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January 2024

nea **T**oday

NEA TODAY for
NEA-RETIRED
MEMBERS

An edition of *NEA Today*



What's the Secret to Staying Fit?

FIND THE WORKOUT
THAT MAKES YOU SMILE

PAGE 26

inside

How to be anti-racist

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Why don't kids read

anymore? PAGE 38

Educators take on gun

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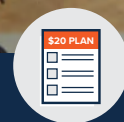
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COVER: MARIAH KARSON; ABOVE, FROM LEFT: KEVIN BRUSIE PHOTOGRAPHY; MARA DIAZ; DAVID SCHWARTZ



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OUR MISSION
To advocate for education professionals and to unite our members and the nation to fulfill the promise of public education to prepare every student to succeed in a diverse and interdependent world.

OUR CORE VALUES
These principles guide our work and define our mission:

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We believe public education is the gateway to opportunity. All students have the human and civil right to a quality public education that develops their potential, independence, and character.

A JUST SOCIETY.
We believe public education is vital to building respect for the worth, dignity, and equality of every individual in our diverse society.

DEMOCRACY.
We believe public education is the cornerstone of our republic. Public education provides individuals with the skills to be involved, informed, and engaged in our representative democracy.

PROFESSIONALISM.
We believe that the expertise and judgment of education professionals are critical to student success. We maintain the highest professional standards, and we expect the status, compensation, and respect due to all professionals.

PARTNERSHIP.
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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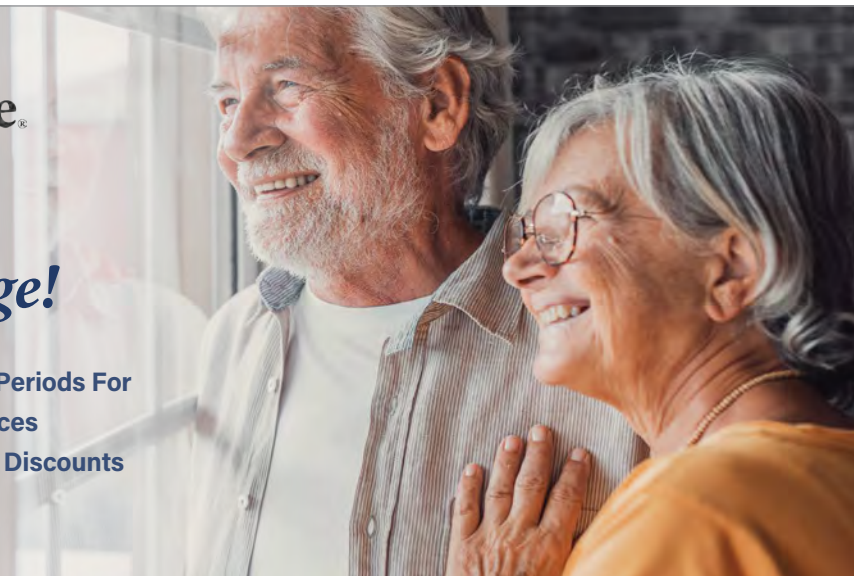
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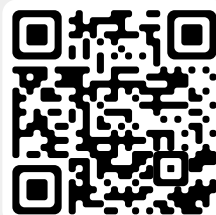
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PRESIDENT'S *viewpoint*

NEA-Retired President Anita Gibson
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A New Year with Endless Opportunity

Happy New Year! As we look ahead, let us embrace the many opportunities before us to uplift the work of NEA-Retired.

We will focus on strengthening our committee work in areas such as legislation, membership, communication, and racial and social justice. We are expanding our governance, scholarship, and NEA Member Benefits committees to include more members.

We are committed to providing a path to leadership for those who have joined our ranks within the last 10 years by providing them with the opportunity to work side by side with our experienced retirees. This ensures our work will continue to make a difference.

Our political action committee (PAC) co-chairs are already busy preparing fun and exciting ways to involve every retired member in voluntary fundraising activities, including in-person and virtual auctions, monthly credit card donations, and more. We have a chance to break all records as we prepare for the fast-approaching 2024 presidential election season.

This year, there will be plenty of ways for you to get involved in electing the next NEA-Retired leaders. Or maybe you'll decide to run for office yourself!

The 2024 NEA-Retired Conference will be held March 3-5, at the Hyatt Regency in Chicago, Ill. Members and staff will be able to network and hone their leadership skills as we build strong, thriving NEA-Retired affiliates. Attendees will also strategize about best practices to fulfill the conference campaign, "Promoting, Protecting, and Strengthening Education." Register at nea.org/retired.

The 2024 Retired Annual Meeting, NEA Representative Assembly, and the U.S. presidential election each provide opportunities to take action to support our nation's educators and students. Visit nea.org/retired for updates. Remember, we are retired, and we are powerful!

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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/neatoday.



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

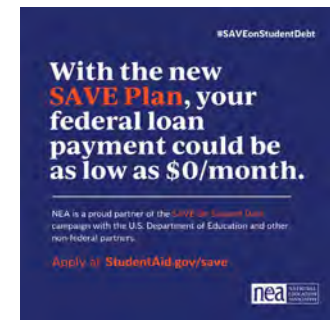
students' freedom to learn accurate, honest, and inclusive lessons.

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

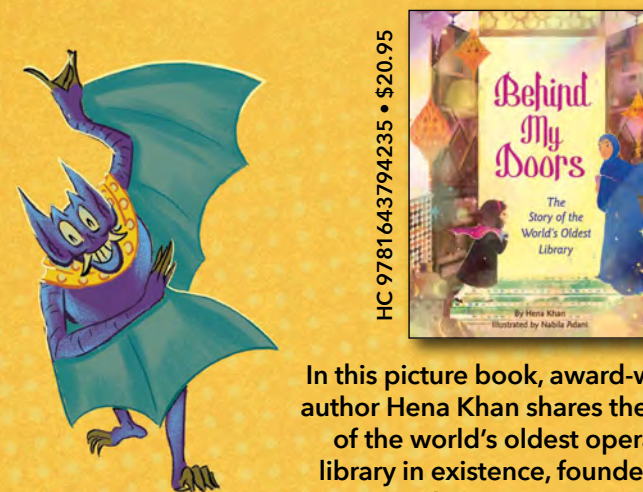
administrators will pilot the program in 10 districts across the country.

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.

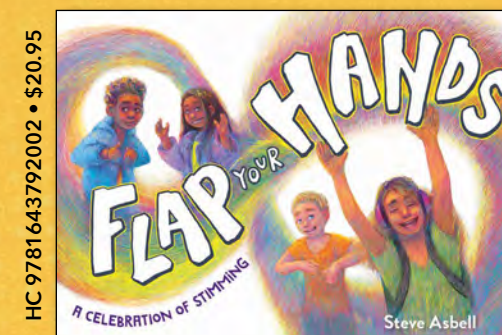


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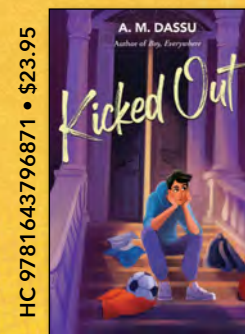


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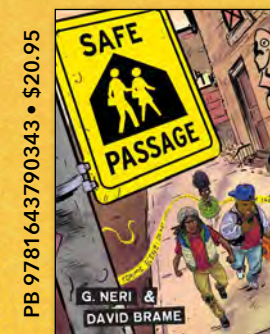
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In this companion novel to the acclaimed *Boy, Everywhere*, A. M. Dassu extends the story of Sami's best friend Ali, who organizes a charity soccer match for their friend Aadam while his whole life is privately unraveling.



PB 9781643790343 • \$20.95

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!"

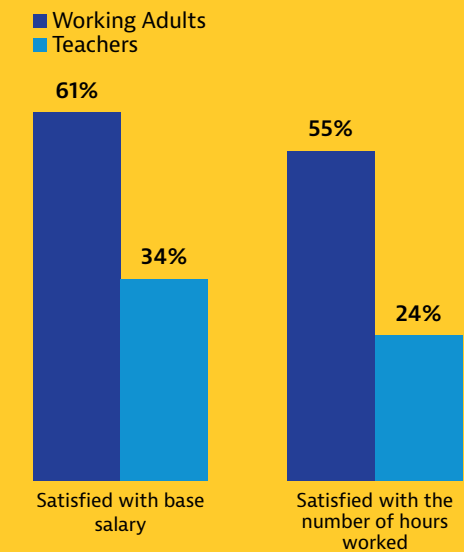
Teachers Work More Hours Than Other Working Adults

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

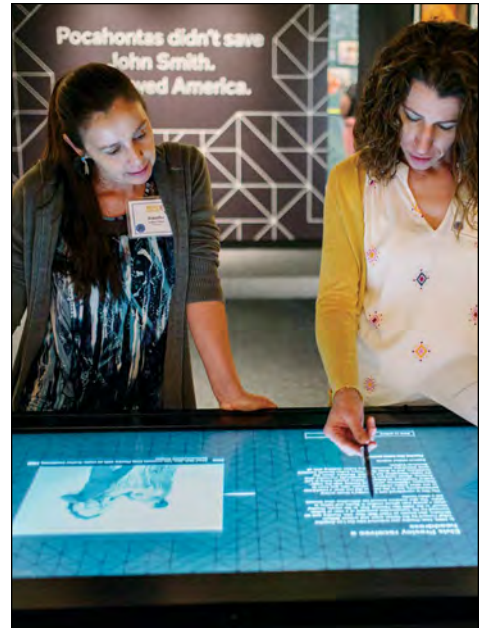
Challenge your assumptions about Indigenous history and cultures from the past and today with free online resources from the museum's education initiative Native Knowledge 360°.

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?

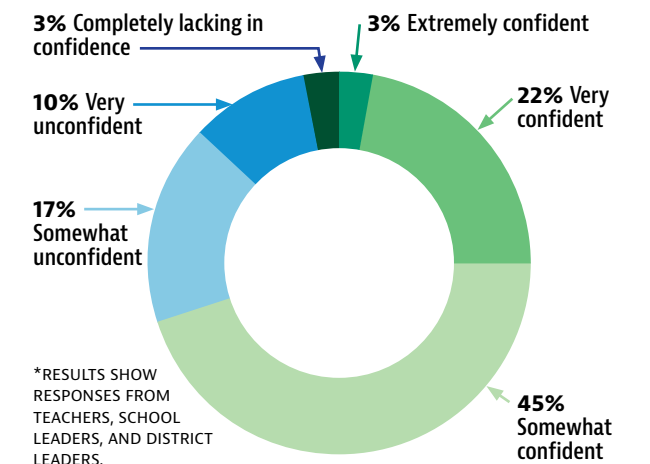
It has been more than a decade since school districts began implementing restorative justice practices—focused on building relationships, conflict resolution, and social and emotional learning—as an alternative to exclusionary discipline, or "zero tolerance" policies. But is it working? In Chicago Public 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

Lynnette Joyner

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



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

ADVOCATING FOR HUMANE PRISONS

By Jelinda Montes

Educators know that some children have more hurdles to overcome than others. For retired science teacher Jan Collins, those struggles hit close to home.

Her father became incarcerated when she was 2 years old. Her family lost their sole breadwinner and were thrust into poverty and homelessness.

"I did my very best to cover up that shame by being the very best person I could be, being the best student, trying to excel in everything, and thought that would hide it all," Collins says. "I didn't have to really face it until my own son became incarcerated."

Collins and her husband, who live in Wilton, Maine, adopted their son when he was 8 years old. What he experienced before that, Collins prefers not to share.

"The trauma will follow him forever," she says.

Collins felt she could no longer hide from the harsh reality of the prison system. She needed to work to change it. In 2014, Collins and her husband began volunteering in prisoner advocacy organizations.

"When you look at incarceration, it is a very inhumane process that does more harm than good," she says. "It's not a pretty picture."

Today, Collins is assistant director of the Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition. She works to educate

the public—including presentations to the Maine Education Association (MEA)-Retired Annual Conference as well as local chapters of MEA-Retired—about what actually happens when people are incarcerated.

"People sometimes think that their loved one will finally get the help they need," she shares. "In reality, ... in a trauma-filled prison setting, people are much more likely to get worse."

Collins also helps organize exhibits of artwork by incarcerated people. The exhibits have been "really eye-opening for the public," she says.

Educators play a powerful role

Schools play a critical role in either diverting students from the incarceration system or pushing them into it, Collins says.

"We need to make sure we do not misinterpret a child's misbehavior as 'criminal activity,'" she explains. "Lots of kids are too young to voice their trauma and have no other way to express it but through their behavior."

When students are punished instead of supported, Collins says, "we set them up for failure, and we set them up for incarceration."

Other institutional barriers such as learning disabilities, mental illness, and lack of health care can increase a person's chances of being incarcerated by up to seven times, she adds. Students with an incarcerated parent also face extra difficulties, as Collins knows from personal experience.

"As teachers, we have one of the most important jobs in the world," she says. "We can identify those kids who most need us and make sure they have the hope and help that will protect them." ❧



Jan Collins

LEARN MORE

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

PHOTO: COURTESY OF MEMBER

Grow Young with HGH

From the landmark book *Grow Young with HGH* comes the most powerful, over-the-counter health supplement in the history of man. Human growth hormone was first discovered in 1920 and has long been thought by the medical community to be necessary only to stimulate the body to full adult size and therefore unnecessary past the age of 20. Recent studies, however, have overturned this notion completely, discovering instead that the natural decline of Human Growth Hormone (HGH), from ages 21 to 61 (the average age at which there is only a trace left in the body) and is the main reason why the body ages and fails to regenerate itself to its 25 year-old biological age.

Like a picked flower cut from the source, we gradually wilt physically and mentally and become vulnerable to a host of degenerative diseases, that we simply weren't susceptible to in our early adult years.

Modern medical science now regards aging as a disease that is treatable and preventable and that "aging", the disease, is actually a compilation of various diseases and pathologies, from everything, like a rise in blood glucose and pressure to diabetes, skin wrinkling and so on. All of these aging symptoms can be stopped and rolled back by maintaining Growth Hormone levels in

the blood at the same levels HGH existed in the blood when we were 25 years old.

There is a receptor site in almost every cell in the human body for HGH, so its regenerative and healing effects are very comprehensive.

Growth Hormone first synthesized in 1985 under the Reagan Orphan drug act, to treat dwarfism, was quickly recognized to stop aging in its tracks and reverse it to a remarkable degree. Since then, only the lucky and the rich have had access to it at the cost of \$10,000 US per year.

The next big breakthrough was to come in 1997 when a group of doctors and scientists, developed an all-natural source product which would cause your own natural HGH to be released again and do all the remarkable things it did for you in your 20's. Now available to every adult for about the price of a coffee and donut a day.



GHR now available in America, just in time for the aging Baby Boomers and everyone else from age 30 to 90 who doesn't want to age rapidly but would rather stay young, beautiful and healthy all of the time.

The new HGH releasers are winning converts from the synthetic HGH users as well, since GHR is just as effective, is oral instead of self-injectable and is very affordable.

GHR is a natural releaser, has no known side effects, unlike the synthetic version and has no known drug interactions. Progressive doctors admit that this is the direction medicine is seeking to go, to get the body to heal itself instead of employing drugs. GHR is truly a revolutionary paradigm shift in medicine and, like any modern leap frog advance, many others will be left in the dust holding their limited, or useless drugs and remedies.

It is now thought that HGH is so comprehensive in its healing and regenerative powers that it is today, where the computer industry was twenty years ago, that it will displace so many prescription and non-prescription drugs and health remedies that it is staggering to think of.

The president of BIE Health Products stated in a recent interview, "I've been waiting for these products since the 70's. We knew they would come, if only we could stay healthy and live long enough to see them! If you want to stay on top of your game, physically and mentally as you age, this product is a boon, especially for the highly skilled professionals who have made large investments in their education, and experience. Also with the failure of Congress to honor our seniors with pharmaceutical coverage policy, it's more important than ever to take pro-active steps to safeguard your health. Continued use of GHR will make a radical difference in your health, HGH is particularly helpful to the elderly who, given a choice, would rather stay independent in their own home, strong, healthy and alert enough to manage their own affairs, exercise and stay involved in their communities. Frank, age 85, walks two miles a day, plays golf, belongs to a dance club for seniors, had a girl friend again and doesn't need Viagra, passed his drivers test and is hardly ever home when we call - GHR delivers."

HGH is known to relieve symptoms of Asthma, Angina, Chronic Fatigue, Constipation, Lower back pain and Sciatica, Cataracts and Macular Degeneration, Menopause, Fibromyalgia, Regular and Diabetic Neuropathy, Hepatitis, helps Kidney Dialysis and Heart and Stroke recovery.

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*The latest news on
NEA-Retired members
around the country*

'We Can Live Together in Peace, Not in Pieces'

When Dr. Cleorah Scruggs-DeBose started teaching elementary school, in 1970, she quickly realized that the curriculum did not reflect the diversity she saw in her classroom. She often spent evenings researching more diverse perspectives to incorporate into her teaching.

"I didn't want [my students] to go through school and not have that understanding, not have that conversation, not have that learning of not only their own culture,

but other cultures and how we can live together in peace, not in pieces," says Scruggs-DeBose, who taught in Flint, Mich., and still resides there today.

In the early 1990s, Scruggs-DeBose worked with the NEA to create a multicultural curriculum guide and to adopt the third Monday in October as National Multicultural Diversity Day.

She retired in 2000, but her activism continues through the National Multicultural Diversity Day and Institute (NMDI), an organization she founded in 1993.

"No pun intended, but a teacher never loses her class, and never loses her passion," she says.

The volunteer-led nonprofit promotes awareness, understand-



Dr. Cleorah Scruggs-DeBose

ing, and respect among cultures, and helps to provide educational scholarships to students in need.

The group attends local concerts and festivals, hosts workshops, and organizes Multicultural Diversity Day forums. The

volunteers also develop curriculum for area schools, the local Boys & Girls Club, and places of worship.

"A lot of things still need to be done in the area of multicultural diversity, but we've made some gains," Scruggs-DeBose reflects.

NMDI offers in-person and virtual programs. Learn more at csdministries.org/multicultural.html. To volunteer, write to connectdiversity@yahoo.com.

—MADELAINE VIKSE

Announcing the 2024 NEA-Retired Communications Awards!

Every year, the NEA-Retired Executive Council Communications Committee recognizes NEA-Retired affiliates for outstanding communications work in the following categories:

- Established State Retired Newsletter (Published more than three years)
- State Retired Newsletter (Published fewer than three years)
- Established Local Retired Newsletter



- E-newsletter
- State Retired Website
- NEA-Retired Spotlight Award (State active newsletter/magazine covering NEA-Retired issues)
- Newsletter Hall of Fame

To apply, visit nea.org/retired-awards. Applications must be postmarked by April 15, 2024.

Getting ready for the 2024 elections!

Retired social studies teacher Bob Brown has served as chair of the Connecticut Education Association's Political Action Committee for 17 years and is already fundraising for the 2024 elections.

"Every important decision about public schools is made by someone either elected or appointed by an elected official," he says.

His biggest fundraising tip? Ask and explain: "When I go to meetings and explain that our dues money cannot go to federal elections—and all the reasons we need to be engaged in political fundraising, and all the crucial issues out there—people give."

—MADELAINE VIKSE



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BE FOUND AT [NEA.ORG/RETIRED](https://nea.org/retired).

Did Someone Say Pickleball?

Swat, bounce, punch, or pose! Find out how to pump up the fun in your fitness routine.

By Mary Ellen Flannery

The best exercise for older adults—or for anyone, for that matter—is the exercise that you’ll do. And that means finding something you enjoy.

Is it pickleball—like 36.5 million other Americans? Is it touring a local waterway on a stand-up paddleboard, an activity that has exploded in popularity? Or is it the latest trend in studio workouts?

During the pandemic, our fitness routines changed. Forced out of our indoor Pilates studios and Silver-Sneakers classes, millions of people picked up pickleball paddles.

Millions more walked and walked and walked some more, often egged on by Fitbits and Apple Watches, to “get their steps in.”

Today, the fitness landscape looks different for people of all ages. Here, a few retired educators share why they get excited about exercise. You may just discover a new fitness passion!

Get pickled

Susan Feiner was an avid tennis player—until she blew out her elbow in 2019.

Today, she’s still swinging a racket, but having a thousand times more fun. “Every other activity ... most of the time, it’s, when is this going to be over?” she says.

Not pickleball. Not only is it great exercise—shown to improve cardiovascular health and endurance—it’s also “just really, really fun,” says Feiner, who retired in 2018 as an economics professor at the University of Southern Maine.

Invented in 1965, pickleball is currently the fastest growing sport in the U.S. Played on small courts, usually by two teams of two people, the sport is especially social.

“The most fun is what’s called ‘open play,’” Feiner says. “You go to the court and put down your racket. When somebody finishes on the court, the first person waiting goes in. ... That’s very fun, very easy, and very, very



Retired professor Susan Feiner is having fun—and getting a great workout—through pickleball.



Former school bus driver Donna Nielsen’s boxing workouts strengthen her arms, legs, and core.

social. That’s how you’re going to learn.”

For aging people, it’s a good fit, says Feiner, who will turn 70 this year.

“It’s kind of hard to hurt yourself!” she says. Along with the cardio benefits, pickleball’s quick, rotational movements offer strength and balance training. And, because it’s so social, it also helps with mental health issues that can be exacerbated by isolation.

How you can get started:

Look for an inexpensive paddle, recommends Feiner. Unless you’re playing competitively, you don’t need to spend a lot of money. Then look at your local YMCA or parks department for intro classes, and check for local groups on Facebook, she says.

Words of encouragement:

“I’ve had more fun in a year of pickleball than I had in 20 years of tennis—and tennis is fun!” Feiner says.

Roll with the punches

At 73 years old, Donna Nielsen knows how to throw a left hook. The retired school bus driver grew up with four brothers. She wishes she knew then what she knows now. “Where was this when I was young?” she laughs.

For the past year, Nielsen has been training for two to three hours, twice a week, at Rock Steady Boxing, in La Porte, Ind., where programs are designed for people with Parkinson’s disease.

“I found out about it at this place where I go for massage therapy, and I thought, ‘This is going to be a lark!’” Nielsen recalls.

Nielsen retired six years ago; a year later, at age 68, she was diagnosed with Parkinson’s. She says deep brain stimulation has been “a god-send,” but she knows that regular exercise is key to physical and mental well-being.

During workouts, Nielsen

puts on a pair of 8-pound boxing gloves and punches for 4-minute intervals.

“Uppercuts, straight punches—[the instructors] call them out, and you do it!” she says. Often, she aims for her instructor’s sparring mitts. “Yesterday, he had those mitts on, and I told him, ‘You better hope I don’t miss!’”

Sometimes instructors will add a mental task, like count backwards from 100 by threes, and the boxers simultaneously talk and jab. In the end, Nielsen leaves sweaty—and often laughing. “It’s a riot!” she promises.

How you can get started:

Many fitness clubs and gyms offer boxing workouts, including some tailored toward women’s empowerment.

Words of encouragement:

“It’s kind of fun to punch something,” Nielsen says. “It works out a lot of frustration, I’ll tell you that! If you go in there and you’re honked off about something, you can sweat it out!”

Hit the barre

After Joyce Bailey “officially” retired from teaching—and then retired again from her union work and a second job as a paraeducator—she finally tried yoga. And Pilates. And then barre classes.

“They totally overlap—but each also offers something different,” she says. Yoga focuses on flexibility and balance. Pilates is all about strength, especially core strength. Barre has all of that, with a dose of cardio.

The barre refers to an actual bar that runs along the studio wall, often held for balance during exercises.

Bailey, who taught music, west of Chicago but was never a dancer, enjoys it so much that she became an



“It’s kind of fun to punch something. It works out a lot of frustration. ... If you go in there and you’re honked off about something, you can sweat it out!”

—Donna Nielsen

NEA-
RETIRED
feature



"You can easily get into bad habits when you retire—and not do anything."

—Joyce Bailey (above)

instructor in the Florida Gulf Coast community where she spends the winter.

"The whole thing is that there's always a modification you can do. I'm having a lot of knee issues with arthritis and such, and you just modify a little bit," she says.

How you can get started:

Bailey's studios are welcoming places, with people who have become friends. Look for something close to home or try online classes. You can use the back of a chair as a barre, she suggests.

Words of encouragement:

"You can easily get into bad habits when you retire—and not do anything," she says. Give something a try, she says, and if you don't like that, try something else.

Get a yin for yoga!

JoAnn Kenner walks daily and frequently bounces on a mini-trampoline that she



"Thank God for modern science!" JoAnn Kenner says. She walks daily on two replacement hips—and practices yoga.

keeps around the house. "I go by it when I'm doing laundry ... and I jump on!" she says.

But the 80-year-old's true love is yoga. "My thing is, you need strength-training, and you need something for flexibility—you can't be just running or just walking."

Even in this world of emerging fitness trends, what's old is sometimes best, she says.

"If I could tell everybody to do one thing, it'd be the five Tibetan rites," she says, referring to a sequence of five movements that are reportedly 2,500 years old. "Google it! They're amazing," she urges.

How you can get started:

With yoga, there's something for everybody, Kenner says. "Hot yoga. Gentle yoga. Yoga with straps—that's similar to Pilates. Goat yoga! I haven't tried that one yet, but I might," she says. Try one, then try another!

Words of encouragement:

"[Yoga] is like an old friend. You may step away, but it will welcome you back!" Kenner says. ✨



Do You Need Wearable Technology? Maybe!

Six years ago, Joyce Bailey got an Apple Watch for her 60th birthday. For the past 1,500 days, the former educator has maintained a perfect record of meeting her daily steps goals. "It gets to be kind of obnoxious. Even on a travel day, I'm like, 'I have to get my steps in!'" she admits. "My husband is like, *really?* But it does hold me accountable!"

Counting steps is just one way that wearable technology—bands, watches, etc.—assists with fitness goals. Here are a few other ways you can use them:

- 1) Track heart-rate variability.
- 2) Use built-in guided breathing exercises for stress relief.
- 3) Monitor sleeping patterns.
- 4) Keep track of nutritional goals.
- 5) Call emergency services in case of falls.



2024 NEA-RETIRED ANNUAL MEETING

PHILADELPHIA, PA | JUNE 30 - JULY 1, 2024

For hotel and meeting information, visit nea.org/retired.

2024 NOMINATIONS FOR NEA-RETIRED OFFICE

The deadline for receipt of **NEA-Retired governance nominations** is **April 15, 2024**, and the deadline for NEA-Retired seats on the **NEA Resolutions Committee** is **May 1, 2024**. Both submissions are due at 5 p.m. EDT. The preferred filing method is to use the electronic forms, which are available at: nea.org/retired_elections. If you use the form below, please follow the instructions at the bottom of the page.

2024 NEA-RETIRED ELECTIONS NOMINATION FORM

- Retired Secretary (3-year term)
 - Retired Executive Council (2 seats / 3-year term)
 - Retired Director on the NEA Board of Directors (2 seats / 3-year term)
 - Retired Alternate Director on the NEA Board of Directors (2 seats / 3-year term)
 - Retired Member on the NEA Resolutions Committee (6 seats / 1-year term)
- A candidate may run for only one office or elected position of NEA-Retired.
- I affirm that I am a current NEA-Retired member. NEA Member ID Number: _____

During the NEA-Retired Annual Meeting, I will need a table for campaign materials.

Yes No

I will need a standing easel.

Yes No

Name _____ Personal Email _____

(PRINT your name as it is to appear on the ballot)

Signature _____

Mobile Phone Number _____ Home Phone Number _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

***Race and Ethnicity (Optional)—Check all that apply:**

- Asian and Pacific Islander
- Native American/Alaska Native
- Latin(o/a/x), Hispanic, and Chican(o/a/x)
- Black or African American
- Multiracial
- Middle Eastern and North African
- White
- Other, Prefer not to say

*Race and ethnicity information is optional and failure to provide it will in no way affect your membership status, rights, benefits in NEA, your state association, or any of their affiliates.

Landrum-Griffin Act (Required)

NEA is covered by the Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure (i.e., Landrum-Griffin) Act, Section 504 of which provides in pertinent part that no person "who has been convicted of, or served any part of a prison term resulting from his conviction of" certain enumerated crimes within the past thirteen years may serve as an "officer" of a covered labor union organization. If you check "yes" below, a representative of the NEA Executive Office will contact you regarding the matter.

During the past thirteen years, have you been convicted of or served any part of a prison term resulting from the conviction of a crime, excluding minor traffic offenses?

Yes No



Being 'Not Racist' Is Not Enough

Retired educators are speaking out when they see incidents of systemic racism.

By Brenda Álvarez

In the early 1970s, when Christine “Chris” Salamone was a high school student, in Buffalo, N.Y., she relied heavily on the city bus. An all-access student pass allowed her to take the bus back and forth to school, an after-school program, and a part-time job. She rode the bus to her monthly orthodontist appointments to get her braces checked, and, one day, she rode the bus home after falling ill at school.

“I grew up poor,” Salamone says. “My mother couldn’t pick me up. We didn’t own a car.”

For students today, particularly students of color who make up most of the Buffalo Public Schools’ student population, the same all-access pass comes with restrictions.

“Kids have specific routes they must take,” explains Salamone, who taught history for more than 23 years in Buffalo, before retiring, in 2021. “If the driver checks your pass, and it’s not for that bus, the driver won’t let you on.”

Plus, students can only use the bus pass at specific times.

In 2015, Salamone along with other members of the Buffalo Parent Teacher Organization—a districtwide group created by her state union,

NYSUT—challenged the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority and forced them to end this practice.

“Most of our parents don’t have cars, and the bus pass allowed students the freedom to do what they had to do,” she says. “A lot of our kids play sports after school. They need to get home afterwards.”

But two years ago, transportation officials reinstated the bus pass restrictions.

“By limiting the students’ mobility, they’re limiting their lives,” she says.

A classic case of systemic racism

How is it systemically racist to limit an all-access student bus pass? Because it’s a policy, embedded as part of an organization’s normal practice, that negatively affects a particular group of people. In this case, it impacts students of color disproportionately.

But these systems can be broken down.

Racial justice, or racial equity, goes beyond non-racism, says Aaron Dorsey, a national trainer with NEA’s Center for Racial and Social Justice. It’s not only the absence of discrimination and inequities, it’s also the presence of deliberate systems and supports to achieve and sustain racial equity through proactive and preventative measures.

Retired educators like Salamone are working toward these goals.

“If you’re really anti-racist, you’re gonna do whatever you can to change the system,” Salamone says. “We’re fighting with the bus company to remove the restrictions—again.”

What is anti-racism?

What is the difference between non-racism and anti-racism? “Someone who

“Someone, who is non-racist, will say: ‘Yes, racism is bad. Everybody should have equal rights and equality.’ An anti-racist not only believes in that, but acts to make it a reality.”

—Aaron Dorsey, NEA’s Center for Racial and Social Justice



Chris Salamone, at a bus stop in Buffalo, N.Y., is working to reverse a policy that limits all-access bus passes, impacting mostly students of color.

is non-racist will say: ‘Yes, racism is bad. Everybody should have equal rights and equality,’” Dorsey says. “An anti-racist not only believes in that but acts to make it a reality.”

These are activists who rally on the streets for justice; write letters to elected officials to challenge policies that harm historically marginalized people; or support racial justice organizations financially or by volunteering, he explains.

“Most people fall into the non-racist category, but anti-racists are doing the work to unlearn racist ideas and calling out racism when they see it,” Dorsey says.

What it means to do the work

In summer 2022, retired

speech pathologist Valenta Ward-Gravely, of Cleveland, Ohio, was among 50 educators who participated in an NEA anti-racist training, where participants learned about implicit bias, systems of oppression, anti-racist work, and how to apply the lessons learned in real time.

The goal? Advance racial justice in their communities.

“It was a powerful experience,” Ward-Gravely says. “We talked about the history of African Americans, Native Americans, the internment of Japanese Americans, Muslims, and others who have been oppressed in this country.”

She adds: “To hear about these experiences and know common ground existed then, and that people to this day are

committed to this work, was inspiring.”

Ward-Gravely would soon draw upon this learning when her twin grandsons, Caiden and Christian, ran up against systemic racism at school.

Caiden and the lunch lady

In August 2022, just a week into the new school year, 9-year-old Caiden was sent to the principal’s office.

“My grandson went through the lunch line, picked up a yogurt and fruit, walked to his table, sat the items down, and then went back in the line to get the rest of his lunch,” explains Ward-Gravely, who received a call from a parent who had witnessed the incident.

When Caiden went to enter his code to pay for lunch, the cafeteria worker accused him of theft. Caiden explained to no avail that the yogurt and fruit were part of his lunch. He was sent to the principal, who also accused Caiden of theft.

Ward-Gravely underscores that the White parent who contacted her is anti-racist, because she saw racism and took action to stop it.

“When she sees an injustice, she addresses it,” says Ward-Gravely. “And we want everybody to be able to do what she does.”

The woman’s actions led Ward-Gravely to immediately set up a meeting with the principal. Unfortunately, the principal repeated the accusations and stated that

this was Caiden’s first strike. Next time, he would be suspended.

“This is how systemic racism works,” Ward-Gravely says.

She notes that harsh discipline—such as going from a warning to a suspension over a misunderstanding—are detrimental to students of color, who often face severe punishment over minor infractions. This, in turn, feeds the school-to-prison pipeline.



“Eliminating [the systemic racist perspective] requires education and training and learning and unlearning ... concepts, thoughts, and perspectives that harm African American people.”

—Valenta Ward-Gravely, retired educator, Ohio

Christian was allowed to call his mother at any time.

But that day, the counselor wouldn’t let Christian make the call unless he explained why it was necessary.

The truth? Christian was angry because another student had taken something off of his desk and thrown it in the trash. But Christian didn’t want to share that with the counselor.

“He wanted to talk to his mother,” Ward-Gravely explains.

Christian and the counselor

Fast forward to early April 2023. Christian was sent to the principal’s office over the use of profanity.

“Yep, this 9-year-old says to the counselor: ‘Leave me the f-- alone,’” his grandmother recalls. “Whoa, that was a wrong thing to say.”

What was behind the f-word? Grief, frustration, and displeasure.

In December 2022, the twins’ father had died. A month later, a memorial service was held. Toward the end of March, Christian had strep throat and was out of school for three days.

When he returned, the counselor—who was working with Christian as part of a small group of students—knew of his father’s death and that

The principal wrote a notice of intent to suspend, which included language with criminal implications: “Destroy or damage property on purpose,” “assault,” “make a physical/verbal attack on,” and “causing damage to the property of another.”

Ward-Gravely makes the poignant point that the administrators and staff involved at her grandsons’ school were African American.

“African Americans are not exempt from having a systemic racist perspective, because that’s what we were all brought up in,” she says. “Eliminating it requires education and training and learning and unlearning to remove some of those concepts, thoughts, and perspectives that harm African American people.”

Dismantling systemic racism in real time

In each instance, Ward-Gravely reached out to school staff to talk about the incident. Afterward, individual staff members apologized to the boys.

As for Christian, Ward-Gravely and her daughter filed an appeal.

During the meeting, they talked about systemic racism and the school-to-prison pipeline. They asked about suspension rates based on race and ethnicity.

They also requested that the criminal language in the report be replaced with an accurate description of events—“use of profanity toward a staff member”—which does not carry criminal implications.

The request was granted.

“Not every parent would know to challenge the criminalizing nature of the words used in their child’s suspension,” she adds.

Ward-Gravely credits NEA’s training with giving her the tools to take anti-racist actions on her grandsons’ behalf.

Today, many active and retired educators across the country are engaged in similar trainings, so they, too, can stand up for racial justice. ✎



If systemic racism doesn’t end, says Valenta Ward-Gravely, “my 10-year-old grandsons will live in a country that is worse than the country I grew up in.”

The Language of Anti-Racism

“People often use words interchangeably,” says Aaron Dorsey, of NEA’s Center for Racial and Social Justice. “Did the person mean bigot instead of racist? Grounding ourselves in the terminology ... sets the foundation for conversation around race and equity.” These commonly used words related to race can be loaded with meaning:

“Colorblind” is a misguided term describing the act or practice of disregarding racial characteristics or being uninfluenced by racial prejudice. “Color blindness” is often promoted by those who dismiss the importance of race to proclaim the end of racism. The term presents challenges when discussing diversity, which requires being racially aware, and equity, which is focused on fairness for people of all races.

Equity means fairness and justice, and it focuses on outcomes that are most appropriate for a given group, recognizing different challenges, needs, and histories. It does not mean “equality,” or “same treatment,” which do not take differing needs or outcomes into account. Systemic equity involves a comprehensive system and process that creates, supports, and sustains social justice.

Inclusion involves authentic and empowered participation in a group or structure, with a true sense of belonging and full access to opportunities.

“Reverse racism” is a concept based on a misunderstanding of what racism is. Every individual can be prejudiced and biased, but racism is based on power and systematic oppression. Even

though some People of Color hold powerful positions, White people overwhelmingly hold the most systemic power. The concept of “reverse racism” ignores structural racism, which permeates all dimensions of our society, routinely advantaging White people and disadvantaging People of Color. It is deeply entrenched and in no danger of being dismantled or “reversed” any time soon.

Systemic analysis is a comprehensive examination of the root causes and mechanisms at play that result in often invisible obstacles for People of Color. It involves looking beyond individual speech, acts, and practices to the larger structures, such as organizations, institutions, traditions, and systems of knowledge.

Test Your Knowledge

Text ANTIRACIST to 48744 to see how much you know about equity terms and phrases—and about the resources needed to promote dialogue around equity and inclusion.

**LEARN
MORE**

Explore NEA’s racial and social justice trainings at nea.org/Social-Justice-Trainings.

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



SAVE THE DATE

March 1–3 | Chicago, IL



For information about the Summit,
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.



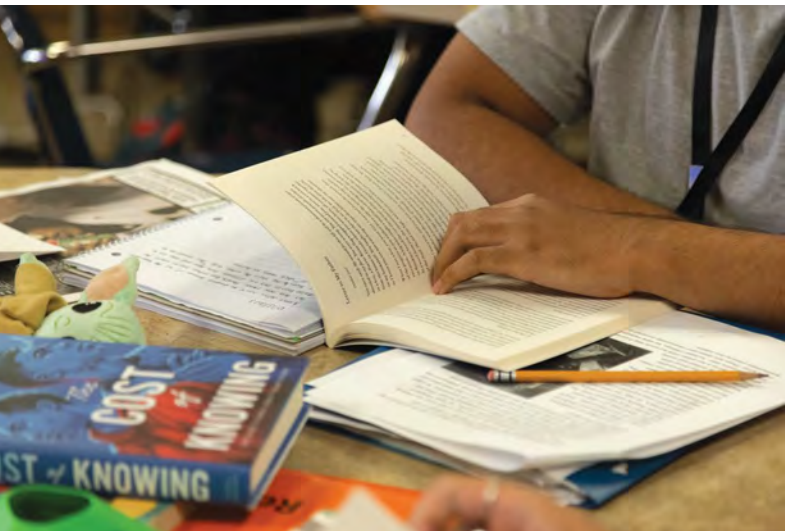
The most-banned books include LGBTQ+ people. But kids want them, Kochel notes.

"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.

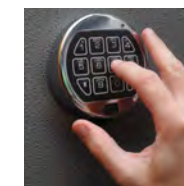
SOURCE: THE WASHINGTON POST

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



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

—Kristen Record, high school teacher, Connecticut

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, 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.

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.

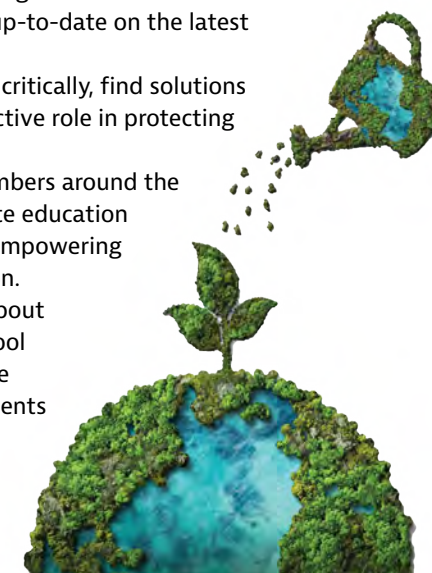


For these resources and more, go to nea.org/gunviolence.

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.



Applications are reviewed three times a year (winter, spring, and fall).

Need a Grant?

Apply for the NEA Foundation's \$2,000 and \$5,000 grants for individuals and teams of education professionals to support instructional practice or professional development across all subject areas and grade levels. **Applications are reviewed three times a year (winter, spring, and fall).**

Want to Bring the World to Your Classroom?

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.

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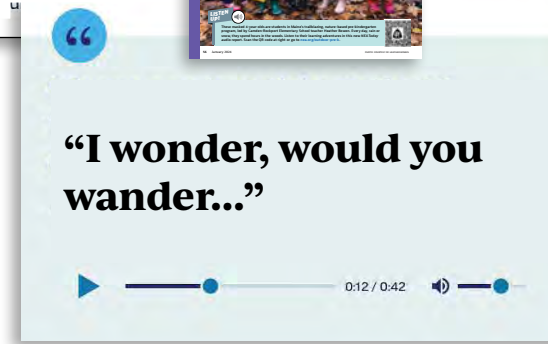
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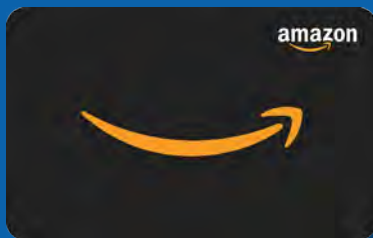
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