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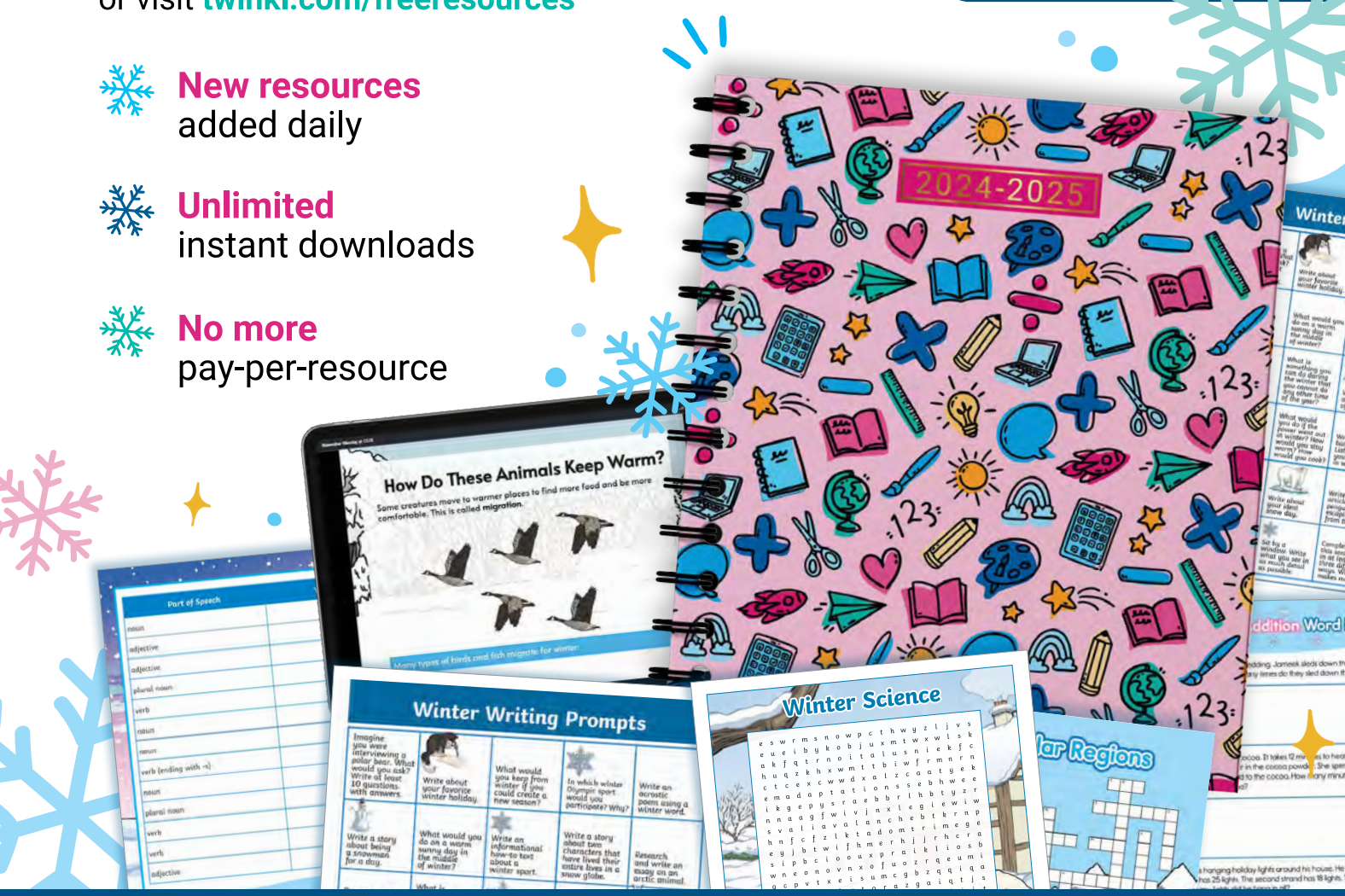
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A hanging holiday light is around his house. He hangs 31 lights. The second strand has 18 lights. The first strand has 13 lights.

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PHOTOS CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: STEVE KOSS; JATI LINDSEY

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We believe partnerships with parents, families, communities, and other stakeholders are essential to quality public education and student success.

COLLECTIVE ACTION.
We believe individuals are strengthened when they work together for the common good. As education professionals, we improve both our professional status and the quality of public education when we unite and advocate collectively.

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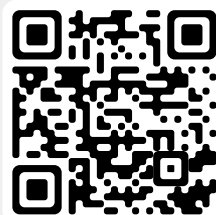
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EDITOR'S note

Associate Publisher and Director **Anitrá Speight**

The Power to Stop Gun Violence

Lockdown drills. Metal detectors. Bulletproof windows. Staff trainings on how to pack gunshot wounds. This is everyday life—not in a war zone, but in many of our nation's schools.

Since 2021, there have been 159 shootings in our nation's pre-K-12 schools and on college campuses that resulted in someone being injured or killed. These horrific incidents, memorialized on the cover of this magazine, include the mass shootings seared into the national consciousness—Robb Elementary School, in Uvalde, Texas; Michigan State University, in East Lansing; Morgan State University, in Baltimore; and too many others. They also include dozens of incidents of guns fired in schools, injuring or killing a classmate, an educator, someone's sister, brother, son, daughter, mother, father, friend.

When we first designed this cover, we attempted to list every school shooting that has taken place since the massacre at Columbine High School, nearly 25 years ago. We even tried a fold-out cover that would triple its size. Still, the shootings wouldn't fit.

Let that sink in. They wouldn't fit.

Then we tried to list school shootings from the last 10 years, 5 years—all too long.

Every single one of these shootings is a tragedy. Every one shakes the community to its core. Every one is the reason school safety has climbed up the list of concerns for parents and educators in poll after poll.

It's easy to let the sheer magnitude of the problem lull us into passivity—into accepting that this is just the way it is. But we are not helpless. There is not one solution, but many that collectively will stanch the bloodshed and fear in our classrooms. And, as educators, we are uniquely positioned to make a real and lasting difference.

This month's cover story, "We. Can. Change. This." (Page 42) shows how we can channel our outrage and fear into real change. Together, we can raise our collective voice and mobilize our schools, our communities, our states, and our nation. We. Can. Change. This.

TAKE ACTION

Sign NEA's Safe Schools, Safe Communities Pledge to start your journey as a gun violence prevention activist: nea.org/SafeSchoolsPledge.

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Joy, Justice, and Excellence

Dear NEA members,
I am honored to serve as
your president.

United, we will reclaim public education as a common good and transform it into a racially and socially just system that actually prepares every student—not one, not some, but every single student—to succeed in a diverse and interdependent world. Onward!



Becky Pringle
NEA President



“

“We know these attacks are happening because our opponents know public education is the ‘foundation of an inclusive democracy, economy, and society.’ To fully dismantle our democracy they must dismantle the system that teaches citizens to think critically.”

—Becky, to Florida Education Association members, Oct. 13, 2023

Face to Face With NEA Members

This fall, I toured schools and met with NEA members in Illinois, Wisconsin, and Michigan—and I saw what’s possible when NEA members demand support for every student and respect for every educator. At Pennoyer Elementary School, in Norridge, Ill., I celebrated with union members who finally won a funding referendum—after six tries! In Michigan, I saw what’s possible when union members work to elect pro-public education candidates. State education budgets have increased, and every student gets free breakfast and lunch! Alongside Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and Michigan Education Association President Chandra Madafferri, I saw how state funds are converting an empty building into an early childhood center in Flint, and how voter-approved funds built a new middle school in Grandville—with a first-in-the-nation robotics arena!



(Top) What a warm welcome I received at Pennoyer Elementary, from third-grade teacher Karen Adkins and others! (Bottom) As a 30-year science educator, I share Grandville, Mich., teacher Mike Evele’s delight in drones. Here, he shows his latest to me and U.S. Rep. Hillary Scholten.

JOIN ME

3 Things to Do For Yourself and Your Union

- 1. Bring on the heat!** This nation has 50,000 school buildings that are 50-plus years old—with outdated HVAC systems. How does that feel in January? Tell your elected reps to support updates and upgrades at nea.org/update-and-upgrade. For more on working conditions in schools, read our story on Page 48.
- 2. Read something by a Black author.** February isn’t only Black History Month, it’s African American Read-In Month—a time to read and share books by African Americans. Be challenged. Be seen. Be celebrated. Find recommendations to share with students at nea.org/readacross.
- 3. Help end gun violence.** Banning assault weapons would help our students and loved ones go more safely about their days. Sign NEA’s Safe Schools, Safe Communities Pledge to start your journey as a gun violence prevention activist at nea.org/safeschoolspledge. To find out how educators can help stop the epidemic of gun violence in schools, read our story, “We. Can. Change. This.” (Page 42).

Find out how NEA is working every day for educators, students, and public schools in “NEA in Action” (Page 10).



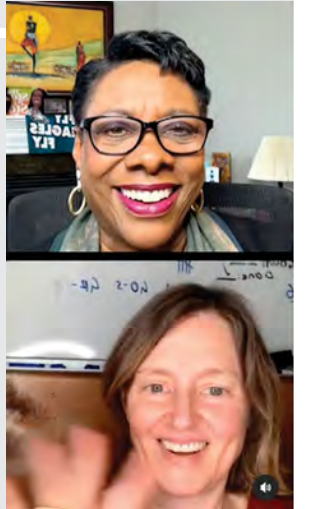
In the News

“Educators are saying to me that the focus needs to be on solutions we know work. It’s important to ask and listen to educators, parents, and students themselves—they’ll tell you what we need. At NEA, we’re focused on solutions like community schools. ... A student can’t learn if they’re hungry.”

—Becky, FOX News Sunday, Sept. 10, 2023

Who I’ve Been Talking To

As part of my Instagram Live series, “Honesty in Education,” I have been diving into deep conversation with some of the most interesting and inspiring people. In September, I connected with Jessica Craven, a parent and political activist who writes a daily newsletter called *Chop Wood, Carry Water*, which suggests specific actions—signing petitions, making phone calls, etc.—that will make the world a better place for our babies. “You’re a mom, so you understand,” she told me. Yes, I do! It’s small actions like these, taken by millions of parents and educators working together, that will help our nation live into the poetry of our Constitution. Then, in October, I talked with Chris Campbell, a third-grade teacher from Missouri who has ADHD, about disability justice and more. Find these reels and others at instagram.com/nea_today.



Becky and Jessica Craven



Stay connected with me through X @BeckyPringle.

NEA Sues States Over Censorship Laws



NEA is taking six states to court over censorship laws that suppress lessons and discussions about race and gender. The lawsuits aim to protect educators' freedom to teach and

students' freedom to learn accurate, honest, and inclusive lessons.

Lawsuits have been filed in:

- Florida
- Oklahoma
- Georgia
- New Hampshire
- Tennessee
- Wisconsin

NEA Chips Away at Student Loan Debt

NEA members have made their voices heard loud and clear. The U.S. Department of Education, after working directly with NEA, introduced a new student loan repayment plan that has reduced the monthly repayment to \$0 for 2.9 million borrowers.



Called Saving on a Valuable Education (SAVE), the new income-driven repayment plan, which debuted in August 2023, also allows monthly payments to count toward Public Service Loan Forgiveness, a program that forgives the student debt of teachers and other public service workers after 10 years of service.

Since President Joe Biden took office, NEA has partnered with his administration to transform the state of student debt, making it easier for educators to afford debt repayment.

Find out more at nea.org/studentdebt.

NEA Members Deliver Blow to Voucher Schemes

The Nebraska State Education Association (NSEA), at right, spearheaded a challenge to a terrible voucher law supported by former Education Secretary Betsy DeVos. With NEA support, an NSEA-led coalition collected more than 117,000 signatures, at right, to qualify a state ballot measure for the November 2024 election. Nebraskans will now have the chance to vote down the harmful law, which diverts taxpayer dollars away from cash-strapped public schools to private schools.



New NEA Program Advances Student Learning

NEA's new Accelerating Student Learning Program gives educators real solutions to close the opportunity gaps that affect students nationwide.

Teams of educators, paraeducators, parents, and

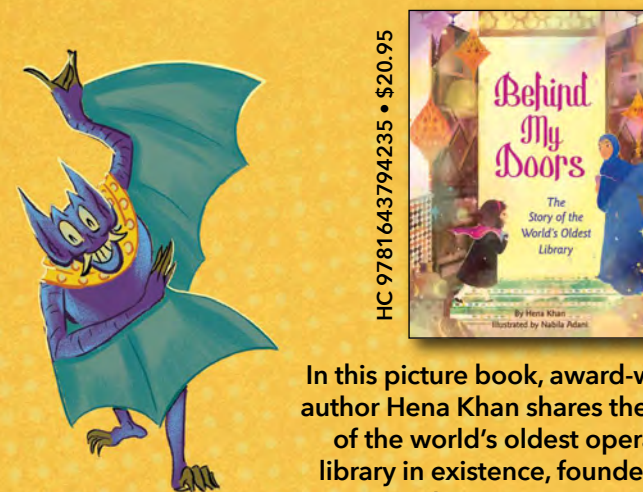
administrators will pilot the program in 10 districts across the country.

Each team will apply a unique plan, such as small group tutoring sessions, professional development, and strategies that increase student engagement. Other plans address student hunger, attendance, and inclusion.

Learn more at nea.org/accelerate.

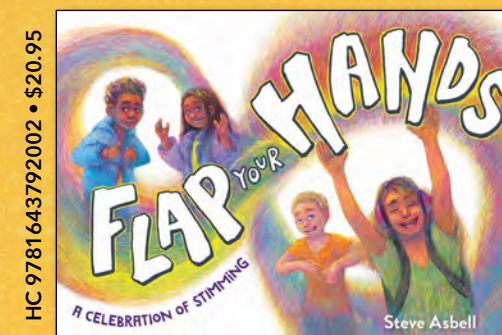


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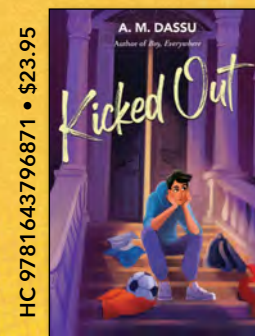


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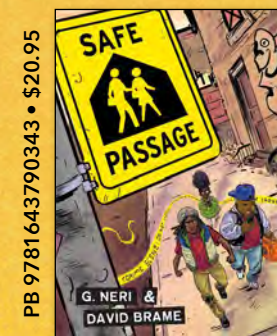
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In this companion novel to the acclaimed *Boy, Everywhere*, A. M. Dassu extends the story of Sami's best friend Ali, who organizes a charity soccer match for their friend Aadam while his whole life is privately unraveling.



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Coretta Scott King Honor-winning author G. Neri returns with an epic graphic novel journey across the South Side of Chicago for three young people as they set out to find an armored truck that has lost a payload of cash.



EDUCATORS DEMAND SMALLER CLASSES

A few years ago, Kathia Ruiz had a whopping 29 students in her fourth-grade classroom. Through some lucky twist of fate, the Woodburn, Ore., teacher started the 2022 – 2023 school year with only 18.

"It was amazing all the things I could do! The differentiation that was possible," she says. To her, the benefits of fewer students in a class are clear.

But when Ruiz and other members of the Woodburn Education Association bargaining team sat down with district administrators, the district didn't—or wouldn't—see it. Their lack of consideration was "mind-blowing," she says. "[Class size] has such an impact on what teachers can do. We want to support every student."

Across the nation, educators agree. In Columbus, Ohio, in fall 2022, teachers went on strike to get smaller class sizes. A month later, Massachusetts educators in the cities of Malden and Haverhill did the same.

In Spring 2023, in both Woodburn and 20 minutes away, in Silverton, Ore., union members were on the verge of striking. Finally, the district agreed to contract language that mandates specific supports when a class exceeds a certain number of students.

Whether at the bargaining table, in the halls of state capitols, or in other places where educators and parents confer about things that matter, class size is a hot topic.



"We haven't seen this historically—until this year," notes NEA's Andy Jewell, a collective bargaining specialist who has tracked educator strikes for decades. "This year, in almost every strike and near-strike, class size has been a big issue. It's more prominent and more significant."

The root cause of the uptick is unclear, though the national teacher shortage and the spike in students' needs since the pandemic have likely contributed.

What is certain is that educators and parents agree that smaller classes and special education caseloads would help students succeed.

"Teachers have to demand what they know is best for the students. Nobody else is coming to save us," says Alison Stolfus, president of the Silver Falls Education Association, in Silverton. "You have to get organized and demand it!"

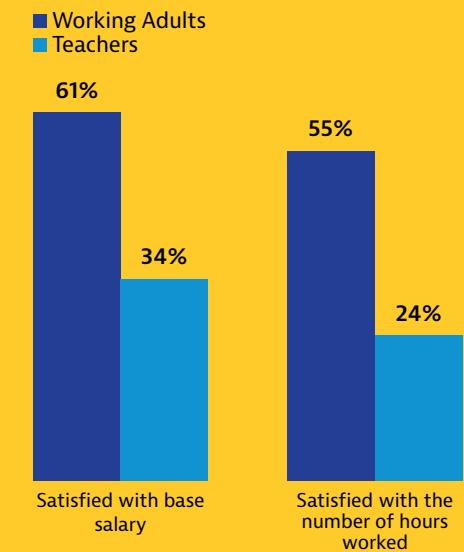
Teachers Work More Hours Than Other Working Adults

In a national survey released by the RAND Corporation, in September, K–12 public school teachers reported feeling overworked and underpaid. On average, they estimate working 53 hours a week—seven more hours than the typical working adult.

(RAND conducted a separate survey of all working adults.) Only 24 percent of teachers are satisfied with their total weekly hours worked, compared with 55 percent of all working adults.

The survey also found that about a quarter of teachers' time is uncompensated, and 66 percent say their base salary is inadequate, compared with 39 percent of all working adults. Of those respondents who are thinking of leaving the profession, 54 percent said working too many hours outside the school day was a factor in their dissatisfaction. Sixty percent said the same for low pay.

Teachers are much less satisfied with their pay and hours worked compared with all working adults



Transforming Education

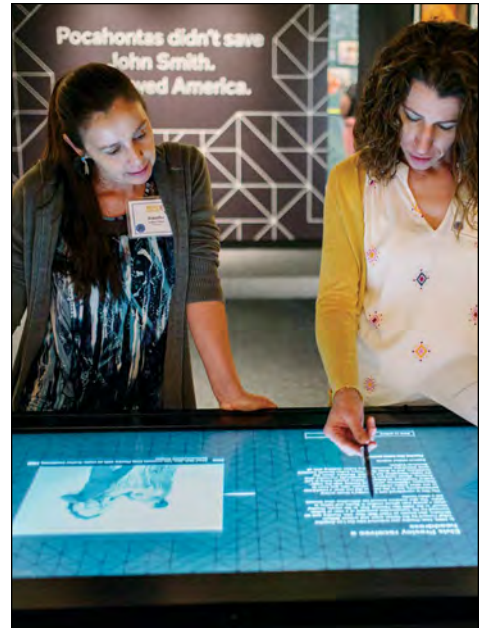
Challenge your assumptions about Indigenous history and cultures from the past and today with free online resources from the museum's education initiative Native Knowledge 360°.

AmericanIndian.si.edu/NK360
#NK360



Smithsonian

Photo by Maitailong Du.



Voters across party lines have positive views of public schools and educators

More than 70 percent of voters (both parents and non-parents) have a favorable view of public school teachers—and their views are more positive this year than last. That's according to a national NEA poll, conducted in August, of 1,400 likely voters in the 2024 elections.

Public school teachers received positive ratings across partisan lines, including among 70 percent of independents and 60 percent of Republicans. Only 13 percent of independents and 16 percent of Republicans view public school teachers unfavorably.



	Favorable	Unfavorable
Democrats	86%	5%
Independents	70%	13%
Republicans	60%	16%

3,362

That's how many book bans were in U.S. public school classrooms and libraries during the 2022 – 2023 school year—a 33% increase from the previous year.



SOURCE: PEN AMERICA



EDUCATORS STILL BUYING THEIR OWN SCHOOL SUPPLIES

Studies show that on average, educators spend from \$500 to \$750 of their own money every year on things students need. And many educators spend a great deal more. Out-of-pocket classroom expenses are greatest during the back-to-school time period and continue to add up throughout the year.

Where does the money go? Educators report buying clothing, winter gear, eyeglasses, food, and toiletries for students on top of classroom supplies and teaching materials. To make matters worse, due to high inflation, prices for school supplies increased almost 24 percent since 2021, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

That's made back-to-school shopping hard on many families, and difficult for educators—already stretched thin by low pay—who often subsidize their classrooms.

Some NEA locals have taken on the issue of educators' out-of-pocket classroom costs during bargaining. When successful, it brings substantial relief to educators.

The Cascade Education Association, in Washington, bargained successfully for annual funding for classroom spending. That helped Vicki Harrod, a second-grade teacher in Peshastin, Wash.

"Our district gives us \$350 to spend on whatever we want and another \$150 for essentials, like construction paper and so on," Harrod says.

Many educators have turned to online resources, such as DonorsChoose, Amazon Wish Lists, and AdoptAClassroom.org, to ask for donations. While this may save educators some of their own money, it does require an investment of time to set up and repeatedly promote their online campaigns.

Still, educators are grateful for the support.

Memphis, Tenn., teacher Rita Elle procured about \$600 worth of supplies through her Amazon Wish List this year, noting that nearly all of the items were purchased by friends and family.



Victory for Portland Teachers!

Tiffany Koyoma-Lane gets her first minutes of planning time each week about halfway through Wednesday. Until then, she scrambles to make it work for her third graders at Sunnyside Environmental School, in Portland, Ore., who have numbered as many as 31 per class in recent years. Special education educators are quitting in droves. Classrooms have rodents, mold, and temperatures that regularly exceed 90 degrees or fall below 60. And the pay isn't great!

For these reasons and many others, the Portland Association of Teachers (PAT) went on a historic strike in early November, after months of fruitless negotiations with Portland Public Schools. Their top issues? Decreasing class sizes and increasing planning time so that all students can get the attention they need; raising pay so teachers can afford to stay in Portland; and making schools safe.

Ninety-nine percent of PAT members had voted to strike, and polls showed that more than 90 percent of Portland parents and community members supported the strike, too. Thousands of union members picketed loudly and proudly, alongside parents, students, and community members.

They won, of course. Like NEA President Becky Pringle told PAT members, as she rallied alongside them: "When we fight, we win!"

Does Restorative Justice Work?

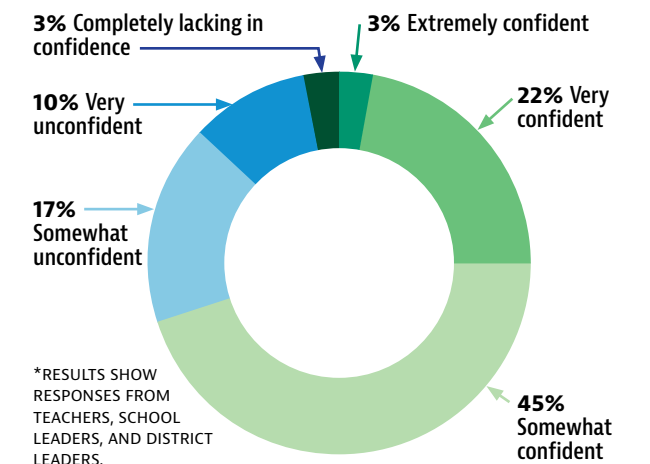
It has been more than a decade since school districts began implementing restorative justice practices—focused on building relationships, conflict resolution, and social and emotional learning—as an alternative to exclusionary discipline, or "zero tolerance" policies. But is it working? In Chicago Public Schools, the answer appears to be yes. Researchers at the University of Chicago Education Lab found that restorative practices, adopted in the 2013 – 2014 school year, have resulted in a staggering 35 percent reduction in student arrests in school and a 15 percent reduction in out-of-school student arrests. Students reported that school climate also improved. They felt a greater sense of safety and were more likely to feel they were members of a community.



RISING CONFIDENCE IN STUDENT ACADEMIC RECOVERY

Improving post-pandemic learning has been a complex and arduous challenge for educators, parents, and students across the nation. But according to a survey conducted at the start of the 2023 – 2024 school year, educators expressed optimism that students may soon be where they need to be academically. Sixty-seven percent said they were "very confident" or "somewhat confident" that their students would reach grade level during the school year. Still, educators' confidence in this outcome was lower than before the pandemic, and schools still face formidable obstacles—including educator shortages and the looming expiration of federal relief funds.

How confident are you* that students in your district or school will be able to reach the grade level where they need to be by the end of the 2023 – 2024 school year?



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WILL NEW JERSEY ESPs FINALLY GET JUSTICE?

By Christy Kanaby,
New Jersey Education Association

Like school staff around the country, education support professionals (ESPs) in East Orange, N.J., were required to report to work during the scariest days of the pandemic, even with school buildings closed.

"When we were directed to return to work, ... the death tolls and hospitalizations were very high," recalls Lynnette Joyner, president of the East Orange Educational Support Professional Association (EOESPA). "All the custodians were afraid and stressed, not just for our lives, but for ... the loved ones we lived with. We didn't want to bring in any germs, and so many of us had to quarantine in our homes."

Contracts for EOESPA and the East Orange Maintenance Association (EOMA) specifically address compensation for work completed during a declared state of emergency, which supersedes all other contract language on overtime.

So, in March 2020, when New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy signed an executive order declaring a state of emergency and closing school buildings, support

staff continued to work and continued to be paid, per the contract.

But in June 2020, the East Orange School District informed EOESPA and EOMA members that starting in July, they would no longer receive state-of-emergency pay.

The district claimed, "No one thought an extended state of emergency would occur."

EOMA president Mark Richards says,

"We signed up to be security and maintenance professionals, knowing that we were working in difficult or even dangerous situations. No one could have predicted working during a pandemic. We had struggles, and we showed up."

And so began a three-year

saga in which EOESPA, EOMA, and the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) teamed up to get justice.

2020: Unions achieve an early win

Working together, the three unions filed grievances, but the East Orange Board of Education balked. The board



Lynnette Joyner



Clockwise from front: Mark Richards, president of the East Orange Maintenance Association, with colleagues Michelle Cruz Stem, Rajahn Robinson, Janice Young, and India Watson, at the NJEA Health & Safety Conference.

claimed that since schools weren't closed in summer and fall 2020, it was no longer necessary to pay individuals more for the same work.

The unions stood firm in their position: The state of emergency was still in effect. The grievance then went to arbitration. The decision upheld each group's contract: The custodians' group would receive two-and-a-half times their salary rate and the security group would receive time and a half.

The maintenance group—per its contract, which says that if the governor declares a state of emergency, no overtime is awarded—would receive only their regular hourly rate.

In all, roughly \$4 to \$5 million was awarded to these members.

2021 – 2022: The school board won't pay up

Despite the ruling, the board of education refused to pay support staff what they were owed.

In June 2021, NJEA sought a judge's certification to enforce the award. The judge ordered the district to pay, but the board still did not comply.

The stalemate continued until summer 2022, when NJEA filed a civil contempt charge—which applies when one party fails to follow a court order,

further injuring the other party's rights.

In the filing, NJEA demanded that the board pay all fines as well as the union's attorney fees.

Late 2022: A bittersweet victory

In another win for the union, the judge held the East Orange Board of Education in contempt. The ruling stated that no fees would be imposed, provided the board paid the EOESPA and EOMA members by September.

Finally, after nearly two years, the district began to comply—sort of.

The district provided a list of members who would be paid retroactively, but it quickly became clear that not all support staff would receive what they were owed:

- The list did not include people who had worked during the pandemic and had since left the district or retired.
- ESPs were required to work over the summer, even though district buildings did not open for summer school. Still the district claimed that this period should not count toward time worked and the award stipulations.
- The district used an incorrect base salary formula to calculate the monies owed.
- The board acknowledged that there are no official records of who worked where and when during the pandemic, claiming problems with its card swipe system.

"It was all very bittersweet," Joyner says. "I couldn't enjoy the fact that we had achieved justice when I knew the numbers were inaccurate."

On Oct. 6, a mediator was brought in, and all parties began to compare attendance records. The board offered to use whichever attendance records would be most beneficial to members.

Less than a week later, additional checks were issued to members, but they were sporadic, inaccurate, and not fully compliant with the award.

2023: Patience paves a path to justice

In March, the matter went to court, and the judge again found the board in contempt. This time the judge ruled to enforce the penalties, ordering the district to pay NJEA's attorney fees.

The judge also considered sanctions against the board members individually for each person's role in disregarding the order.

The judge wasn't the only one upset. EOESPA and EOMA members were outraged.

"At this point, we fully learned that we are hardworking people who are not appreciated by our school district leaders," Joyner declares.

In June, the local unions, NJEA, and district representatives met with an arbitrator from the Public Employment Relations Commission. On Oct. 16, the East Orange ESPs received the arbitrator's award.

It includes an additional \$1.3 million to be paid out for the ESPs work during the pandemic and an order that full payment be made by Dec. 15, 2023.

"I hope other ESPs can learn from this experience to never give up," Richards says.

"It can be exhausting to fight for things that you shouldn't have to fight for, but you need to just keep going and stay focused." ❄️

LEARN
MORE

Find out how you can advocate for education support professionals at nea.org/esp.



WHAT IT'S LIKE TO TEACH UNDER FLORIDA'S HISTORY STANDARDS

"This is going to set us back. ... It's a big blow to our students and nation."

—Jorje Botello, American history teacher, Florida (above)

American history teacher Jorje Botello loves it when his students make connections between the past and present. This critical thinking helps them make sense of the world they live in and hopefully build a more accepting society.

But in summer 2023, education officials in his home state of Florida released new standards for how African American history should be taught. The now infamous standards claimed that "slaves developed skills which, in some instances, could be applied for their personal benefit." The standards drew severe criticism in Florida and across the country.

"I was furious," says Botello, who teaches in the city of Okeechobee. "This is going to set us back so much as classroom teachers. It's a big blow to our students and nation."

It's not lost on him that public schools are held accountable for only some of the state standards.

"Great value is placed on math, language arts, and science, for example, but when it comes to knowing the history of our country, that can get a little gray," he says.

Students' knowledge will depend on the state where they received schooling—and what was left in place, mischaracterized, or omitted from history, he explains.

Teaching the true stories

Botello is a 20-year veteran of his profession and will continue to do what he does best: Teach.

"In good conscience, I cannot say or think it's ethically correct to say, 'Well, you know, African Americans did benefit from slavery.'"

What he will do is tell the real story of how people were brought to the Americas by force because of their skill sets.

"Plantation owners looked for people who could plant tobacco or grow rice. They looked for people who were more educated and skilled than the people already living here—whether they were early Europeans or indentured servants," Botello says.

"These people had special skills, but were kidnapped and harvested from their [homelands]," he explains. "So to claim that they learned it while here, ... no. [Plantation owners] knew exactly what they were doing when it came to slavery."

Politicians who censor history also know what they're doing, and it's a detriment to students.

"There's going to be a small population of kids who grow up to believe this made-up story of 'it benefited people.'"

—BRENDA ÁLVAREZ

Find out how AP African American Studies engages students on Page 28.

LEARN MORE

Protect your students' freedom to learn an honest and culturally inclusive education. Visit nea.org/TeachTruth.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF JORJE BOTELLO

WHO IS THE ONE PERSON YOU CAN'T SURVIVE THE SCHOOL YEAR WITHOUT?

"Mikkell Willard: The best dang school secretary anywhere!"

—Shawna Blamires (below, right), pictured with Mikkell Willard, Utah



"My student teacher! She helped me daily to remember why I love teaching!"

—Melissa M.

"Our union rep. She stood by me and encouraged me to be me."

—Libby G.

"My paraprofessional! She not only makes my job more enjoyable, but easier as well. Thank you, Josie!"

—Jolinda Davis, Washington

"GOD AND THE ANGELS HE SENT IN THE FORM OF MY HUSBAND, FRIENDS, COLLEAGUES, AND PRINCIPAL!"

—Rhea C.

"I HAVE TO KEEP IT TO ONE? DON'T YA KNOW IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO SUPPORT A TEACHER?"

—Elena Marsh, Nevada

"My therapist."

—C.H.A.

SHARE THIS

We want to know what's on your mind. We asked this question on NEA Today's Facebook page and received so many great answers! Keep an eye on facebook.com/nea_today for our next question, and share this link with your fellow NEA members.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF MEMBERS

OUR VOICES

member spotlight

Creating Critical Thinkers

Carlye Holladay
HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH TEACHER
CHERRY CREEK, COLORADO

"This is my 27th year of teaching English. I also coach speech and debate. I get to teach so many great kids and discuss many interesting topics with them. We talk about controversial topics, too, and debate multiple sides of an issue. This helps students recognize viewpoints unlike their own.

Last year in Public Forum, they debated whether 'right-to-work' laws do more harm than good. My students knew very little about labor unions and even the idea of collective bargaining. We dug into all the multiple viewpoints so they could argue effectively on both sides. In debate, they learn quickly that even with steadfast opinions, they're going to change their minds once they understand more.

With the many echo chambers that live online and in the news, kids need context to differentiate between what's real and fake. In my classes, they learn that everyone has a story, and the more they know, the better off we all are because of it.

It helps that I'm trusted as a professional, and my administrators recognize that kids need to be exposed to different ideas and stories."



LEARN MORE

For more member stories, go to nea.org/member-spotlight, or submit the name of an educator you'd like to see featured at nea.org/submit-member-spotlight.

THE FUTURE OF AIR

NEW Lysol® Air Sanitizer is the first and only air-care product approved by the EPA to kill 99.9% of airborne viruses and bacteria[†] while eliminating odors in the air.*



[†] Kills 99.9% of *Staphylococcus aureus* and *Klebsiella pneumoniae* in the air, in 4 minutes. Kills 99.9% of airborne viruses (Tested on MS2 surrogate for enveloped airborne viruses such as Influenza viruses, Coronaviruses, and Pneumoviruses) in the air, in 12 minutes.
^{*} Eliminates odors by killing odor-causing bacteria in the air.
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A PATH TO A BALANCED LIFE: BULLET JOURNALING

By Toni Allyn

Welcome to my bullet journal life. I stumbled upon bullet journaling in August 2016, when I bought a journal because I liked the army-green cover. When I saw that the pages were dotted, I had no idea what to do. I started to do some online research and then fell down the rabbit hole.

Setting up my own system for planning and tracking? Yes, please! This was the answer to years of buying planners, only to toss them aside when I got tired of following a preplanned page. Bullet journaling was a life-changer.

I have taught high school English for 20 years. My bullet journal sits open on my desk every day. I use a lot of colors and doodles, so it is quite an attention-getter. I allow students to flip through it, and I answer their questions about it. On occasion, I even let them doodle in it or sign their names with my fancy pens!

Help students reflect

The first time I shared this practice with students, I had a small class of Advanced Placement (AP) English students who asked if we could dedicate class time to bullet journaling. So, we did!

Every Friday (if they had completed their AP work for the week), I brought in all of my markers, turned on some chill music, and we would talk and journal together.

I have taught my students to track habits—including exercise, self-care, and homework time—which helps them see their patterns. This has led to many conversations about how they can improve balance in their lives.

I helped a young man, who was struggling with depression, to set up a mood and sleep tracker. And a young woman with multiple college options set up a list of pros and cons.

Some students, inspired by Pinterest, made “date idea” lists for their weekends



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF TONI ALLYN

Teacher Toni Allyn uses bullet journaling to take notes in staff meetings, plan her week, and set priorities inside and outside the classroom. Here's a peek inside her many journals.

or “books to read” lists. One student was studying the flags of different countries and set a goal to draw and color every country's flag in the world.

Our bullet journals were creative, productive, and created a sense of community in our classroom.

After three years of bullet journaling and seeing the impact it had on my students, I was inspired to earn an additional teaching endorsement in art.

Then I created an art class (which more than 150 students signed up for) that includes a unit on bullet journaling, art journaling, and sketchnoting, which is visual note-taking with drawings, symbols, and text.

Improve your practice—and your life

I use my bullet journal to support my work, too. From taking notes at a staff meeting to planning out my week and to-do lists. I use creative styles as well as traditional bullet journaling techniques.

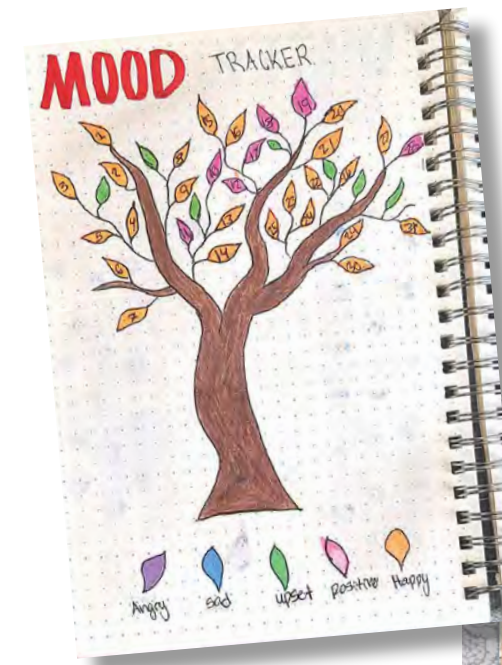
With rapid-logging, I quickly plan out and prioritize the tasks ahead. I use this technique as well as a daily log for both my school and personal journaling.

I teach four subjects, so having a daily log helps me prepare for each class.

With two daughters, each in a different school district, I use a future log to map out important dates throughout the school year. This allows me to see scheduling conflicts in advance so I can make appropriate arrangements.

A strategy called “migration”—or transferring a task from one day, week, or month to another—significantly improves my productivity and

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF TONI ALLYN



balance. When it's time to migrate, I'm encouraged to reflect on my priorities, and I see where I am putting my energy and time. Then I evaluate if the way I'm spending my time is congruent with my values. It's a powerful process.

I tell my students that I am a “recovered perfectionist” thanks to bullet journaling. This is a meaningful conversation for advanced high schoolers, who put immense pressure on themselves to perform.

I share how creating collections and setting goals on paper—and getting my to-do lists out of my head!—helps me envision what I can achieve.

Breaking down my goals with the 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 exercise (setting goals for 5 years, 4 months, 3 weeks, 2 days, and the next hour) helps me feel less overwhelmed.

In the book *The Bullet Journal Method*, author Ryder Carroll shares the concept of *memento mori*, which means “remember death” in Latin. I write that quote in every new journal as a reminder

that time is ephemeral and my priorities and values need to reflect that.

This perspective has directly impacted my teaching, allowing me to focus on what really matters in my work with students. My instruction is more organized and intentional because I prioritize what matters and discard what is distracting and unimportant.

To say that bullet journaling has changed my life is an understatement. By tracking my habits, I see patterns emerge in how I can improve my life as a teacher, mom, and woman. The practice has led to stronger relationships and connections with students and helped both me and my students feel empowered and in control of our lives. 🌟

Toni Allyn teaches English and art at Hockinson High School, in Brush Prairie, Wash.

LEARN MORE

Find out about bullet journaling methods and benefits at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bullet_Journal

TRY THIS
Technology



WHO SAYS RESEARCH CAN'T BE FUN FOR STUDENTS?

By Jacqui Murray

When it comes to research, are you still directing kids toward your grandmother's resources—encyclopedias, reference books, and museums? These are excellent sources, but students often don't find them engaging and don't get the most out of them. The following research websites have been developed with an eye toward attracting and keeping students' interest. All of them, except BrainPOP, are free, but they do include advertising.

BrainPOP (brainpop.com)
Pay for premium

BrainPOP is a collection of 3- to 5-minute animated movies, learning games, quizzes, and interactive activities for grades 3–8 addressing a wide variety of topics such as math, science, social studies, health, art, and technology.

Two quirky moderators, colorful graphics, and a clean uncluttered interface help keep students engaged in easy-to-understand discussions.

First, students search by subject



matter, video topic, Common Core or state standard, or browse a list of videos. Then they can choose a game, called GameUp, or a theme-based video—whichever is better suited to a student's learning style. Another option is to take a quiz and send results to the teacher.

BrainPop can be purchased as a single-student license or a districtwide offering. Besides BrainPOP, the franchise offers BrainPOP Jr. (for K–2), BrainPOP Español, BrainPOP Français, BrainPOP ESL, and other specialized platforms.

History Channel Famous Speeches (history.com/speeches)
Free

The History Channel features a large collection of famous speeches and events in video and audio, such as President Harry Truman's address after the Hiroshima bombing, Jackie Robinson speaking about racism in baseball, and



Amelia Earhart on the impact of women in science and innovation.

These are great primary sources for students in third grade and up who are researching almost any topic.

Students will hear original phrasing, emphasis, and often reactions to dramatic events that—without recordings—would be simply words on paper, devoid of passion, emotion, and motivation.

How Stuff Works (howstuffworks.com) Free

How Stuff Works is an award-winning source of unbiased, reliable, accessible explanations about how the world actually works. The site covers topics such as animals, culture, automobiles, politics, money, science, and entertainment. It uses a wide variety of media (photos, diagrams, videos, animations, articles, and podcasts) to explain complex concepts, such as magnetism, genes, and thermal imaging.

Students 12 and older (and younger with supervision) find thorough



discussions on research topics with add-on articles that enable them to dig deeper. For those looking for more rigor, there are quizzes that evaluate knowledge and challenge learning, including "The Hardest Words to Spell Quiz" and "Who Said That?"

Infoplease (infoplease.com) Free

Infoplease provides authoritative answers to questions using statistics, facts, and historical records culled from a broad overview of research materials, including atlases, encyclopedias, dictionaries, almanacs, thesauruses, the periodic table, a conversion tool, the popular "News and Events Year-by-Year," and the oft-quoted "This Day in History."

Students in middle school and up (or precocious elementary students) can find easy-to-understand facts for



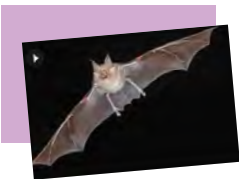
a state report or tips on how to write a persuasive essay. Students ages 9–13 may prefer Fact Monster, which is geared toward younger students.

NOVA Videos (pbs.org/nova) Free

NOVA videos (from the PBS program) offer high-quality, well-researched videos on a variety of topics of interest to older students, including ancient civilizations, the body and brain, evolution, physics, math, planet Earth, space, tech and engineering, and more.

Many topics include teacher resources, such as lesson plans, assessments, teacher videos, and webinars. Other resources include articles, slideshows, audio, quizzes, more than 400 short videos, and more. ☞

Jacqui Murray has been teaching K–18 technology for 30 years. You can follow her on Twitter @AskaTechTeacher.



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BEYOND Harriet, Martin, AND Malcolm

By Mary Ellen Flannery

INSIDE THE MOST
CONTROVERSIAL
(AND MOST
AWESOME!) CLASS
IN AMERICA

Virginia teacher Antoinette Waters recalls visiting the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture when it opened in Washington, D.C., in 2016.

"I cried," she says. "It was finally a space where I felt like, oh my gosh, I'm validated!"

From age 14, when she read Mildred Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, about a Black family during Reconstruction, Waters had been interviewing family members about Jim Crow and immersing herself in African American history.

That day on the National Mall, Waters felt elated to see the kind of work she'd been doing on her own, bound together and shared with the world.

Then she saw a teen girl stroll under the museum's

yellow-winged biplane and say out loud, "Tuskegee Airmen? Who are the Tuskegee Airmen?" It was a whoosh moment for Waters, whose grandfather was a World War II veteran.

"It was like, 'ohhhh, children don't know,'" she says.

Today, many are learning—about the first African American aviators in the U.S. Armed Forces and more—thanks to Waters, who was one of two public school teachers on the original development committee for Advanced Placement African American Studies (AP AfAm).

Last year, 60 U.S. high schools piloted the course, including Waters' Wakefield High School, in Arlington, Va.

This year, the pilot expanded to 800 schools—with teachers receiving training and support from the College Board. Next year, it will be available

to all schools and students for college credit.

The course's development and expansion is a "big step in the right direction toward ensuring students—especially students of color—have access to advanced courses that reflect the diversity that is America," says NEA President Becky Pringle.

'SEE THEM AS INDIVIDUALS'

On a recent Monday morning at Maryland's Randallstown High School, class unfolds with teacher Lauren Ferrara asking her AP AfAm students what they might expect to find in the firsthand account of a captured African, kidnapped through the slave trade.

"Rape," whispers one girl. Fear. Anger. Exhaustion. Starvation.

They probably felt dehumanized, answers one. "Because they're stuffed somewhere and they can't communicate with each other."

Ferrara passes around pages from the autobiography of Olaudah Equiano, who was born around 1745, in what is now southern Nigeria. In 18th century prose, Equiano describes how African traders snuck into his village, kidnapped him and his sister from their yard, and then tied their hands and tore the siblings from each other.

For months, the then-10-year-old was marched toward a fetid slave ship on Africa's West Coast, crewed by the first White men he'd ever seen.

With "red faces and loose hair," they looked like "demons," he writes. "Quite overpowered with horror and anguish, I fell motionless on the deck and fainted."

Ferrara explains to the class: "The reason we look at narratives like this is they're primary sources, so it's a way for us today to get accurate information about what it was like to have these experiences."

"Also, like you all said, this was dehumanizing. We look at these accounts to humanize these people and see them as individuals."

Ferrara's students are rapt. Indeed, AP AfAm students everywhere are riveted.

"I have students who say things like, 'Can I read ahead, miss? Please?'" says New York teacher Sharon Courtney. "Do you understand how rare that is? I haven't had such an eager group in a class in a very long time! I'm like, 'Yes! Absolutely, you can read ahead.'"

AN HONEST EDUCATION

This level of engagement isn't surprising to Pringle. A complete and honest education, she says, doesn't just foster "a deep[er] understanding of the beauty and complexity of our full American story. It also fosters joy in learning."

Indeed, students with more inclusive curricula are more academically engaged and graduate at higher rates, a 2021 Stanford University study found.

And yet, some high school students are being denied this



Antoinette Waters (above) says the biggest challenge in developing the AP African American Studies curriculum was culling the material into one semester-length class.

"I have students who say things like, 'Can I read ahead, miss? Please?' Do you understand how rare that is? I haven't had such an eager group ... in a very long time."

—Sharon Courtney, AP African American Studies teacher, New York



Lauren Ferrara

BEYOND Harriet, Martin, AND Malcolm



Maurice Cowley

opportunity. Last year, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis banned AP AfAm. In August, Arkansas officials followed. Meanwhile, since 2021, 18 states have passed laws that restrict teaching about racism, according to *Education Week*.

It's frustrating, says Florida history teacher and TikTok influencer Erin Freeman. Not all of American history is "flowers and rainbows," she says. "There are some dark parts, but it's important for us to teach our students those parts. If we're going to teach anything in America, it should be taught honestly."

These AP-specific bans also have consequences for students' access to college. The key thing about AP is that nearly all U.S. colleges award credits to students who pass the year-end exams. Those credits can save students tens of thousands of dollars in tuition.

"[AP classes] are a bridge to higher education," notes José Luis Vilson, author of *This is Not a Test: A New Narrative on Race, Class, and Education*.

But it's a bridge more often taken by White students.

In Florida, for example, while two-thirds of White students take at least one AP exam, about half of Black students do.

So, why would DeSantis target an AP class likely to be popular among students of color?

"It's totally political and we have to realize that," Vilson says. "Unfortunately, there's a network of people who are trying to get rid of any materials that might make people feel included in this big notion of America."

VALIDATE AND EMPOWER

Maurice Cowley teaches AP AfAm at McDaniel High School, in Portland, Ore. At the start of the school year, he asks his students what they already know. Their answer? Enslavement and civil rights. Or, in other words, Harriet Tubman and Martin Luther King Jr.

That was Kimora Worthey's experience, too. The Virginia teenager is one of 50 students taking Waters' AP AfAm classes this year. Worthey is Black; about one-third of her AP classmates are not.



Teacher Maurice Cowley (left) says his Black students have learned there is no one way to be Black. The class has also helped them put words to the experience of being Black in a largely White city.

WHO BUILT THIS?

The AP framework is "about honoring those who built America," says Virginia high school teacher Antoinette Waters.

Do you know the African Americans behind these advances? Try to match each invention below to the correct inventor.

- 1) Three-color traffic signal
- 2) Color PC monitor
- 3) First home security system
- 4) Blood bank
- 5) The foundations of the portable fax, touchtone phone, fiber optic cables, and caller ID

- a) Charles Richard Drew
- b) Garrett Morgan
- c) Mark Dean
- d) Shirley Ann Jackson
- e) Marie Van Brittan Brown

Answers: 1. b, 2. c, 3. e, 4. a, 5. d

From Empires to Empowerment: A Walk Through the Framework

Unit 1: Origins of the African Diaspora
The course kicks off in Africa with the empires preceding the African diaspora.

MALI EQUESTRIAN FIGURE, 13TH-15TH CENTURY



Unit 2: Freedom, Enslavement, and Resistance
Students investigate U.S. enslavement and resistance.

HARRIET TUBMAN



Unit 3: The Practice of Freedom
Post-Civil War history, such as Jim Crow, Black migrations, and the Harlem Renaissance, gets a look.

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER'S TUSKEGEE INSTITUTE



Unit 4: Movements and Debates
The course concludes with movements such as Black Power and the U.S. Civil Rights Movement.

WOMEN OF THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY



"You want to talk about the American Revolution? We were there. ... You want to talk about the White House? I love the White House. We built it. Both times."

—Gabby Harber, AP African American Studies student, Virginia

In all her years of K-8 social studies, she says, "We never actually learned about Black people and all we do. We'd go over slavery or whatever, but it's like a quick unit, and then we're done."

This opportunity to learn more is exciting, says Gabby Harber, another of Waters' students, who has spent many hours doing her own research into African American history. But it doesn't seem right to her that students have to enroll in a college-level course to get this information.

"I feel like that's a problem. It should be included in regular studies," she says.

"African American history is American history," Harber adds. "You want to talk about the American Revolution? We were there. You want to talk about the French-Indian War? We had a role. You want to talk about the White House? I love the White House. We built it. Both times."

At Wakefield, many teachers attempt to be inclusive of Black perspectives—offering

books by Black authors, for example. And that's true at McDaniel, too, Cowley says. "All of my colleagues work really hard to make sure there's a representative curriculum that represents all of our communities," he says.

But AP AfAm is much more than that, he adds: "It's broader and really centers the experience of my Black kids, and that's very new for them."

Students, of all races "are eating it up," particularly the lessons that show African American people's significant contributions to the development of our nation, Courtney says.

"It uplifts them," she says. "And they ask all the time, 'How come we haven't learned this before?'"

TAKE ACTION

Support Racial Justice

Check out NEA's racial justice toolkit, which includes tips for talking about race in school. See nea.org/racialjustice.

Differences. Not Deficits

By Cindy Long

There's an energetic girl at Antoinette Felder's elementary school who loves to play jump rope. She uses a wheelchair, but that doesn't stop her from joining the fun on the playground. She's in charge of turning the rope. It never occurred to the girl that she couldn't join the game.

That's what education should look like for students with disabilities—it's not a matter of if they can learn or participate in a school activity, it's a matter of *how*.

Felder, a special education paraeducator in Seattle, Wash., understands that educators have enormous empathy for students with disabilities.

"It's a natural thing, but often it's a bias," she says. "Students with disabilities don't want us to feel sad or sorry for them because of their disability, or to make assumptions about challenges they may endure. They don't want to be seen as any different from any other child."

Students with disabilities need more than empathy. They need their educators to be champions for them, and to be champions for disability rights. That means never assuming that students with any disability—whether physical or developmental—can't do something. That assumption is a



Antoinette Felder

form of ableism, which is a combination of societal attitudes, structures, and policies that devalue people with disabilities.

"Never tell a child she can't," Felder says. "Like the girl who plays jump rope. She can play, she only needed to find a way how. As educators, we need to help them get there."

LOOKING THROUGH A CAPACITY LENS

Alison Lauber is a special education coordinator at Capital School District, in Kent County, Delaware. She works with high school students to help them achieve knowledge and skills that will lead to employment after graduation.

She sees individual gifts and abilities in all of her students. She says the job of educators is to make the necessary accommodations to help them reach their goals.

Instead of looking at students with disabilities through a "deficit lens," by focusing on what they can't do, Lauber encourages fellow educators to look through a "capacity lens."

"We need to focus on their strengths ... and figure out what their needs are to ensure growth in their behavior and in academics," Lauber says.



"Students with disabilities don't want us to feel sad or sorry for them because of their disability. ... They don't want to be seen as any different from any other child."

—Antoinette Felder, special education paraeducator, Washington

others are saying. A student who can make sounds rather than words can still communicate, if given the right accommodations.

"Just because they might not be able to tell you, it doesn't mean they don't understand," Lauber says.

THE POWER OF TEAM WORK

We need to raise expectations, says Kathryn Punsley, a learning and instructional coach at W.E.B. DuBois Academy, in Louisville, Ky.

"We should never think any student is incapable, just that they need the right supports," she says. "We know every single student can succeed. If every teacher believes that students can do it, they can."

Punsley says collective teacher efficacy is a powerful thing. That's the idea that teachers can positively impact student learning when they work as a team and agree on high expectations for growth and achievement.

"Developing teacher efficacy as a staff is critical, and we can do that with anti-ableism professional development," Punsley says. "Biases perpetuated in media and misrepresentation about people with disabilities leads well-intentioned teachers to think, oh well, maybe this student can't do it. That attitude gets in the way."

For example, if a student excels at organization and following directions, Lauber points out those positives. She may help the student work toward a career in the culinary field where they could organize ingredients and follow recipes.

Part of Lauber's work is helping colleagues overcome ableist biases. She challenges common assumptions, including that wheelchair users are ill or have cognitive disabilities. Someone who uses a wheelchair can have high levels of intellectual capacity, she reminds colleagues.

Or if a student is non-verbal, that doesn't mean the person can't hear what



Kathryn Punsley



Alison Lauber

LEARN MORE

You and your colleagues can be champions for disability rights. Go to nea.org/DisabilityRights to download the "We Need Champions" guide to hang in the teacher's lounge.

WE MUST FOCUS ON WHAT STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES CAN DO, NOT WHAT THEY CAN'T

Psst... Your Bias Is Showing

By Cindy Long

WANT TO CREATE MORE JUST SCHOOLS? THREE IDAHO EDUCATORS CAN TELL YOU EXACTLY HOW TO DO IT.

Imagine standing up in a staff meeting at school and saying, “Let’s address institutional racism in our schools.” How would your colleagues react? Some might welcome an open discussion, but many would probably shift in their seats and glance around nervously. A few might even get up and walk out of the room.

Talking about race openly and honestly is essential to creating educational equity for all students and members of the school community. But the approach to the conversation must be handled with care.

“You can’t march into a room of educators and announce that you are going to talk to them about racism. People will bristle and back away immediately,” says Caitlin Pankau, an Idaho English teacher, facilitator for NEA’s Leaders for Just Schools (LJS) program, and staffer with the Idaho Education Association (IEA). “You need to take the right steps first, and that’s what Leaders for Just Schools is all about.”

“You can’t march into a room of educators and announce that you are going to talk to them about racism. People will bristle and back away immediately.”

—Caitlin Pankau, English teacher, Idaho (above)



“The work, quite honestly, will never be done, but we are showing educators across the state how to advocate for equity for our students by using policies like the Every Student Succeeds Act.”

—Lindsey Smith, English teacher, Idaho (left)

The program helps participants better understand how they can cultivate equitable, just schools for students of every race, place, background, and ability.

LJS focuses on the intersection of racial justice in education and understanding how to use the levers of local, state, and federal policy—specifically the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)—to create equitable learning spaces for all students.

Everyone can be a leader

More than 200 educators from across the country are currently engaged in the three-year program. Typically held in summer, the training kicks off with virtual sessions followed by in-person learning experiences.

In the first year, educators learn about critical definitions and topics in education justice. And they turn inward to explore their own biases.

In year two, participants examine structural inequities in education and focus on building partnerships with families and communities to break those structures.

In year three, they create a plan to address a “problem of equity” that they have identified in their own schools or communities. Over the course of this learning journey, educators develop the knowledge and skills to advocate and organize for education justice.

A powerful preliminary step is to ask participants to reflect on their race and how it has impacted their experience.

“The goal is not to send White people down a shame path,” Pankau says. “It’s to help them identify and acknowledge advantages and disadvantages people of different races experience.”

Tapping into educators’ talents

Pankau has completed all three years of the program and is now an LJS facilitator. She and two Idaho colleagues—high school science teacher Jamie Morton and middle school English teacher Lindsey Smith—were part of the pilot cohort in 2018 and engaged in the program as both participants and facilitators.

“We were so proud of where the curriculum had taken us, we wanted to take it more broadly at home,” says Smith, who worked alongside Pankau, Morton, and IEA to design a statewide LJS curriculum.

Today, the colleagues are fostering a community of educator-leaders who are prepared to address institutional inequities in their schools and communities.

“The work, quite honestly, will never be done, but we are showing educators across the state how to advocate for equity for our students by using policies like the Every Student Succeeds Act to promote the schools we want.”

The LJS curriculum offers a structured journey for educators who are passionate about these critical issues.

“The first step is figuring out how we can change as individuals,” Smith says. “Then we learn how to talk about race and inequities, which are not always easy to discuss. Then, when we’re more comfortable talking about this openly, we look at the students and how they are impacted by what we teach and by other factors at school, like dress codes or discipline practices.”

That’s when it all comes together, say the three educator-leaders. They note that it’s powerful to discover how everyone can help make schools equitable by first taking a hard look inward at how one thinks, speaks, and acts, and how that is received by the world.

“Once you know better, you do better,” Pankau says.

Psst... Your Bias Is Showing

So how have LJS participants been doing better? They have the opportunity to create an advocacy plan addressing an issue in their school, district, or state. From implementing new classroom policies to reviewing school handbooks to offering testimony at school board meetings, an array of projects stem from members' engagement in the program.

'We're continuing the work back home'

The beauty of the program is that the work is ongoing, Morton says.

"Having one- or two-day trainings on equity wasn't working, but with LJS, the goal is to make ongoing, systemic changes with a cohort of people who connect with each other like we did, and then make connections back

home," she shares. "We keep working on this, purposefully and intentionally, throughout Idaho. We may be graduates of the national program, but we're continuing the work back home."

Now there are about 30 educators who are incorporating the LJS curriculum into learning experiences throughout the state. They hold sessions at state and regional IEA meetings and offer them through their districts and schools.

After the training, facilitators check in regularly on the educators' progress: Are they making changes to lessons and updating curricula to make learning more equitable,

inclusive, and culturally sustaining? Are they addressing unfair school policies? Are they participating in committees at the school, district, or state level to ensure equity is on the agenda? Facilitators find out where people need assistance and how they can help.

"Our hope is that folks will keep practicing what they've learned, either in groups or on their own," Pankau says.

"If you're not a facilitator by nature, then your role can be to simply change your awareness, which then impacts your classes and potentially the lives of thirty or more students," she explains. "Then, if you have a conversation with a colleague or two, and they change their awareness, that impact grows."

The training covers topics such as defining equity, understanding "-isms," and examining the consequences of segregation on public education.

"The program does an excellent job of explaining White privilege while also acknowledging that it was hard for many White people," Smith notes. "But it shows how we had a leg up from the start. When we understand that, we harness that knowledge on behalf of our students of color."

Awareness generates empathy and grace. It also filters into lesson plans—such as including literature in which People of Color are the protagonists and heroes, or examples of leaders of color in the arts, science, or engineering. Awareness can help interactions with colleagues, too.

All of this work takes time, practice, and relationship building, Pankau says, but the effort pays off by creating more equity, more successful students, and better humans. 🌟



"The goal is to make ongoing, systemic changes with a cohort of people who connect with each other... and then make connections back home."

—Jamie Morton, science teacher, Idaho (above)

**LEARN
MORE**

Check out videos on ESSA, "isms," equity, and more at nea.org/LJSVideos.

PHOTO: NEA

2024 NEA National Leadership Summit



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visit nea.org/leadershipsummit

THE JOY OF READING IS NOT DEAD, YET

By Mary Ellen Flannery

THE TERRIBLE, HORRIBLE, NO GOOD, VERY BAD NEWS ABOUT READING TRENDS—AND HOW NEA MEMBERS ARE REVERSING THEM

Matilda Wormwood's heart would break. The famous book-worm—star of the eponymous children's book by Roald Dahl—taught herself to read to escape her ghastly parents. She loves books. Can't keep her nose out of them.

Today, kids like Matilda are rare. Research shows that the

number of children and teens who read for fun has dropped to an all-time low.

Forty years ago, if you looked at a class of 30 middle or high schoolers, just about two would say they never read for fun. Today, that number would be 10—or a third of the class. Young readers are more likely to read for fun than older students, but that rate is declining, too.

Is this another thing that social media has killed? Maybe. But many NEA members point to other factors. For one thing, reading is too wrapped up in standardized testing.

When children are forced to read for high-stakes tests and are constantly graded—and punished—for how well they comprehend impassive reading passages, it's not fun for them.

Making matters worse, many have been told that the books they like to read aren't the "right books."

"The joy of books has been ... suppressed, tested, and killed," says R. Joseph Rodriguez, an English teacher at Akins Early College High School, in Austin, Texas. "I hate when students are called 'struggling readers.' We need to see them as students who need a revival! I want a revival!"

For Rodriguez, the key is providing access to good books—and letting students pick for themselves.

Indeed, it's not a secret what motivates kids to read. John Guthrie, of the University of Maryland, has studied "reader motivation" for decades.

Nearly 30 years ago, he identified key factors. Topping the list are curiosity, or a desire to learn; "aesthetics," meaning the pure pleasure of reading; and social aspects.

"It's access, choice—and talking about books," says Marcia Kochel, a librarian at Druid Hills Middle School, in Decatur, Ga.

Here, NEA members explore five ways to spark joy in reading.

1) Ask yourself: What do they want to read?

"You have to buy the books they want," Kochel advises.

When she first came to Druid Hills, in 2016, her library didn't have any graphic novels. No manga. She applied for grants, got PTA funds, and even held a fundraising concert with the Grammy Award-winning Indigo Girls. (Emily Ray, one half of the famous folk duo, is from Druid Hills, and her mother was a school librarian.)

"We buy and buy and buy what the kids want us to buy," Kochel says.

For her, that means scary stuff, true crime, adventure, romance, and more.

For Tamara Cox, a National Board Certified librarian at South Carolina's Wren High School, it's "mysteries, mysteries, and mysteries," she says. "Any time I see a new mystery book, it's pretty much an automatic order for me."

Kochel points out, "Kids get told all the time that what they like to read isn't really reading. They will never hear that here."

Librarians, like 2023 School Librarian of the Year Julie Stivers, talk about "reading

trauma," Kochel adds. The term refers to the harm done when reading is associated with high-stakes tests—and when the only kind of books that "count" are classic texts by White men about White people.

Thanks to conscientious publishers and authors, students today have better access to books that explore themes such as homelessness, racism, and so on. These books are vital to help students understand the world around them, Kochel says, but publishers also need to publish stuff that makes kids laugh.

"We have great books dealing with heavy problems," she says. "But 80 percent of the kids just want something fun."

2) Include diverse books

In Rodriguez's classroom, most students are Latino—and they notice racial representation. One recently told him that the blockbuster TV show *Friends* had white-washed New York City with its all-White cast.

"Why is this funny? This show is mean," he told Rodriguez.

Students should enjoy the freedom to read, Rodriguez says. But today, as book bans reach a historic level and some states prohibit teaching about race or LGBTQ+ people, it's a challenge for educators like Rodriguez to provide books that celebrate diversity.



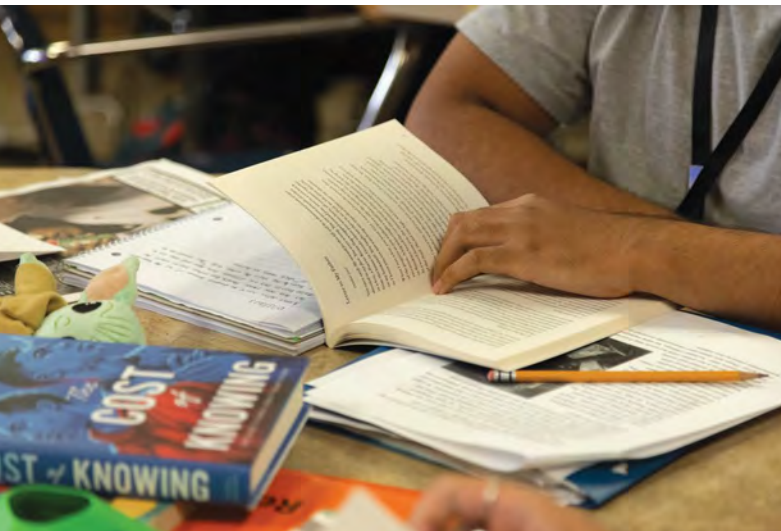
The most-banned books include LGBTQ+ people. But kids want them, Kochel notes.

"These last couple of years, kids have been coming to me and saying, 'What do you have with LGBTQ+ themes?'" she says. "Ten years ago, they might have been embarrassed. Today, they're excited about these books and affirmed that we have them!"

Publishers have gotten the message, Kochel adds. "We're seeing a nice uptick in representation," she says. Say you're a Black kid who loves fantasy books. These days, you can find a time traveler who looks like you—and that's fun.

"I hate when students are called 'struggling readers.' We need to see them as students who need a revival! I want a revival!"

—R. Joseph Rodriguez, English teacher, Texas (above)



THE JOY OF READING IS NOT DEAD, YET

“Once [students] find the books they like, they realize it’s not that they hate reading, it’s that they only like adventure books. ... [When] they know their shelf, it eliminates that fear of wandering the library.”

—Tamara Cox, National Board Certified librarian, South Carolina

3) Make time for reading

It has been more than 40 years since Ramona Quimby’s third-grade teacher told her class to sit quietly and read books of their choosing. “Drop Everything and Read,” or D.E.A.R., is what author Beverly Cleary named the practice in *Ramona Quimby, Age 8*.

At Kochel’s school, D.E.A.R. means “Dragons Excited About Reading,” a reference to the school’s mascot.

“Our teachers are purposeful about making time to read,” she says. Multiple times a day, classes start with 10 minutes of silent, at-your-desk reading. “And it’s a book of their choice,” she points out.

“We say that reading is the greatest skill that students can acquire in school, but if we’re not giving them time to do that during school ... do we really think that?” she asks.

At Rodriguez’ school, he and his English department colleagues dedicate 20 to 30 minutes of every 90-minute class to independent reading. It’s critical that students choose, he says. And it’s fine with him if it’s an audiobook, comic book, or whatever, as easy or hard to read as they want.

Reading also can—and should—be a community activity. Indeed, one of the motivations to read that Guthrie identified in 1995 was the process of sharing books or ideas about books with friends and family. No students are too old for read-alouds!



4) ‘Genrefy’ your shelves

Kids who love to read also love to wander the stacks, browsing for a familiar author or a title that catches their eye. But for many, it can be overwhelming, Cox notes.

“It’s like dumping a person who hates to exercise in a gym and telling them to work out,” she says. “They don’t even know where to start!”

Organizing books by genre—or “ditching Dewey”—helps those students navigate the library. Horror books go here. Manga over there. Each genre has a place.

“Once [students] find the books they like, they realize it’s not that they hate reading, it’s that they only like adventure books or only like books about space or science fiction,” Cox adds. “They know their shelf—and it eliminates that fear of wandering the library.”

The process of reorganizing thousands of books can be daunting for school librarians, but the library isn’t for librarians, Cox points out.

“Are you doing things because it’s easier for the librarian or easier for the kids?” she asks. “For me,

“There will always be a core group of kids who just love to read, no matter what,” says Tamara Cox (left). Her concern is the other students, who need help to find books that they will enjoy, too.

it’s about helping kids find the books they like.” After “genrefying,” Cox’s circulation numbers tripled.

As an additional bonus, genrefying also helps librarians see the gaps in their collections, Cox explains. “One thing I noticed right away—teenage girls love romance, but I only had 20 romance books! It’s easier to identify weak areas and see what we need to add.”

5) Have fun!

Once you have the right books, in the right places, consider some other ideas to entice readers, such as contests, puppies, and more! NEA members are doing a million things to make reading fun.

Rewards: Kochel bought water-bottle stickers this year, but most of her reading contests don’t elicit material rewards. She might do a bingo card—with different genres or various titles within one genre—and the winners spend an hour in the school’s makerspace doing Legos or crafts. Last winter, she did a “winter reading challenge.” For the kids who completed it, she created an escape room in the library.

Therapy dogs: “I’ll try anything!” Cox says. One of her most popular ideas? Arranging for therapy dogs to visit the library, where kids read to them.

“Our kids love it! I get these giant football players coming in and they’re like, ‘Ohh, look at that baby dog!’”

Book clubs: Kochel runs about a dozen book clubs, based on genre and grade. “Kids just flock to them,” she says.

Most meet monthly during lunch. But she also has an after-school club for the most dedicated readers and, toward the end of the year, those kids enjoy an overnight “lock-in” in the library. (NEA’s Read Across America can help with your book club! Check out our resources on Book Club Basics at nea.org/read-across.)

Author visits and guest readers: Often author visits can be arranged in collaboration with local bookstores, but they don’t have to be in-person. Virtual visits are fun, too. Reading can be a social activity. Many educators bring in guest readers—parents, grandparents, older siblings, or members of the community. 🐾

Put on Your Party Hat for NEA’s Read Across America!

WE HAVE THE BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS YOU NEED

Looking to make your classroom library more fun for middle grade and young adult (YA) readers? Check out these recommendations from NEA’s Read Across America calendar.

Speculation by Nisi Shawl: In this middle-grade fantasy book, 10-year-old Winnie finds a pair of magic spectacles that reveal the friendly ghosts of her African American ancestors, plus more!

Ellie Engle Saves Herself by Leah Johnson: It’s a laugh-until-you-cry, cry-until-you-laugh book about friendship—and Ellie’s mysterious powers—for middle-grade readers.

Maybe An Artist by Liz Montague: In this YA graphic memoir, described as “laugh-out-loud” funny by its publisher, the 20-something artist-author looks back at her life.

Man Made Monsters by Andrea L. Rogers: Give the kids what they want—a YA collection of supernatural horror stories involving one extended Cherokee family.

Well, That Was Unexpected by Jesse Q. Sutanto: In this YA romance, Sharlot is “fake dating” the son of a wealthy Indonesian family and is surprised when she falls in love with him and her mother’s Indonesian homeland.



LEARN MORE

Don’t miss the event ideas, classroom activities, and resources for read-alouds at nea.org/play-with-books.

We. Can. Change. This.

By Amanda Litvinov

EDUCATORS
CAN BE A
POWERFUL
FORCE IN
DEMANDING
AN END TO
GUN VIOLENCE

On Nov. 30, 2021, Michigan high school teacher Melissa Gibbons became part of a group she never wanted to join: school shooting survivors.

Gibbons was on hall duty at Oxford High School that afternoon when she heard gunshots and saw students running around the corner toward her. Every educator's nightmare had just become her reality.

After getting the students out of the hall, she put her room on lockdown.

Her twin daughters were also in the building, and their classroom was in the direction where the shots rang out. Gibbons was thankful that she could text with them and with her husband Jim Gibbons—a teacher at the same high school and president of the Oxford Education Association—who was home sick, along with their younger daughter.

"I just tried to focus on keeping my 35 students calm and doing what we had to do," Gibbons recalls. "It wasn't until I got home later that night, when all three of my kids were home safe and sound, that I completely went into mom mode and broke down."

Four students were killed. Six more students and an educator were injured. The community was shattered.

Not long after the shooting, Gibbons shared her story with the Michigan Education Association (MEA). But mostly, she wanted to focus on teaching, parenting, and healing.

Like thousands of other educators across the country, however, she would soon feel compelled to raise her voice to demand change.

A TURNING POINT

On May 24, 2022, another massacre: 19 students and 2 educators were killed, and 17 others were injured by a gunman at Robb Elementary School, in Uvalde, Texas. The fresh anger Gibbons felt—that school shootings just keep happening—moved her to share her story more widely. When NEA asked, she traveled to Washington, D.C., along with other educators who are school shooting survivors, joining the March for Our Lives in June 2022.

"I don't have all the answers, but what we're doing now is not the right answer," said Gibbons at the time. Today, she is still speaking out on behalf of her students. "We don't make the laws, but we can have a voice."

Across the country, educators are using that voice, working through their unions to negotiate safer

conditions; support "gun-sense" candidates, who are committed to passing gun safety legislation; and hold elected leaders accountable for their actions—or inaction, as the case may be.

That's exactly what educators should do, says Rebecca Woodard, an associate professor of curriculum and instruction at the University of Illinois Chicago. She believes that educators have a unique ability to galvanize support for changes that actually work to reduce gun violence.

"Educators can and should organize and collectively raise their voices, alongside outraged parents and youth, to demand gun safety legislation and comprehensive school safety policies," Woodard says.

There isn't one thing that will solve the epidemic of gun violence. It will take passing evidence-based gun safety measures—such as banning assault weapons, requiring waiting periods and thorough background checks, and instituting safe storage measures and red flag laws. It will take defeating bad proposals that aim to arm teachers or make it easier to carry concealed weapons. And it will take educators pushing for district-level policies that help make schools safer.

"Gun violence is a solvable problem with a road map for success," Woodard assures. "And educators



▶
Melissa Gibbons reflects on the school shooting that changed her life forever. Hear her story at nea.org/WeCanChangeThis.



"If I had a magic wand, I would take away the fear these students have of coming to school."

—Maine elementary school teacher

"I went to a training where they were encouraging kindergarten teachers to have backup weapons. One person asked, 'But how can I hug my kids?'"

—Utah high school teacher

"We had a training on how to pack gun wounds and how to disarm people with a weapon. We had all that training, and now we're supposed to handle safety for any situation."

—Michigan middle school teacher

"It's on everybody's mind all the time. ... Even in the middle of a lesson, it's in the back of my head. A fire alarm goes off, I'm thinking, 'Is this a real fire alarm, or is something happening right now?'"

—Missouri teacher, multiple grade levels

"It's heartbreaking and it's sad, but it's our reality. You could be at school, you could be at church, you could be at the mall. You can be anywhere. It's the world we live in."

—Michigan paraeducator

"Our students shouldn't have to train to survive being shot. Teachers shouldn't have to pledge to stand in front of a bullet so their students feel safe in the classroom. Parents shouldn't have to feel scared to send their kids to school."

—NEA state education association president

"The community is not the same since the shooting at the high school. I never want to see anyone else go through that ever again."

—NEA affiliate staff member

We. Can. Change. This.

can work through their unions to pass resolutions for safer schools, participate in days of action, rally and lobby for change, and create opportunities to address mental health and well-being in schools.”

That work is underway in NEA state affiliates and locals around the nation.

WIN ELECTIONS, DEMAND CHANGE

Most educators have not experienced a school shooting. But they, along with their students, are forced to live in a state of anxiety knowing that any given day could be “the day.”

“Believe me, when the balloon pops down the hall, everyone jumps,” says Justine Galbraith, an English teacher in Troy, Mich. “Kids have a lot of feelings about the active shooter drills and the fear we all live with.”

In Galbraith’s view, lawmakers and voters need to hear some hard truths from educators about what the constant threat of gun violence means in a school.

“In my district, educators have to decide whether to lock down or flee—to decide in an instant what’s going to work better to keep kids from getting murdered,” she says. “Obviously, that’s not the job we signed up for.”

Galbraith was already an active member of her local chapter of Moms Demand Action back in 2017, when the Michigan legislature proposed the “Guns Everywhere” bill that would allow citizens to carry concealed weapons in schools and churches.

That was the year she first attended a Troy Education Association meeting to tell members about the dangerous bill and how they could speak out against it.

“My effort was so well received. I just became more active in my local after that,” Galbraith recalls. The harmful bill was defeated.

A few years later, in 2021, came the shooting at Oxford High School—just 20 miles from where Galbraith and her family live. Her own children, 10 and 14 at the time, were shaken. “It was literally too close to home,” Galbraith says. “We all have connections in Oxford.”

MEA doubled down on efforts to organize and mobilize members around the issue of gun violence. Galbraith was involved from the start. She worked with other members to email and call their legislators and teamed up with other organizations for advocacy days at the capitol, supporting the commonsense changes that the majority of Michigan voters wanted.

There was a small but vocal faction of gun rights advocates who, she recalls, “showed up wearing camo, with bullhorns, and tried to intimidate us.” But educators and allies refused to back down.

In April 2023—just a few months after three students were killed and five more injured at Michigan State University—Gov. Gretchen Whitmer signed 13 gun safety bills into law, establishing universal background checks for all firearm purchases as well as safe storage requirements among other important changes.

Biden breaks decades of inaction on gun violence

President Joe Biden heard the many educators and other advocates who demanded meaningful action on gun violence. His administration spearheaded the first major federal efforts to curb gun violence since the 1990s. Here are some of the pivotal actions Biden has taken:

SIGNED A NEW FEDERAL LAW

On June 25, 2022, Biden signed the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, landmark legislation which:

- Expands background checks before the purchase of firearms.
- Targets interstate gun trafficking.
- Supports state “red flag” laws, which allow courts to temporarily prevent someone in crisis from accessing guns.
- Provides nearly \$1 billion for mental health supports in public schools.

CREATED AN OFFICE OF GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Led by Vice President Kamala Harris, the office will:

- Provide on-the-ground crisis response.
- Coordinate government agencies on programs and new research that can prevent gun deaths.
- Help implement the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act.

TOOK EXECUTIVE ACTION

The Biden administration has taken more than 20 executive actions to reduce gun violence, from working to curb gun trafficking and the proliferation of “ghost guns” to investing in community violence prevention initiatives.

So how did Michigan go from proposing concealed carry in schools to passing a host of gun safety laws in just five years’ time?

It started with winning elections.

“We had a fantastic and successful effort to un-gerrymander the state in 2020,” Galbraith explains. Once fair voting district maps were established, a pro-public schools majority was elected in 2022, flipping control of both houses of the legislature.

“Suddenly all of the work that we’d done over the previous six years started actually moving and ultimately became law,” Galbraith says.

ENGAGE LOCAL POWER TO MAKE SCHOOLS SAFER

On December 10, 2021, a 13-year-old boy at Mitchell Middle School in Racine, Wis., was arrested for bringing a gun to school. The weapon was not loaded, and he made no threats against staff or students.

A few months later, the district installed costly weapons scanners that rely on artificial intelligence and have been known to miss kitchen knives and mistake a lunchbox for a bomb.

Racine Educators United (REU) had concerns about the district’s response on both fronts. The student’s actions were serious, but REU leaders questioned whether he would receive the services he needed in the hands of local authorities. They also pointed out that weapons detectors alone would not reduce the streak of violent incidents at Mitchell that had resulted in more than a dozen staff injuries in recent years.

Though Wisconsin educators’ collective bargaining rights were curtailed in 2011, that did not stop REU from using the union grievance process to demand change. When that didn’t work, REU filed a lawsuit that broke the logjam.

“We called for the creation of a safety committee so that educators and parents have a say in creating policies that don’t push students into the school-to-prison pipeline or use up resources on the wrong things,” says REU President Angelina Cruz.

Staff from NEA’s Health and Safety program supported that work and attended meetings with REU leaders and architects involved in an ongoing \$1 billion school construction project. Made possible through educator advocacy, the project is the result of the state’s largest-ever referendum to improve schools, which passed in 2020.

“We’re asking how we can design a safer school,” Cruz explains. “That includes everything from proper

We can and must protect students from gun violence

In 2022, the United States had the most school shootings in a single year.

SOURCE: THE K-12 SCHOOL SHOOTING DATABASE

More than **357,000** students have survived a school shooting since the Columbine High School massacre, in 1999.

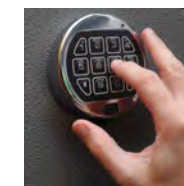
SOURCE: THE WASHINGTON POST

In 2021, gunshot wounds became the leading cause of death for American youth ages 18 and younger.

Roughly two-thirds of those young people died by homicide; nearly 30 percent died by suicide; and nearly 4 percent died in accidental shootings.

SOURCE: AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

Can we stop this? The data says yes.



What works: Safe storage of firearms

Fact: The weapons used in nearly 70 percent of gun-related incidents in schools were taken from the home of a friend or relative.

Fact: Child access prevention laws are among the most effective ways to reduce rates of violent crime; suicide; and accidental deaths.



What works: Red flag laws and programs that teach educators and older students to identify and report signs of trouble

Fact: More than 40 percent of school shooters are former students, and nearly all of them shared threatening messages or images before the incident.

Fact: The Say Something training program, offered by Sandy Hook Promise, has managed 2,700 interventions. At least nine credible school shooting plots were averted and 321 lives were saved.



What works: Communities finding common ground to make conditions safer for students and educators

Fact: In the U.S., over 60 percent of gun owners favor laws that are shown to reduce gun injuries and deaths.

We can do this together!

We. Can. Change. This.



Michigan teacher Justine Galbraith distributes free gun locks through the nonpartisan Be Smart program.

air ventilation to rooting out blind spots where violent incidents tend to occur.”

Nationwide, conversations about school buildings now include classroom door-lock systems, shatter-resistant windows that double as emergency exits, and bulletproof whiteboards that can be used to shield students.

Racine educators are focused on preventative measures, including districtwide training on trauma-informed practices and evidence-based programs to help staff de-escalate violent situations.

NEA has crafted violence-prevention and response language (at nea.org/gunviolence) that locals can use to strengthen board policies, employee handbooks, and collective bargaining agreements. The language covers topics such as prohibiting the arming of educators; addressing violence, abuse, and threats against staff; supporting students and educators after an assault; instituting broad health and safety provisions for safer work environments; and establishing joint health and safety committees.

“Educators must have a voice in all of these decisions if we’re really trying to create safer schools,” Cruz says. “That’s what we know.”

COMMIT TO STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

Travon D. Tillis worked in community mental health for nearly two decades before joining the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), in 2020.

“I knew that I could have an even greater impact if I were in a school full-time,” says Tillis, who works at 42nd Street Elementary School, not far from where he grew up.

As a psychiatric social worker, he provides social and emotional learning opportunities for more than 200 students. He also offers targeted supports to the school’s most marginalized students, most of whom are Black and come from families who struggle with housing, medical needs, and food insecurity.

Tillis was also one of dozens of educators at NEA’s convening on gun violence prevention last year. Educators know that improving student mental health is critical to curbing gun violence in more ways than one.

The fear of gun violence holds some students back. “Students can’t learn if they don’t feel safe at school,” Tillis says.

Some of Tillis’ students have heard about school shootings and seen images of the aftermath on TV. Others have been affected by violence in the community, and a few have even lost family members to gun violence.

Schools must not ignore their students’ lived experiences, Tillis says, but rather help them address difficulties, build self-esteem, focus on academics, and seize opportunity.

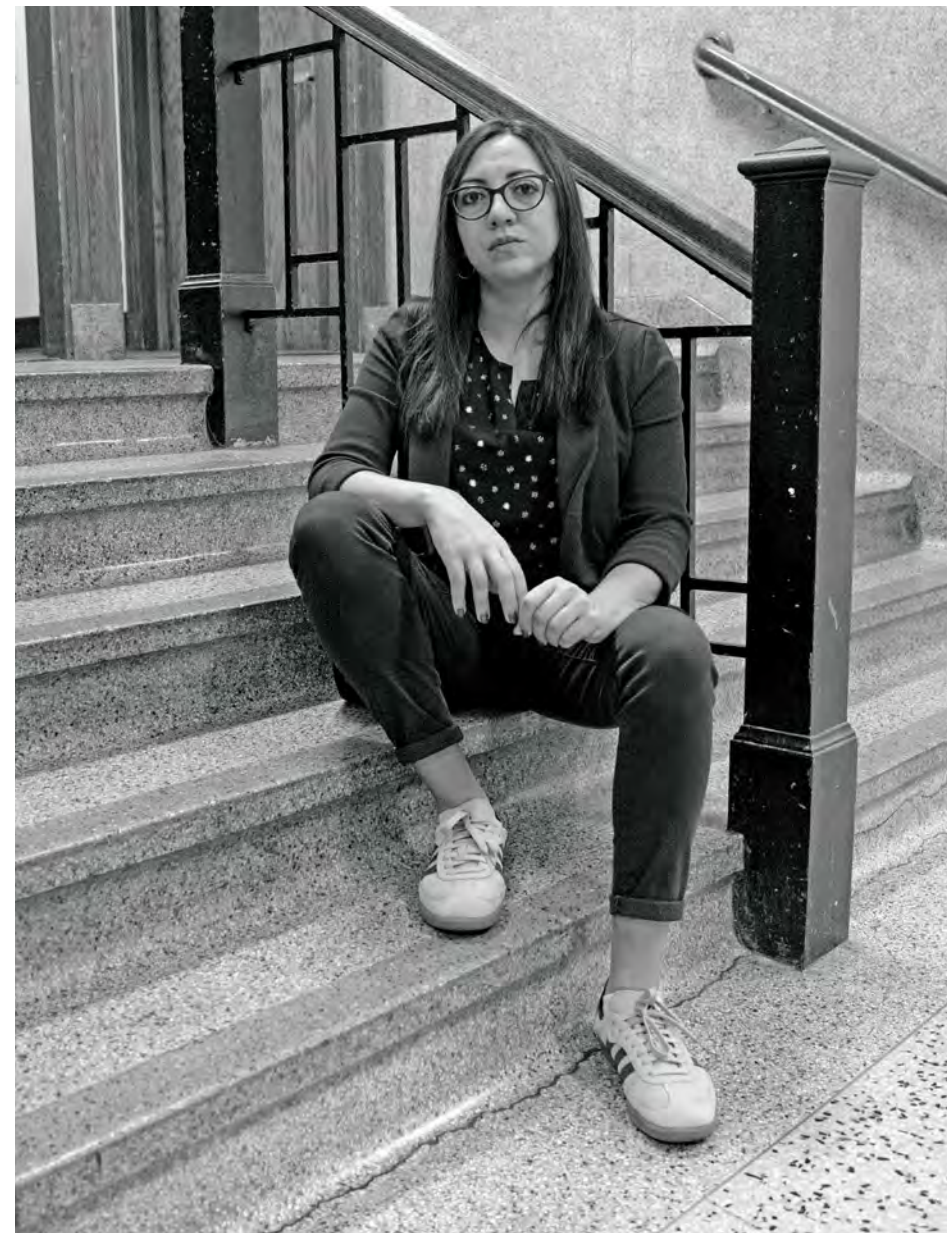
Research shows that students benefit from relationships with trusted adults at school. And the more skills students acquire in processing emotions and social interactions, the more likely they are to reach out when they need help or when a peer is in distress.

Among these trusted adults are school counselors and social workers who help resolve bullying; provide intensive counseling for students in crisis; conduct threat assessments; and work with families, all of which reduces violence in schools.

But that work requires having the staff to do it. The National Association of Social Workers recommends that social worker caseloads do not exceed 250 students, but some LAUSD school social workers were still serving around 1,000 students at the beginning of 2023.



Travon D. Tillis



Racine Educators United (REU) President Angelina Cruz at Mitchell Middle School, where ongoing safety concerns led REU to file a lawsuit.

That’s why United Teachers Los Angeles worked with students and the community to develop a student-centered platform before bargaining last spring.

The new contract establishes LAUSD as a model for addressing student needs and commits to adding mental health providers throughout the district.

It will always be up to educators and parents working together to ensure that those commitments are funded and sustained, Tillis says.

“The crisis of gun violence won’t be solved by doing just one thing,” Tillis says. “We have to pass the laws, talk to families, and remain totally committed to our students’ well-being.” 🌟

HOW YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

ADVOCATE FOR GUN SAFETY LAWS IN YOUR STATE

Find a rundown of your state’s gun laws at everytown.org/states. Take a deeper dive into research about gun violence in your state at everystat.org. Use this information to demonstrate to state lawmakers how to keep your schools and community safer.

HELP MAKE YOUR SCHOOL SAFER

Scour your district handbook and your union contract to understand how violent incidents are supposed to be addressed and whether there are firearm policies.

Advocate for a school safety committee that addresses violence

prevention as part of its routine work.

Find age-appropriate resources to teach students how to speak out about bullying, identify signs of distress in their peers, and get help when needed.

Sponsor a Students Against Violence Everywhere Promise Club. Find out more at sandyhookpromise.org/programs.

Ask your school board to run a campaign that informs families about safe storage of firearms. The Be SMART organization offers a helpful toolkit at besmartforkids.org.

TAKE ACTION

Sign NEA’s Safe Schools, Safe Communities Pledge to start your journey as a gun violence prevention activist. Go to nea.org/safeschoolspledge.

PUSH CONGRESS TO ACT

Email Congress through NEA’s Action Center. Introduce yourself as an educator and explain how gun violence affects your students and your family.

Connect with a local chapter of a national gun violence prevention organization, such as Everytown for Gun Safety at everytown.org.

Find more ways to create change as well as NEA resources on responding to gun violence at nea.org/gunviolence.



"We're told to live with it," says teacher Kristen Record (left) of the unhealthy working conditions that impact many educators.

IS YOUR SCHOOL BUILDING MAKING YOU SICK?

UNIONS SOUND THE ALARM AS INDOOR AIR POLLUTANTS AND EXTREME TEMPERATURES PRESENT A GROWING HEALTH RISK FOR STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS

By Tim Walker

Anne Forrester began feeling ill during her first year of teaching, in 2016. The symptoms steadily worsened as she spent more time in her decades-old school building.

"I was getting sick all the time, including chronic respiratory and asthma symptoms," says Forrester, who worked in Thomas C. Boushall Middle School, in Richmond, Va., at the time. "But I was new and didn't think too much about it."

There were, however, whispers in the building about what was really triggering these symptoms—which were also affecting many of Forrester's colleagues and students.

It turned out that many buildings across the district were becoming breeding grounds for mold.

By 2022, says Forrester, "you could see it everywhere." Mold was clearly visible in classrooms, hallways, and offices, covering parts of the ceiling, floors, lockers, and chairs.

Mold is just one of the many pollutants that degrade indoor air quality (IAQ) in many school buildings. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, roughly half of the educators and students working and learning in school buildings are breathing air polluted by bacteria, chemicals, viruses, and pesticides.

When hot weather hits, conditions become even more dangerous. Long before the end of the school year, temperatures—fueled by climate change—are reaching 90 degrees, creating stifling, often unbearable

learning and working conditions.

"When you have breathing issues or it's too hot or too cold or too humid, you will not be productive," says Kristen Record, a high school physics teacher in Stratford, Conn. "It is extremely hard to concentrate for lengthy periods of time."

Several years ago, Record moved out of her office at Bunnell High School while workers removed the mold-infested carpet, relieving symptoms she had blamed on seasonal allergies.

When a clear health risk emerges, the response from districts is usually to close the school until some sort of repair or remediation can be completed—usually a temporary fix that buys a little time.

That is no longer acceptable, says Darrell Turner, a teacher at Martin Luther King Jr. Early Learning Center, in Richmond.

The dismal air quality at Turner's previous school forced him to take his students outdoors for short breaks.

"We're setting up our students for a lifetime of health issues," he says. "If the buildings they're learning in make them sick, it's not creating a safe environment for them—or for us."

A lasting impact on students

A June 2020 report by the Government Accountability Office estimates that 41 percent of public school districts need to replace or update their heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems in at least half of their schools—roughly 36,000 schools across the country.



"When you have breathing issues, ... it is extremely hard to concentrate for lengthy periods of time."

—Kristen Record, high school teacher, Connecticut

School buildings have been neglected for too long, says Joseph G. Allen, director of Harvard University's Healthy Buildings Program and associate professor at the Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health.

"When we think about education, we think about curriculum and teaching, and lunch and recess, and transportation and socialization," Allen explains. "But the role of the school building is an afterthought. We know that good ventilation and filtration are key to student health, student thinking, and student performance."

When schools began to reopen after the height of the pandemic, healthy indoor air quality and ventilation—essential to managing the risk of infectious disease—became one of educators' most pressing concerns.

NEA successfully advocated for historic pandemic rescue funds that could be allocated to infrastructure investments. NEA also worked with affiliates and local leaders to document air quality hazards and demanded that they be remediated before schools reopened.

Over the past couple of years, NEA state affiliates and NEA school rescue fund coordi-

nators have collaborated with school administrators to address poor IAQ by updating HVAC systems to improve ventilation.

In Albuquerque, N.M., public schools are replacing all HVAC units in 35 schools with new refrigerated air systems at a cost of over \$16 million in relief funds.

Massachusetts has allocated \$100 million in American Rescue Plan funds at the state level to improve and install HVAC systems in its schools.

More recently, however, as rising concerns over student learning, gun violence, and other issues have taken center stage, it's become challenging to focus attention on the dire condition of school buildings.

"People, parents especially, will pay attention when schools actually have to close," Record says. "But they are not tracing falling grades and misbehavior to issues around heating, cooling, HVAC, and mold."

While these connections are not always easy to see, the physical and cognitive effects of poor indoor air quality and extreme temperatures are well established by research. A 2006 study found that when air quality improved in schools, student achievement increased on average by 8 percent.

A 2020 study revealed that students scored increasingly worse on standardized tests each school day where the temperature rose above 80 degrees. Furthermore, a recent study by Harvard University found that extreme temperatures exacerbate absenteeism and student disciplinary referrals.

IS YOUR SCHOOL BUILDING MAKING YOU SICK?

Impact on teacher retention

Poor working conditions are also becoming a key factor in retaining educators. A recent teacher survey by the RAND Corporation found that pay increases alone—without improvements in hours worked or working conditions—are unlikely to improve teachers’ job satisfaction enough to reverse their intention to leave.

Indoor air quality and temperatures are critically important working conditions, along with class size, respect, support, and workload.

“Pay is the number one issue in Richmond,” Turner says. “But working conditions are right up there as well. And the safety of our buildings—this mold and heat—is one that we are concerned with.”

Forrester, who is vice president of the Richmond Education Association (REA), agrees: “Mold in our building and the health issues it has caused [won’t] do wonders for teacher retention.”

In 2022, as the school district downplayed the dangers posed by mold, Forrester transferred to a different school. Although there were other reasons she wanted to move—namely a desire to teach at the high school level—the mold problem at Boushall was a major factor.

“Educators whose health is being affected will do the same,” Forrester says. “They don’t have to leave the profession, just their school or district. But it’s still a disruption for students.”

The disruption is more likely to be felt by students of color in high-poverty districts, where staff shortages can be more severe. Lack of professional pay and burnout are cited as top reasons for departures.

But the dismal condition of many school buildings in these communities—and the documented impact on student achievement and health—can only contribute to educators’ sense of frustration and helplessness.

When it gets too hot

When a heat wave gripped the Pacific Northwest in May 2023, many students and educators in Federal Way Public Schools—a high-poverty district south of Seattle—sat in classrooms without air conditioning.

The district provided more fans, but educators were tasked with finding other ways to alleviate the heat. There was only so much they could do. The impact on students was alarming.

Sara Rowe, an office manager at Adelaide Elementary School, took care of students when no nurse was on duty. She saw students who were close to passing out, as well as some who suffered from nosebleeds, headaches, and anxiety.

“We had a young girl with a panic attack,” Rowe recalls. “The heat was making it feel as if the walls were closing in on her.”

Educators in Federal Way and across the country began posting photos on social media of classroom thermostats hitting 80 to 90 degrees, drawing attention to the oppressive conditions.

In 2022, Columbus, Ohio, educator Joe Decker purchased a large fan to try to mitigate classroom temperatures in excess of 90 degrees. Mifflin Middle School, where he teaches eighth grade, was one of many in his district without air conditioning.

“More than 90 percent of our students have free or reduced lunch,” he says. “Some of them are malnourished, and I can’t watch them become dehydrated. ... I should not have to be thinking, ‘Do I need to call a Life Squad for one of my students?’”

(Top) Mold grows on a ceiling tile in a Richmond, Va., pre-school. (Bottom) In schools without air conditioning, fans do little to keep students cool.



“Pay is the number one issue in Richmond. But working conditions are right up there as well.”

—Darrell Turner, teacher, Virginia (above)

Filling the leadership void

No national or state standards exist to govern how public schools should monitor, detect, and address air-quality problems, including heating and cooling. Then there’s the prohibitive cost of repairs or upgrades. The result is often inaction or half measures on the part of school districts.

The response from the Federal Way district during the 2023 heat wave was underwhelming. “We were told to think outside the box, be creative,” Rowe recalls. “We didn’t really feel supported.”

After the Federal Way Education Association sounded the

alarm about extreme heat and poor air quality last spring, state lawmakers took notice. Educators hope to see a bill in next year’s legislative session that helps address these issues.

Progress can take time, as Connecticut’s Record discovered. Back in 2018, the Connecticut Education Association (CEA) found that while the state had statutes governing temperature ranges in animal shelters, no such mandates existed for public school buildings.

That same year, Record co-led a CEA data collection drive that asked educators to record temperature and humidity levels of their classrooms into an online database.

In September, classroom temperatures regularly exceeded 85 degrees. A couple of months later, as winter approached, temperatures barely topped a chilly 55 degrees.

The effort helped launch a CEA advocacy campaign. The union urged lawmakers to address air quality and extreme temperatures, direct pandemic relief funds to HVAC repair and installation, and secure additional grant funding.

“It’s all a work in progress,” Record says. “What we’re really focusing on is getting those

funds into underserved communities, where the need for upgrades is more urgent.”

In Columbus, Decker and his colleagues used the power of collective bargaining. The Columbus Education Association’s successful three-day strike, in October 2022, led to a new contract that, among other highlights, won a guarantee that all student-learning areas will be climate-controlled no later than the start of the 2025 – 2026 school year—including the installation of HVAC units.

In Richmond, educators persuaded the district to conduct more mold testing, and REA lobbied the school board to establish criteria for maximum and minimum indoor temperatures and air quality standards.

Record says district leaders and lawmakers must acknowledge that when you close schools due to allergens or extreme temperatures, the problem has reached a crisis stage.

“Instead, we’re told to live with it,” she says. “We shouldn’t still be talking about this in 2023, and I have no doubt that if our state and local associations were not speaking up, no one else would be.”

LEARN MORE

Indoor Air Quality Toolkit

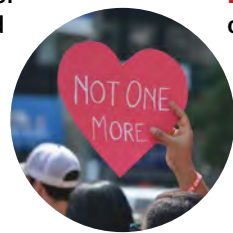
NEA offers resources to help address indoor air and environmental quality in public schools at nea.org/indoor-air-quality.

GUN VIOLENCE: How You Can Make a Difference

Working together, educators can have a profound impact on creating safer schools and communities. NEA is committed to ending gun violence through legislative action, crisis preparation, and support for the health and well-being of every student and educator.

Visit nea.org/gunviolence to find the following resources and learn how you and your colleagues can take action:

- **Advocate for change.** Educators have a distinct voice in the national conversation about how to end gun violence. Send letters to Congress through NEA's online Action Center, and learn about ways to make your voice heard.
- **Find violence-reduction language** to include in your district's policies and your next contract.
- **Take NEA's pledge** to help end gun violence in our schools.



- **Download the NEA Crisis Guide**—a step-by-step outline of what to do before, during, and after a school or community crisis. Help students process what they see in the news or cope with the tragic realities of gun violence.
- **Create a positive environment and support students' mental health.** These are critical steps in reducing gun violence. Find information about social and emotional learning and how to help prevent bullying.

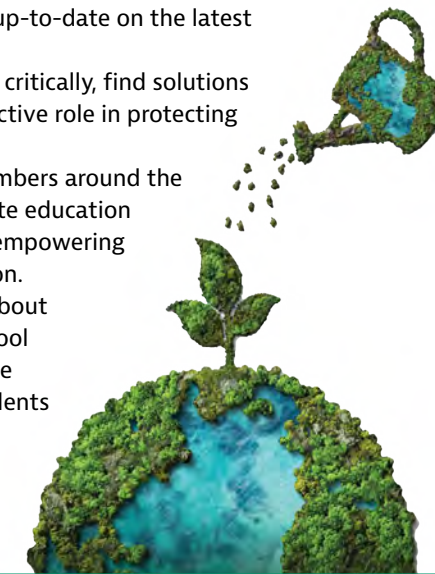
LEARN MORE

For these resources and more, go to nea.org/gunviolence.

IDEAS FOR EARTH DAY—AND BEYOND!

Visit NEA's new online climate hub, nea.org/climatejustice, to find lessons on climate change for any grade level that can be integrated into any subject. Check out these highlights:

- New resources to help you stay up-to-date on the latest climate science.
- Lessons that help students think critically, find solutions to climate change, and take an active role in protecting the Earth.
- Information about how NEA members around the country have incorporated climate education into curricula and how they are empowering the next generation to take action.
- Six new NEA micro-credentials about how climate change impacts school communities and how to advance environmental justice for all students and educators.



Find it all at nea.org/climatejustice.

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These resources and opportunities can help connect you, your classroom, and your students with ideas and people around the world.

Download classroom resources from the NEA Foundation's Global Learning Resource page to help your students become 21st century global citizens. And join a learning community of educators committed to global education advocacy.

Find more resources and programs offered by the NEA Foundation—a public charity founded by educators for educators—at neafoundation.org. Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube for updates.

Three Steps to Financial Wellness

Falling short of your retirement savings goals or having trouble paying the bills? You are not alone. Many people are financially out of balance. Financial wellness means finding a balance between living for today and preparing and planning for tomorrow.

1. Protect what you have with insurance.

"Life, disability, and long-term care are vital components of a comprehensive financial strategy," says financial planner Nick Ventura, president and CEO at Ewing, N.J.-based Ventura Wealth Management. "Having these elements in place will offset the risks of catastrophic events."

2. Plan for life after you're gone.

Most people don't want to contemplate their own mortality, but putting off estate planning is ill-advised. In addition to arranging for an authenticated will and a trust, you should designate beneficiaries for your retirement accounts.

3. Get an early start on saving for retirement.

Putting off long-term retirement saving could cost you. To get started, designate contributions as a percentage of your income, not as a flat dollar figure. Also consider increasing your contributions each year to match any salary increases.

NEA Member Benefits can help. Get started with benefits for insurance, retirement, and more at neamb.com/overview.

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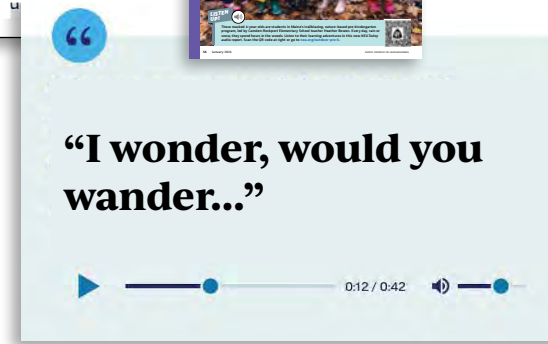
Visit nea.org/resource-library.

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Summer 2024

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July 1 notification

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