input was extremely valuable and, consequently, decided to continue the relationship following the end of the Kellogg grant cycle. H&H Strategies has been present at a number of LJS major activities, including in-person professional learning experiences, LJS Leadership Team planning meetings, and facilitator engagements. The NEA also has worked with H&H Strategies to conduct a standard survey that is used to track year-to-year growth and program changes, and they have interviewed the LJS Leadership Team, select participants, and NEA staff.

H&H Strategies' reflections and feedback on the program delivery and the first two years of the curriculum were instrumental in establishing a foundation for the development of Year 3 and identifying topics and themes for extended learning opportunities. For example, when H&H Strategies noted that, in the first two years of the program, there was a noticeable lack of content addressing the perspective of Native/Indigenous students and families. LJS facilitators—who subsequently hosted the extended learning opportunities—responded by featuring the importance and influence of Native Land acknowledgments. Educators in attendance reported an increase in cultural awareness that will help them advance equity and justice in their local schools and communities.



# MAJOR ACTIVITIES

By developing and implementing culturally relevant models in schools and districts across the country, educators can work to correct the systemic limitations that are placed on students who often need the greatest advocacy and opportunities for empowerment. Leaders for Just Schools takes a multiprong approach to connecting educators and creating a professional network of equity leaders through a combination of in-person professional learning, continuous mentorship and small-group check-ins, quarterly cohort check-ins, and extended virtual learning opportunities.

## In-Person Professional Learning

Due to the sensitive nature of the program content, NEA staff and the LJS Leadership Team determined that in-person delivery allowed the necessary supports and learning space to guide participants through intense learning and introspection. This mode of delivery fosters deep connections through national cohorts and anchors participants in the purpose of creating equitable learning environments for every student. Each year, LJS participants convene by cohort for a multiday professional learning experience to explore awareness, equity, and socially just learning environments from many levels.

At the conclusion of each in-person professional learning experience, participants are encouraged to return to their school communities and deliver curricular material and program activities. Both facilitators and participants make a commitment to create an honest, safe, and confidential learning space so that all educators can take full advantage of the growth and opportunities encapsulated in the LJS curriculum.



## Virtual Professional Learning

With the onset of COVID-19, NEA staff and the LJS Leadership Team had to quickly pivot and create virtual opportunities to accommodate the restrictions introduced by the pandemic. Although this resulted in an interruption to delivery of the full curriculum, participants remained engaged with the LJS network and engaged in virtual experiences as they faced inequities that were created or exacerbated by the pandemic in their own communities.

In the spring of 2021, NEA staff and the LJS Leadership Team returned to curricular discussions and planning, but this time, to prepare for virtual delivery of curricular content. Together, they selected activities from each year of the program that were conducive to a virtual learning space. These introductory sessions moving cohorts forward took place in July and August 2021, and the rest of the curriculum will be delivered in person later in the school year.

## Facilitator Training, Mentorship, and Virtual Check-Ins

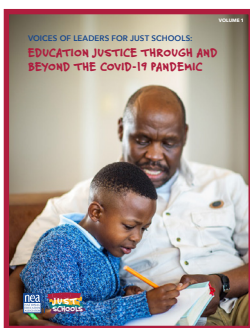
An essential component of Leaders for Just Schools is the ongoing mentorship educators receive as both participants and facilitators. Participants from each cohort who demonstrate exceptional leadership are selected by the LJS Leadership Team to become facilitators for the subsequent cohort of participants. Prior to taking on their new role, facilitators gain specific skills related to leading conversations around racial and social justice as well as policy advocacy through training led by NEA Human and Civil Rights and NEA Education Policy and Practice. They also learn in-depth tips for facilitating this specific curriculum through coaching by the LJS Leadership Team.

Throughout the year, LJS participants have ongoing check-ins with their facilitators to discuss successes and challenges and offer support. Although participation is not mandatory, the LJS Leadership Team recommends monthly check-ins for participants and facilitators to connect on progress and discuss barriers they might be facing. The LJS Leadership Team—with support from NEA staff—also leads whole-cohort check-ins quarterly.

## Voices of Leaders for Just Schools: Education Justice Through and Beyond COVID-19

As many educators faced challenges that the local, state, and national responses to COVID-19 laid bare, LJS participants gathered virtually to discuss barriers to learning and opportunities to achieve education justice in these uncertain times. *Voices of Leaders for Just Schools: Education Justice Through and Beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic* memorializes these discussions.

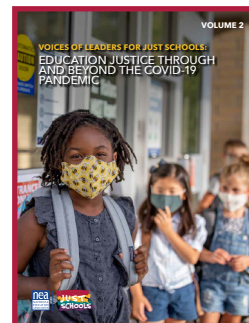
### Volume 1



In March 2020, LJS participants discussed how, at the onset of the pandemic, educators and policymakers can begin to address inequities and work toward more just learning environments for every student, whether they're Black or white, Latinx or Asian, Native or newcomer. The first volume of *Voices of Leaders for Just Schools* captures the big ideas gleaned from hours of online conversations with LJS participants. The report includes valuable insight and recommendations about how to design a path forward for learning throughout the country.

### Volume 2

Nearly a year into the pandemic, LJS participants reconvened virtually to reflect on their own experiences teaching through COVID-19. In this discussion, they identified new challenges, barriers, and lessons learned, and they brainstormed equitable solutions to spur action in school communities across the country. The second volume of *Voices of Leaders for Just Schools* isolates priority issues and offers solutions to address education inequities and close achievement gaps.



## Learning Series

The LJS Learning Series was initially born out of an effort to continue programmatic professional learning through the COVID-19 pandemic. The topic of each session, proposed by LJS facilitators and selected by the LJS Leadership Team, complements and expands on select content and concepts from the Leaders for Just Schools program. Following successful delivery of the fall and spring discussions, NEA staff and the LJS Leadership Team have added these extended learning opportunities to the program structure.

### Fall Learning Series

In October and November 2020, LJS participants engaged in a series of discussions that examined themes of racial and social justice in education through media. The first installation of the virtual series explored the five-part podcast *Nice White Parents* about building a better public school system and the obstacles that get in the way of achieving this goal; the movie *Coach Carter*, centering discussions around how to respond to challenging situations and systemic oppression; and *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You*, a book about the history of racism in America and hope for an antiracist future.

### Spring Learning Series

Throughout March and April 2021, LJS facilitators led conversations around three topics: an investigation of statues, mascots, and symbols that continue to prevail in the United States; understanding the difference between cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation to eradicate misconceptions and stereotypes that can be harmful to already oppressed and marginalized groups; and the importance of acknowledging Native Lands and restoratively honoring Native People.

## Learning On-the-Go at NEA.org

The NEA is currently developing mini learning modules that have been adapted from the first two years of the program, which will be available on the NEA.org website. Modules will provide introductory learning on several topics, including the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), equity, microaggressions, zero-tolerance policies, and restorative-based learning practices. Upon completion, the learning modules will include an introduction video, background on the topic, downloadable resources and other digital media, information that connects each topic with education policy, and questions for consideration.



# TIMELINE OF MAJOR ACTIVITIES

## 2018

### MAY

The NEA selects 7 NEA member educators—who were also approved by their respective state affiliates—to lead the development and execution of the Leaders for Just Schools program. The 7 NEA member educators become the LJS Leadership Team.

### JUNE

NEA staff and the LJS Leadership Team draft the first year of the curriculum in collaboration with the Arizona K12 Center, a nationally renowned curriculum consultant.

## 2019

### FEBRUARY

The Pilot Cohort—which includes 51 educators from 24 state affiliates—participate in the Year 1 professional learning experience, facilitated by the LJS Leadership Team, in Durham, North Carolina.

### APRIL

NEA staff, governance, and the LJS Leadership Team meet to revise and finalize the first year of the curriculum and further build out programmatic structure, including the facilitators program and virtual cohort convenings.

### MAY

The LJS Leadership Team identifies participants from the Pilot Cohort who excelled in the Year 1 professional learning experience and invites them to become facilitators for Cohort 1.

### JUNE

NEA staff and the LJS Leadership Team, in collaboration with the Arizona K12 Center, draft the second year of the curriculum.

### AUGUST

151 educators, nominated by their state affiliate leaders, convene in San Diego, California, to participate in the first year of the program, led by 14 participants-turned-facilitators from the Pilot Cohort. These educators, who make up Cohort 1, represent 31 state affiliates and districts of various sizes and demographics, from Tribal Lands to some of the largest urban school districts in the country.

### OCTOBER

The NEA retains H&H Strategies to conduct an external evaluation of Leaders for Just Schools.

## 2020

### FEBRUARY

26 educators from the Pilot Cohort participate in the Year 2 professional learning experience, facilitated by 6 LJS educator leaders, in Dallas, Texas. Although some participants from the Pilot Cohort are unable to attend in person, many continue to engage with the program. NEA staff and the LJS Leadership Team meet to revise and finalize the second year of the curriculum and further programmatic structural components.

### MARCH- APRIL

The NEA hosts virtual conversations with LJS participants to capture valuable insight and recommendations to design a path forward for learning during COVID-19. NEA staff captures participant input to develop the first volume of *Voices of Leaders for Just Schools*.

### MAY

All major in-person activities are put on hold due to COVID-19.

### JUNE

*Voices of Leaders for Just Schools: Education Justice Through and Beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic, Volume 1*, a report that memorializes the virtual conversations that took place in March and April 2020, is released.

### AUGUST

NEA staff and the LJS Leadership Team meet virtually to begin building the third year of the curriculum.

### OCTOBER- NOVEMBER

As part of the Fall Learning Series, three virtual discussions are led by members of the LJS Leadership Team; topics examine themes of racial and social justice in education through media.

## 2021

### JANUARY- APRIL

NEA staff and the LJS Leadership Team draft the third year of the curriculum.

### FEBRUARY

The NEA hosts virtual conversations with LJS participants who reflect on their experiences teaching through COVID-19, identify barriers and challenges, and brainstorm equitable solutions. NEA staff captures participant input to develop the second volume of *Voices of Leaders for Just Schools*.

### MARCH- APRIL

As part of the Spring Learning Series, three virtual discussions are led by LJS facilitators; topics investigate symbols of institutional racism, cultural appropriation, and Native Land acknowledgments.

### APRIL

NEA staff and the LJS Leadership Team meet virtually to discuss program evaluation work and facilitator training, map out the virtual curriculum, and plan virtual professional learning experiences for summer 2021. Sessions will include LJS topics and activities from each year of the program that are conducive to a virtual learning environment.

### JUNE

*Voices of Leaders for Just Schools: Education Justice Through and Beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic, Volume 2*, a report that memorializes the virtual conversations that took place in February 2021, is released.

# 2021

## JULY

NEA staff, in consultation with the LJS Leadership Team, finalizes the third year of the curriculum.

## JULY- AUGUST

The NEA hosts virtual professional learning experiences: educators from the Pilot Cohort begin the Year 3 professional learning experience over two days; educators from Cohort 1 attend a virtual refresher course on Year 1, followed by a one-day introduction to the Year 2 professional learning experience; and educators from Cohort 2—who were delayed one year due to COVID-19—participate in a one-day experience that introduces the Year 1 professional learning experience.

## SEPTEMBER

NEA staff and the LJS Leadership Team meet to review the curriculum and programmatic structural components to make revisions as needed for continued improvement of the program.

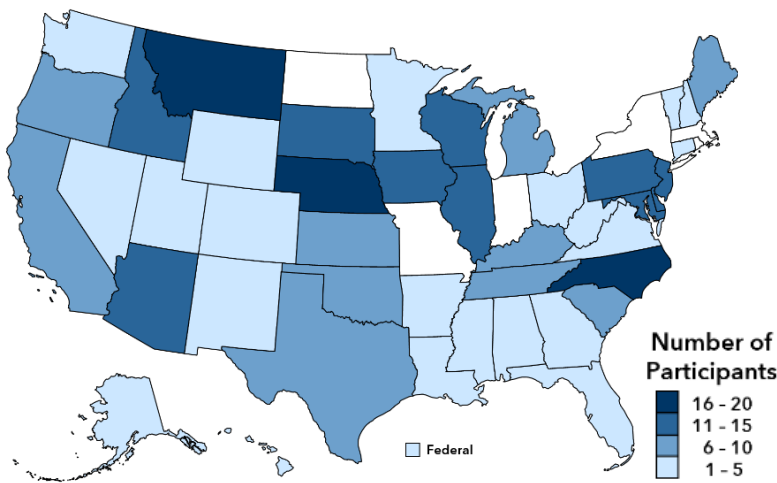
# NATIONWIDE REACH

**7** LEADERSHIP TEAM MEMBERS

**3** COHORTS

**29** PARTICIPANTS-TURNED-FACILITATORS

**325** PARTICIPANTS



**45** STATE AFFILIATES\* REPRESENTED

*\*44 states in addition to the Federal Education Association, which includes educators from the U.S. Department of Defense Education Activity.*



# EDUCATOR HIGHLIGHTS

Throughout the country, LJS educators have gone on to lead significant actions to advocate for safe, just, and equitable learning environments for students across race and ZIP code. They have led professional learning opportunities and organized advocacy efforts in their own schools, districts, and communities to promote public schools that are racially, socially, economically, and educationally just for all students.

In **Arizona**, Ann and Janice—two LJS educators from Cohort 1 who are part of the Arizona Education Association (AEA)-Retired—have started to build a network of retired association members and leaders, most of whom are engaged in supporting early career educators either through school membership and/or partnership with the Arizona K-12 Center in their new teacher supports program. Through this network, Ann and Janice are moving the Leaders for Just Schools curriculum. Their work is directly impacting the mentorship and support of new educators.

Estella, from **California**, chairs the racial equity committee for the California Teachers Association, which works to improve the lives of students and educators at every level that the union touches. Their goal is to transform the entire union to incorporate LJS content into professional learning, retain consultants to rethink bargaining to include education justice work, and more. She hosted a virtual prom during the first wave of COVID-19-related lockdowns and has been working on transforming a stage production for performance using a virtual platform.

Ang and Rhiannon, from **Colorado**, formed an Allies group to support the work of their local affiliate’s Ethnic Minority Outreach Action Team (EMOAT). The Allies group maintains a Google Classroom repository of articles and resources on racial justice topics. Currently, this group is working with EMOAT to draft bargaining language that specifically addresses and promotes equity across the district and its schools, including offering implicit bias and racial justice training district-wide and requiring the creation of a district-level committee made up of educators, families, students, and district personnel to conduct equity audits and work to support the recruitment and retention of educators of color.

Gena, from **Idaho**, has been aiding families of English learners secure the help they need to fully participate in school events and engage with the school community. Although she has not been able to host professional learning opportunities, she has been working hard to share her knowledge with her school community, including with her colleagues.

- • • • •  
According to a survey recently conducted by H&H Strategies, the external evaluator of Leaders for Just Schools...
- ✓ 82 percent of respondents reported hosting a professional learning experience using the Leaders for Just Schools curriculum.
- ✓ More than half of those respondents reported having more than 20 participants at their events.



Peggy, from **Idaho**, worked with her facilitators to deliver a regional training in her state that involved several districts and focused on identifying inequities in school buildings. She created a presentation, which she delivered to her district school board, about the inequities and injustices that she was able to identify in her own school as a result of her participation in Leaders for Just Schools. Peggy is a member of the NEA Board of Directors.

In **Idaho**, Leona helped start a district-wide literacy committee where she and her colleagues work to diversify the books used in classrooms and guide educators in using them to teach students. She is also working with the Wassmuth Human and Civil Rights Education Outreach Committee to build a glossary for educators to build a common language and build efficacy around doing racial and social justice work.

In **Illinois**, Louise and Andrew from the Pilot Cohort conducted regional trainings for more than 100 educators through the Opportunity Coalition, built in partnership with the Illinois Education Association (IEA). Through this process, the IEA decided to use the NEA Opportunity Audit to build a community organization equity audit.

Cathy, Rahaf, and Mae, from **Illinois**, cofacilitated the first year of the Leaders for Just Schools program virtually. Upon meeting with other state leaders, they planned four additional virtual professional learning experiences that will be followed by an opportunity to reflect after each session. Cathy has also collaborated with leaders in her district and her principal to integrate concepts and activities from Leaders for Just Schools in her school and across the district.

In **Iowa**, Anne has been supporting the work of her state affiliate's Multicultural Committee to pass resolutions and adopt NEA language in the state, underpinning documents about white supremacy culture. She has also been supporting a group of students, serving as liaison between their equity work and the state educators' union. As part of their efforts, these students worked for more than a year to remove school resource officers from all buildings in the district and recently held a rally at the state capital to protest two anti-inclusive, anti-public education bills, demanding fellow students speak out about bills concerning public schools.

Jamie, from **Iowa**, was appointed to serve as her district's equity innovator to help educators identify full-time leadership opportunities. As part of this work, she helps coordinate the district's Crisis Response to Violence Prevention Team, where she uses learning and resources from Leaders for Just Schools to help design district-wide professional learning to comply with state requirements. Jamie also serves as the multicultural committee chair for her state and local affiliates, and she co-chairs the special education committee for her local affiliate. She has worked with her state affiliate to establish the first scholarship for Iowa State Education Association

.....  
"The Leaders for Just Schools program has been incredibly helpful in facilitating meaningful, impactful reflection and self-awareness among our educators so that they can, in turn, provide equitable environments for all members of our learning communities. The 'ripple effect' of this work is visible, essential, and sustainable."  
—Rebecca Cole, Maine

early educators, specifically aimed at recruiting educators of color to the profession. Recently, Jamie brought together the work of these two committees in an effort to identify solutions to combat the disproportionate identification of Black students for special education in her district.

In **Kentucky**, Emilie has worked with Aspiring Educators, using the first year of the LJS curriculum to discuss how to address traumatic public events. She teaches in Jefferson County, which is the district in which Breonna Taylor grew up and attended public school. Emilie's local, Jefferson County Teachers Association (JCTA), has organized multiple marches at Injustice Square, the name given to the location that most protests have taken place following Breonna Taylor's murder. In June 2020, Emilie and her fellow LJS educators from Kentucky hosted a statewide virtual training for members of the Kentucky Education Association. During this session, Emilie noted that while she presented, she could "hear helicopters flying over the nighttime protests."

Vickie, from **Kentucky**, helped write and restructure her state association's teacher handbook. Her contribution to the handbook focused on privilege and unpacking the backpack. Vickie, who currently serves on the Kentucky Education Association's Strategic Planning Committee, will help develop the state's five-year strategic plan. As a member of this committee, which is a three-year commitment, Vickie will help rewrite the mission statement for the union; she will also assist with racial justice training and team building activities. In addition, Vickie's district is currently working through the first year of the Leaders for Just Schools program using the "train the trainer" model.

Rebecca and James have had great success in **Maine**, creating opportunities to host workshops and share valuable information about education equity. They have presented on the topic at notable events, including MEA conferences, Maine's School Management conference, and Bates College's annual Martin Luther King, Jr., Day Celebration; presenting at local colleges, such as Bates, has helped the affiliate extend their reach and build relationships with other educators in the state. Rebecca is a member of the NEA Board of Directors.

Barbara, from **Maine**, worked with a small group of staff at her middle school to review the LJS Year 1 Curriculum Guide. She was part of a network of educators that incorporated LJS elements in their teaching plans during COVID-19. One particularly powerful example of how the LJS program served to make a difference in the lives of students happened during this past school year: Barbara assisted some of her colleagues with how to conduct restorative conversations with students following the murder of George Floyd. Barbara used LJS content and learnings to speak directly to the issues of the moment with her colleagues and students to help the school community heal and prevent future harms.

.....  
"My work with Leaders for Just Schools has opened my eyes around education injustice. I never paid attention to the 'haves' and 'have nots' before I got involved in this program. It is so important that we recognize the way our school district boundaries determine privilege, and because of my work with LJS, I have the courage to have the conversations to make our schools more equitable for all students."

—Peggy Hoy, Idaho

Richard, of **Maryland**, is a leader on equity at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, where he serves as professor of education. He is actively promoting racial and social justice in his state; he has led workshops and spoken at conferences about the importance of promoting equity in schools and classrooms. He communicates regularly with fellow educators from his cohort.

Nikki, from **Maryland**, worked with her city council and school principals in Prince George’s County to offer professional learning in equity, restorative justice, understanding white supremacy culture, and expanding mental health services for the community following the passage of a bill to replace school resource officers with other supports and services in schools in the district.

Vernon, from **Maryland**, was a participant in Cohort 1 and became a widely respected facilitator for Cohort 2. His colleagues from his facilitation group have often consulted with him to help conduct their own professional learning opportunities. Vernon presented the LJS curriculum to new members of the Minority Affairs Committee, the Teachers Association of Baltimore County Board of Directors, the State Instructional Professional Development Conference attendees, the Racial and Social Justice Workgroup, and members of the Maryland State Education Association government relations committee.

Blaine, from **Michigan**, has been working with her district as part of a local affiliate subcommittee to provide professional development throughout the district. The district has hired a new person who focuses on diversity, equity, and inclusion, in part, due to Blaine’s efforts to bring attention to equity issues in the district.

Jordann and Cheri, from **Montana**, worked to establish a Leaders for Just Societies program, which is a modification of the LJS curriculum, for use across the state. They have worked together under the leadership and guidance of Lucinda, an LJS facilitator from North Carolina, to plan and host multiple district-wide trainings. Cheri has worked with her local and state affiliates to host both face-to-face and virtual professional learning experiences, including opportunities to earn professional learning credit.

In **Montana**, Lacy offered teachers in her district an eight-session course that covered most of the LJS Year 1 learning and activities. She also led a whole-school professional learning experience about restorative justice and classroom community-building.

Bridgett, from **Montana**, initiated a conversation with the Billings Public School superintendent, school board, and local president about



**“Leaders for Just Schools, by far, has been the most empowering work that I have completed.**

**The professional learning experience has provided me with the tools of analysis and reflection to deep dive into this vital work of dismantling the structures that prevent school districts from achieving true equity. This experience gave me the knowledge and support to create lasting change and greater equity in our policy, practice, and performance.”**

**–Lawrence Brinson, North Carolina**

exploring a new school schedule that will be more equitable for students and educators. She is also part of a cohort of educators from across the school district participating in a Social Justice Holocaust course.

In **Nebraska**, Ed reported that his state affiliate created a social justice committee that was charged with re-examining the strategic goals of the affiliate and incorporating racial and social justice into those goals. Additionally, this committee is investigating how to work with local affiliates to establish ongoing cohorts for “Challenging Racism.”

In **New Hampshire**, Misty and Terry have collaborated and worked with other educators within their state and have consistently worked and collaborated with LJS educators throughout the country, forming bonds with fellow allies who are also invested in this work. To continue their efforts, they have used strategies informed by Leaders for Just Schools to begin the necessary work to improve school environments for their students and create equitable school environments throughout the state. In 2020, Misty was awarded the Christa McAuliffe Sabbatical—a year-long leave of absence to an exceptional New Hampshire public school teacher—from the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation to promote just schools. The sabbatical provides Misty with the time, space, and funding to explore new ideas and ways to enhance classroom teaching.

Angel, from **New Jersey**, hosted two LJS sessions during her district-wide in-service training period in spring 2021. She was recently nominated to become a facilitator for Cohort 2. Angel hosts a weekly podcast called “The NJEA REAL Movement: A movement for racial equity, affirmation, and literacy,” which discusses how educators can collectively and effectively engage in the racial equity work that is vital to the transformation of our public school system.

Sherri, from **New Mexico**, received a phone call from Governor Lujan Grisham thanking her for her advocacy on behalf of special education students in her district. Sherri contacted her superintendent and actively lobbied members of the state legislatures alongside fellow NEA-NM members to advocate for educators to not be required to return to school buildings until it was safe to do so. Sherri retired this year after 36 years in the classroom and is looking forward to coordinating with her fellow retired members about how to stay involved in racial and social justice work in retirement.

Turquoise, vice president of her local affiliate in **North Carolina** and a member of the NEA Board of Directors, participated in a book study organized around Rethinking Schools: Teaching for Black Lives with a group of educators from across the state. Turquoise was a Pilot Cohort participant who subsequently became a facilitator for Cohort 1 in San Diego, California.

In **North Carolina**, Bryan has presented portions of the first year of the LJS curriculum at conferences for beginning teachers—those who are in their first few years in the classroom. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Bryan shifted his attention to weekly and monthly mini professional development sessions, utilizing the curriculum to fit the context of his school’s or grade-level agenda. This year, he has led efforts in his school community to refocus social-emotional learning initiatives to meet the social, emotional, and equity needs of the students.

Tamika, the **North Carolina** Association of Educators president, credits LJS for helping her “deepen my toolkit and skills to advance the conversation around racial and social justice in my school and local community.” She put those skills to the test time and time again throughout the course of the last year. Two such examples include when Tamika was interviewed by NPR about issues surrounding school reopening and her participation in a Community Forum hosted by the Fayetteville NAACP Education Committee and other coalition partners about disparities in school discipline and suspension. Tamika looks forward to continuing to engage in these Community Conversations and advocate for opportunities for all students.

Cortney, from **Oregon**, has facilitated the learning from the first year of the LJS curriculum for educators across role and level, including members of her local union, a superintendent, an assistant superintendent, high school administrators, and directors at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. She currently leads professional learning opportunities with a newly formed middle school equity committee in her district.

Daneen, from **Pennsylvania**, created a racial and social justice resource webpage to share information with fellow educators on various topics and issues related to securing education justice wins for students across the state.

Stephanie, the vice president of the **South Dakota** Education Association (SDEA), facilitated the first year of the LJS curriculum at the South Dakota State Mentoring Academy to approximately 100 statewide mentors and mentees. The presentation was well received by participants. A new initiative was also passed at the SDEA’s Representatives Assembly last spring that included racial and social justice training for staff, board of directors, and members; this allowed Stephanie to present to about 30 educators at a retreat for staff and board members. Stephanie is in the process of developing statewide language around critical race theory and community schools.

In **Tennessee**, Jeanette is working with her state affiliate to track the implementation of a statewide school discipline bill to make sure it is implemented with equity and restorative practices. The bill is modeled after one she had experience with in her local in Chattanooga.

Lakeisha, from **Texas**, has been working to promote equity using learning from the Leaders for Just Schools program to advocate for student-centered decision-making as schools reopen amid the COVID-19 pandemic. She was interviewed by a local Black News Channel about the impact of COVID-19 on students and the exacerbation of opportunity gaps. Subsequently, she was asked to participate in an interview for ABC News.

.....  
“Leaders for Just Schools has empowered me to raise my voice as an advocate for student equity issues. I now feel more comfortable engaging in meaningful dialogue to ensure equity is a true focus in our public schools and not just a buzzword. By more closely examining and reflecting on my own teaching practices, I am better equipped to ensure all students have the opportunity to attend a public school where they will thrive.”  
–Nick Schwei, Wisconsin

In **Wisconsin**, Nick and Jennifer collaborated with the Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC) leadership team to grow a state-based cohort of educators who are currently moving through the LJS program with the goal of expanding equity training across the state. More than 100 educators have participated over the three years of the in-state program, and they were eager to continue this work. They have already met to discuss challenges, barriers, and ways to continue their efforts as part of a professional learning community.

Angela, from **Wisconsin**, met with her district superintendent and school board vice president to discuss their district ESSA plan, and Angela outlined recommendations for addressing inequities she identified in her classroom, school, and district. In response, they invited Angela to review her district's equity guidebook, in which she enlisted the help of her local association to participate in the review and feedback process. Angela was also invited to conduct an LJS professional learning opportunity for her local. Shortly after, she presented learning from the first year of the LJS curriculum to a statewide network of educators, with the goal of conducting equity work "from the bottom up" in their respective school districts.

# VISION FOR THE FUTURE



The overarching vision for the future of Leaders for Just Schools is to continuously expand NEA's network of educator equity leaders in communities across America. These equity leaders understand how to use education policy at the federal, state, and local levels to take action to achieve racial and social justice in education for all students and educators, no matter their race, background, ZIP code, or ability. They are steeped in the Leaders for Just Schools curriculum and conversant in policy strategies to achieve safe, just, and equitable public schools.

The NEA endeavors to help state and local affiliates implement Leaders for Just Schools with their

own cohorts to further expand this work. By scaling the impact of the program, the NEA hopes to create systemic behavioral changes in educators, schools, districts, affiliates, and public education systems throughout the country.

In the immediate future, the NEA is working with the LJS Leadership Team to broaden and upgrade the program's ability to support the ongoing learning and work of LJS educators. Initial improvements include a revised process for identifying, evaluating, and supporting LJS facilitators; ongoing consultation with the LJS Leadership Team, facilitators, and participants to discuss ever-changing professional learning needs; and assessments of LJS program delivery and content.

The NEA will continue to support state and local affiliates as their members engage in the Leaders for Just Schools program and work through their problem of equity to create and implement local and state policy, legislation, regulation, and bargaining/contract language that creates safe and just schools for every student.



National Education Association  
1201 16th Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20036  
[www.nea.org](http://www.nea.org)