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2024

# nea Today

NEA TODAY for  
**ASPIRING  
EDUCATORS**  
An edition of *NEA Today*

# Are You Safe on Campus?

ASPIRING  
EDUCATORS ARE  
TAKING ACTION ON  
GUN VIOLENCE  
PAGE 18

Michigan State University student Reagan Williams at the restaurant where she witnessed a 2023 campus shooting.

*inside*

Speaking out against  
book bans PAGE 10

What kind of changemaker  
are you? PAGE 14

Your vote matters for  
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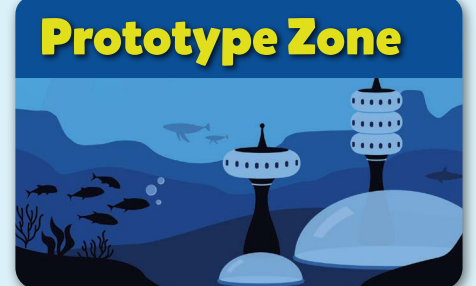
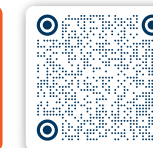
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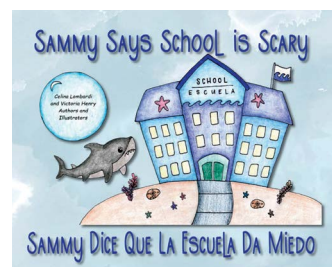
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Aspiring Educators Champion Equity and Education Justice

I am honored to serve as your NEA Aspiring Educators (AE) chair and to connect with members across the country. Together, we are demanding high-quality teacher preparation programs and advocating for a safe and just education system.

This year, AE members have organized around the need for paid student teaching, the elimination of EdTPA, and the importance of educator safety. You have used your voices and experiences to demand change and to demand that our profession become more equitable and just. As Aspiring Educators, we have made it clear to politicians, union leaders, and education stakeholders that we will continue to advocate for our students, educators, and communities until education justice is achieved for every student.

As we gear up for a pivotal election season—at a time when educators do not receive the respect or resources they deserve—I am grounded in my values and purpose as an educator to continue seeking progress.

Our nation is experiencing one of the largest teacher shortages in recent history. We are also impacted by politicians who want to privatize education. This harmful strategy undermines the promise of public education—that all students, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, disability status, or ZIP code have the right to a quality education. In addition, we continue to see book bans and state laws that prevent us from teaching the truth of our nation's history.

As educators, our purpose is to ensure that all students have access to an accurate and complete education—one that allows them to reflect on our country's mistakes so they can become informed and engaged citizens.

The reality is that when educators do not receive the professional and emotional supports they need to serve students, then highly qualified educators will leave the profession they love. As Aspiring Educators, it is our responsibility to stand in unity with active and retired educators to ensure that our profession is protected and respected.

I am eager to do this work alongside the tens of thousands of Aspiring Educators who embody the values of our union.

Together, we can transform our profession and continue to strengthen the labor movement in our pursuit of educational justice.

"As we gear up for a pivotal election season, ... I am grounded in my values and purpose as an educator to continue seeking progress."

—Sabreena Shaller

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**NEA ASPIRING EDUCATORS CORE VALUES**  
The foundations of NEA Aspiring Educators—Educator Quality, Community Engagement, Political Action, and Social Justice—direct all program activities and publications.

Educator Quality encompasses pre-professional development and job preparation. Our members' involvement in the NEA Aspiring Educators program increases their ability to become quality teachers.  
Community Engagement describes how members of NEA Aspiring Educators engage the people and environment around them; we impact our communities—locally and globally—and value the meaningfulness of such involvement.

Political Action includes both the realization that political and legislative issues impact the education world and the initiative to get involved.

Social Justice empowers our members to advocate for the distribution of resources fairly and to treat all students equitably so that they feel safe and secure physically and psychologically.

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## BECKY'S JOURNAL OF

# Joy, Justice, and Excellence

**Dear NEA Aspiring Ed 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



“

*“Aspiring Educators, hold on to what you must do, knowing you have with you the collective power of 3 million strong. If we hold [on], ... our hearts will be filled, our souls replenished. Our resistance will be renewed, and our resolve will never be broken.”*

—Becky Pringle, at the 2023 Aspiring Educators Conference, in Orlando, Florida

## Face to Face with NEA Aspiring Educators

In September, I invited NEA Aspiring Educator Demetrius Dove, of Georgia, to join me on a special panel at the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation's 52nd Annual Legislative Conference (right), in Washington, D.C. There, we discussed the adverse effects of the Black teacher shortage across the country. Demetrius shared how unpaid student teaching placements and attacks on the freedom to learn are barriers to the profession.

“Students are not able to afford tuition and bills while working eight hours a day for no pay,” he said, adding that in some cases, colleges prohibit future educators from working a second job.

Another reason: Book bans and censored history. He noted: “In Florida, where the new history standards teach that enslaved people ‘benefited from slavery,’ we have a responsibility to teach the truth that slavery was not an internship. It was an atrocity.” Well said, Demetrius!



(Left to right) Ryan Saunders, Learning Policy Institute; Demetrius Dove, NEA Aspiring Educator; Becky Pringle, NEA President; U.S. Rep Bobby Scott; U.S. Rep. Jahana Hayes; Christina Grant, D.C. State Superintendent of Education; Ivory Toldson, NAACP; and Derrick Johnson, NAACP President and CEO.

## JOIN ME Three Things to Do For Yourself and Your Union

1. **Plan to vote in November!** The best way to make sure students have the freedom to read and learn is to make our voices heard at the ballot box. See our recommended candidates for office in your state, check your voter registration, preview your local ballot, find nearby events, and more at [EdVotes.org](https://EdVotes.org).
2. **Looking for a banned book to read?** Text **BANNED** to **48744** and receive a book recommendation from NEA!
3. **Sign the pledge.** Commit your support for free and open access to books. Ensure that all students can find age-appropriate materials that reflect and respect their identities in their school libraries. Take action at [nea.org/FreedomToRead](https://nea.org/FreedomToRead).



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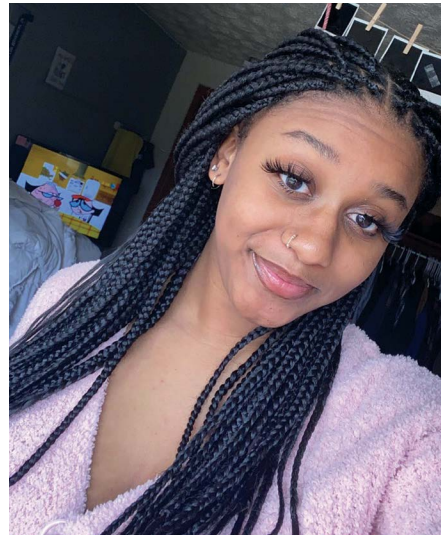
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## MEET THE KINNAMAN SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS!

NEA-RETIRED IS HELPING  
ASPIRING EDUCATORS  
ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS

By Summer Fitzgerald

Jack Kinnaman taught for nearly 30 years and was a long-standing NEA member and leader—including serving as vice president of NEA-Retired. After his death, in 2002, NEA-Retired established the Jack Kinnaman Memorial Scholarship to support future educators. For two decades, NEA-Retired members have generously contributed to the fund. Congratulations to these accomplished members of NEA's Aspiring Educators (AE), who each received a \$3,500 scholarship!



### Ashley McCreeley

Elementary education major,  
University of Massachusetts Lowell

As vice president of the Student Education Association of Massachusetts, McCreeley empowers other members by organizing study sessions, informing them about professional development workshops, and providing community service opportunities. In 2023, she started her practicum for elementary education and moderate disabilities, which is also unpaid.

"Receiving the Jack Kinnaman Scholarship will allow me to work harder on my studies and relieve some of the financial burden that comes with earning a degree," McCreeley says.



### Anesha Ward

Primary education major,  
Capital University, Columbus, Ohio

"I'm committed to working toward growing the teacher pipeline, encouraging students who desire to teach, and finding ways to support minority Aspiring Educators," says Ward, who has served as the Ohio Education Association (OEA)-AE minority member at-large and on the OEA Human and Civil Rights Subcommittee.

As founder and president of the Capital Student Education Association, Ward is passionate about providing resources for future educators. Her wish for her teaching career? "To use my voice to bring love and change to the classroom," she says.

### Briana Hale

Middle school social science major,  
Florida State University, Tallahassee

As treasurer of FSU's Student Florida Education Association chapter, Hale says she has developed invaluable leadership skills. Among other responsibilities, she organizes fundraisers, social events, and supply drives at a local elementary school. The most important part of these events, she says, is that they create "bonding moments with members and [the chance to] work alongside our community."

The Kinnaman scholarship, Hale adds, will help her continue her studies and receive her master's degree in social science.



### Hannah StClair

Elementary education major,  
University of Oregon, Eugene

"My involvement in NEA is the cornerstone of my undergraduate experience and will continue into my graduate studies," StClair says. She became the University of Oregon's first official chapter president, advocated for AE members to attend the state delegate assembly, and proposed a new business item (NBI) at the NEA Representative Assembly that aimed to increase AE membership. The NBI passed! StClair has even served as an Aspiring Educator member of the NEA Board of Directors, speaking up for the need for more student teachers, educational funding, and other issues. 🇺🇸

### Elena Sloboda

Elementary education major,  
Arizona State University, Tempe

Sloboda established the first AE campus chapter at Arizona State University and has paved the way for a statewide chapter. She is an active member of the Arizona Education Association's Racial and Social Justice Committee, and she has coordinated with other AE members across the country to advocate for paid student teaching.

Along with other students from her state, Sloboda has met with representatives at the state capitol to raise awareness of the need for paid student teaching.

"I was able to speak with our governor about the issues aspiring educators face," she says.



HOW TO  
APPLY

Complete the NEA-Retired Jack Kinnaman Memorial Scholarship application online at [nea.org/Kinnaman](https://nea.org/Kinnaman). Make sure you meet all requirements and submit a complete packet. Applications are due by April 15, 2024.

## AE CHAPTER TOOLKIT: HOW TO BUILD A STRONG CAMPUS GROUP

By Brenda Álvarez

NEA's Aspiring Educators (AE) program is made up of more than 40,000 amazing members in 1,100 campus chapters nationwide. AE chapters provide members with professional learning opportunities, including access to grassroots community coalitions and a vast network of educators. Through AE, new educators can also learn about racial justice in education and how to advocate for students inside and outside of the classroom.

If you're interested in starting or building an AE chapter, NEA's "Aspiring Educators Chapter Toolkit" offers important tips like these to help you take the first steps:

### Form a leadership team.

The first step in forming an AE chapter is to gather a diverse team of students to lead the effort.

- These students could become the chapter's governing officers (president, vice president, and treasurer).

This team should research the university's requirements for obtaining a club or organization charter, such as the number of student members needed; constitutional requirements; and a meeting location.

### Contact your NEA state affiliate.

Every state has an NEA affiliate and an AE program that can help you get started. Find your affiliate at [nea.org/nea-affiliates](http://nea.org/nea-affiliates) or email [aspiringed@nea.org](mailto:aspiringed@nea.org) for assistance. Forming a campus chapter allows members to collaborate with other Aspiring Educators across the state and around the country.

### Find a faculty or staff advisor.

Most colleges require campus groups to have a full-time staff or faculty advisor. An education professor is ideal. However, AE is a student-led group, so any supportive, full-time staff member will work.

### Draft a constitution.

Your group's constitution will set the rules and guidelines that govern the organization.

Bylaws guide the chapter during decision-making processes; provide information on the duties of official positions, affiliation, and chapter goals; and outline proceedings for elections, filling vacant positions, and more.

### Contact your student organizations office.

Most colleges have a department dedicated to student clubs and organizations. This office would provide the information and processes necessary to obtain an official charter.

### Attract more members.

Recruiting members is important, not only for chartering the group but also for the chapter's viability. Be sure to recruit members who reflect the diversity of your community and the nation.

Recruitment can be done through casual conversation, by setting up a table during club days, or by distributing flyers around campus.

The chapter's leadership team should collaborate with members on which activities to pursue for the semester.

When chartering an organization, some colleges may ask you to provide ideas for activities that your group might organize. These activities can address educational and social justice issues, or could feature collaborations with other campus organizations. 🌟



If you're an AE chapter leader or are interested in becoming one, check out NEA's "Aspiring Educators Chapter Toolkit," at [nea.org/AspiringEducatorsChapterToolkit](http://nea.org/AspiringEducatorsChapterToolkit), for an in-depth look at how to create, build, and expand your campus chapter.

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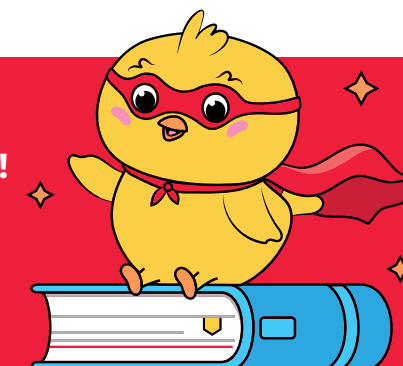


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# Becoming an educator in the age of banned books

By Jelinda Montes

**RIGHT-WING EXTREMISTS ARE TRYING TO CO-OPT PUBLIC EDUCATION, BUT ASPIRING EDUCATORS ARE FIGHTING BACK**

Extremist politicians are intentionally fueling fear and dividing citizens by banning books that represent marginalized people. It is no accident that most of the challenged titles feature LGBTQ+ voices and People of Color.

Often one parent's challenge is enough to ban a book from school shelves indefinitely. According to PEN America, a nonprofit that defends free expression, over 1,550 individual titles were banned across more than 33 states during the 2022 – 2023 school year.

Which states are the worst offenders? Florida, Texas, and Missouri have the most banned or challenged books, according to the report. Many bans are still under review by school districts around the country, but in the meantime, the challenged books remain off-limits.

The freedom to read is under attack, but Aspiring Educators are teaming up with K–12 educators to protect every student's right to an honest and accurate public education.

## 'It's really heartbreaking'

Alex Johnson is a sophomore at Northern Arizona University (NAU), in Flagstaff, where they are majoring

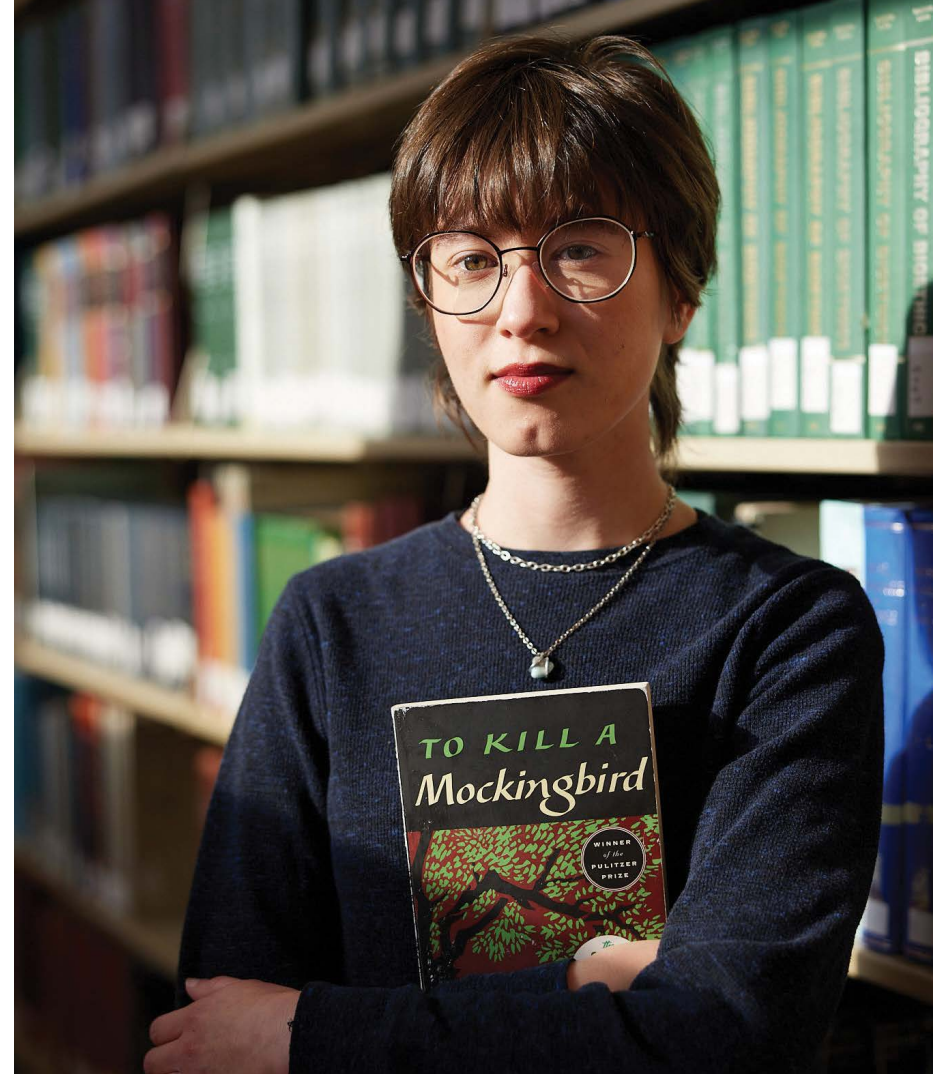
in secondary education in English. Former Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey signed a law, in 2022, that banned several books—including the Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker and *All Boys Aren't Blue*, a memoir by LGBTQ+ activist George M. Johnson.

Alex Johnson dreams of teaching creative writing to high school students but believes that censorship is stifling students' creativity and critical thinking.

"The learning comes from the discussion, from the different perspectives, from two kids sitting next to each other that have nothing in common, and finding something in common through a book," Johnson says.

Growing up, Johnson's English teachers introduced them to some of their favorite books. Today, some of the books that made them fall in love with literature and inspired them to become a teacher—such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Fahrenheit 451*—are banned from classrooms in some states.

"It's really heartbreaking, just seeing all these stories being hidden away as if there's something to be afraid of," Johnson says. "I think that a lot of the censorship comes from people being afraid of the power that words hold and the power that stories hold."



"A lot of the censorship comes from people being afraid of the power that words hold and the power that stories hold."

—Alex Johnson (left), Northern Arizona University

As secretary of NAU's Aspiring Educators chapter, Johnson shares information about book bans and other advocacy projects with their fellow students.

One of their favorite resources? The New York Public Library's "Books for All: Protect the Freedom to Read" campaign. The library's website states: "Stand with NYPL for the right to read freely! We are dedicated to free and open access to information and knowledge—a mission that is directly opposed to censorship."

People across the country can go online to access young adult books that have been banned or challenged at [nypl.org/spotlight/books-for-all](https://nypl.org/spotlight/books-for-all). Johnson hopes that resources like these can help combat politicized attacks on educational and transformative material.

As a creative writer and aspiring novelist, Johnson says, "Stories that need to be told are still out there waiting to be written, and the power of storytelling can never be taken away."

## 'I will protest'

Since Niseiki McFerren moved from Michigan to Florida a few years ago, she has noticed a clear difference in the treatment of educators and in attitudes toward education. A non-traditional student at Florida A&M University, in Tallahassee, McFerren returned to school after earning an associate degree and working in education for more than 20 years—including as a substitute teacher in Head Start programs.

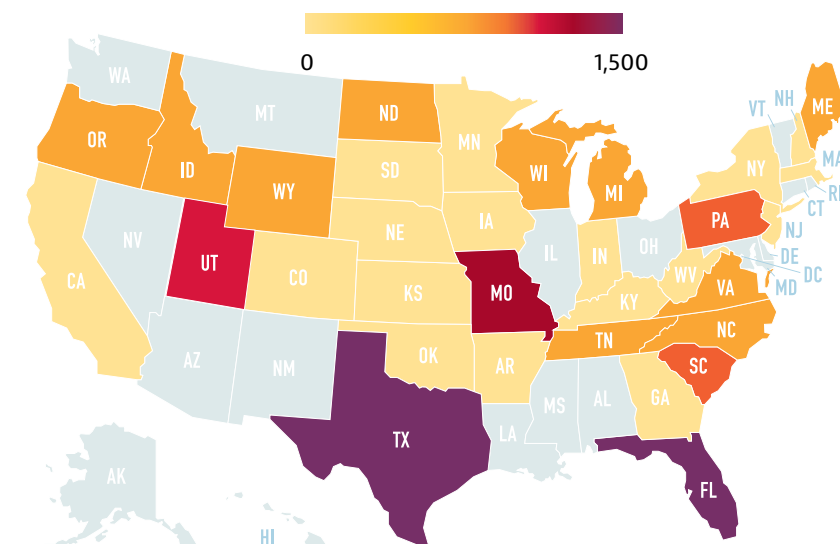
"I have never ever seen education politicized so blatantly, so discriminatorily," she says. "I think it is shameful."

In the past two years, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis has deliberately limited the educational opportunities of students through laws that ban books, demonize LGBTQ+ students, and whitewash curricula—such as a requirement that history lessons teach that slavery "benefited" Black people.

The book bans and censorship are without cause, says McFerren, who serves as secretary for the Student Florida Education Association.

## Books Banned in Public Schools Across the U.S.

During the 2022 – 2023 school year, there were 3,362 incidents of book bans across 33 states. The highest number of bans took place in Florida, Texas, Missouri, Utah, and Pennsylvania (in that order).\*



\*BANS ARE COUNTED BY SCHOOL DISTRICT, SO ONE BOOK MAY ACCOUNT FOR MULTIPLE BANS ACROSS A STATE. SOURCE: PEN AMERICA

PHOTO: BRANDON SULLIVAN

# Becoming an educator in the age of banned books



“It’s because of a made-up agenda. It’s because some people got riled up about something that isn’t true.”

Even her professors have trouble keeping up with state bans that routinely strike popular books from curricula. And McFerren feels her ability to teach is being severely impaired by these policies.

“They’re not doing things to fulfill an obligation to teach our children and to educate them so they can go out into the world and be successful and make good choices. They’re stifling that,” McFerren says. “I don’t know if I can battle that from the classroom, because they’re making it so that I’ll get in trouble.”

McFerren says she is ready to take this fight to the state legislature.

**Niseiki McFerren, a student at Florida A&M University, is among the large majority of voters who reject book bans.**



“I will stop what I’m doing and I will be on those Capitol steps. I will march with educators, and I will protest with them,” she says. “Black and brown children want to see their faces on pages as well. Why not? They exist.”

**Paulette Vélez Pérez**

## ‘Education is the cure for ignorance’

Student teacher Paulette Vélez Pérez is seeing the impact of Florida’s book bans firsthand.

A senior at the University of Central Florida, in Orlando, she is teaching kindergarten and working with English as a second language students. She finds that fulfilling university requirements to incorporate books into lesson plans and abiding by book bans is increasingly difficult.

“It makes it harder for you to do your assignments or to be able to introduce the books that you want to in the classroom,” she says. Some teachers have removed their in-class libraries, while other schools have gotten rid of libraries altogether.

Under the current legislation, if one parent complains, the book has to be pulled off the shelf, she explains.

As president of her university’s Aspiring Educators chapter, Vélez Pérez protested Florida’s book ban laws during a session at the state legislature where amendments to limit censorship failed.

The review process for book complaints is also flawed, she says: “A book can just be continuously banned over and over again and never actually get reviewed, or the review process can take a year.”

Parents’ input is important, Vélez Pérez notes, but it should not supersede educators’ knowledge and expertise on what and how to teach students.

“I feel personally that education is the cure for ignorance,” she says. ✨

**TAKE ACTION**

**Looking for a banned book to read?**

Text **BANNED** to **48744** and receive a book recommendation from NEA!

## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

# POWER UP YOUR CAREER WITH ASPIRING EDUCATORS

As told to Summer Fitzgerald

**Ja'Deric Talbert**  
Grambling State University, Louisiana

During my three years as a member of NEA’s Aspiring Ed (AE) program, I have traveled around the nation, helped plan a state conference, and participated in trainings that have made me a better educator and leader. I also participated in a minority leadership training program, where I traveled to Washington, D.C., to learn more about leading as an educator of color.

The Aspiring Ed program has ignited my passion for education, and I plan to obtain my master’s and doctorate so I can pursue a career in higher education. My achievements led me to be selected as the AE vice president for the Louisiana Association of Educators.

I also became president of Grambling State University’s Call Me MISTER program, which stands for Mentors Instructing Students Toward Effective Role models and aims to increase the number of Black males in the education field.

The Aspiring Ed program provides me with resources and support to make sure I have the tools to be a better educator and that I’m protected as a teacher. The program gives up-and-coming educators the opportunity to grow and lead in their profession.



**Izzy Lee**  
Clemson University, South Carolina

When I was a sophomore in college, I heard that a Clemson Aspiring Educators club was just getting started. I was the youngest member, working with a group of all seniors. Now I’m a senior, and I decided to step up as the club president. I’m proud to have been involved in building our AE group from the ground up, and it’s been so rewarding to watch it grow from 5 people to more than 50 members.

Our chapter’s top priority is giving back to the community and helping

students. That’s why we organize donation drives to provide books and supplies to elementary schools that lack proper funding.

One of my goals is to continue being a voice for others and to help fellow members be heard. My leadership position has taught me how to support the other leaders in the club and to really listen to ideas from other members.

We all empower each other and lift up one another’s aspirations. This club has built a foundation and a community for future educators. That support is so important to help Aspiring Educators stick with their career goals—because in the end, becoming a teacher is worth it. ✨

**TAKE ACTION**

For more member stories, go to [nea.org/Member-Spotlight](https://nea.org/Member-Spotlight), or submit the name of an educator you’d like to see featured at [nea.org/Submit-Member-Spotlight](https://nea.org/Submit-Member-Spotlight).



# A FIELD GUIDE TO Change- makers

By Summer Fitzgerald  
and Jelinda Montes

## WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF UNION ADVOCACY!

The NEA Aspiring Educators (AE) program is a vibrant community of people making their campuses, schools, and hometowns better places to live and learn. Whether getting needed resources for students, electing candidates who support public schools, or showing up at a Praxis session on a Tuesday night, each of us has a role in cultivating a healthy education "ecosystem."

Where do you fit in? Let your interests and talents lead the way.

## The Advocate

### HABITAT

These Aspiring Educators hasten to places where policy is made, determined to have a word with the leaders who make decisions about public schools.

### CHARACTERISTICS

**Skilled guides.** With NEA support and training, these future educators share their expertise on what students and educators need to succeed.  
**Bridge-builders.** These members do not avoid problems. When they get time to advocate for students, they make the most of it.

### MEET ALISSA PRESSLEY

Ever since her sophomore year at the College of Charleston, in South Carolina, Pressley has known she wants to teach low-income students. "Knowing that other people did not have the same advantages that I had makes me want to be a person to fight for them," Pressley says.

She notes that many of the public schools in her state are dilapidated and are not meeting students' needs. "So, I can only imagine how their academic needs are being met," she adds.



Lobbying state officials is one way Pressley and her fellow AE members advocate for education causes.

"What we do is so much bigger than just our college campus," Pressley explains. "I want students to know that I'm always ... in their corner—rooting for them in a society that isn't always set up for them to succeed."

Become an NEA EdActivist at [edvotes.org/Ed-Activist](https://edvotes.org/Ed-Activist).



PHOTO: COURTESY OF MEMBER; ILLUSTRATIONS: LINDA BLECK



## The Negotiator

### HABITAT

These Aspiring Educators gather around the table with their fellow members to effectively plan and advocate for themselves and their future students.

### CHARACTERISTICS

**Detail-oriented.** These members are used to getting out the magnifying glass to take a closer look at every element of a project.

**Great at teamwork.** These members know their strength comes from unity with their union siblings.

They know how to make the most of each team member's skills.

### MEET ANGELA CORAN

During her student-teaching practicum, Coran was working with a student who qualified for an Individualized Education Program (IEP). But the student's parents decided against using the service.

"It was a misunderstanding," says Coran, who attends Western Governors University online and lives in Washington. "They didn't want their child to be

viewed in what they thought was a bad light."

While the decision was ultimately up to the parents, Coran advocated for her student by sitting down with the parents and explaining the importance of the IEP.

In the end, the student received the needed services and progressed smoothly throughout the year.

Discover more about your union at [nea.org/union101](https://nea.org/union101).



## The Connector

### HABITAT

You'll often find Connectors sitting with a fellow student over coffee or setting up an AE information table during the campus club walk.

### CHARACTERISTICS

**A persuasive voice.** Part of a connector's work is asking peers to join the union. These Aspiring Educators ably explain why we're stronger together.

### The heart of an advocate.

Connectors are willing to speak up for their peers and future students.

### MEET ESTHER KING

When King learned about her AE campus chapter at Stockton University, in Galloway, N.J., she immediately saw the program's benefits: Education events, conferences, and professional development hosted by the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA), and study sessions for the Praxis and EdTPA.

By the time she graduated last May, King had become president of her campus chapter and worked to connect

other education majors with the program.

"It was important for our campus chapter to recruit new members and show what we could offer them," King says.

"Once they got their foot in the door, they saw the value of our preservice chapter ... and the support we get from NJEA."

She adds: "We always say: The more numbers we have, the more we can do as a chapter."



## The Elected

### HABITAT

Behind most pro-public education elected officials are scores of volunteers, including Aspiring Educators who knock on doors and pound the pavement to get them elected.

### CHARACTERISTICS

**Strong drive.** These members want to elect public officials who have the interests of students at heart and are at the table where decisions are made—whether it's on a city council, school board, or state legislature.

**Thick skin.** Not every election campaign goes negative—but every candidate will be scrutinized. You'll

need to have thick skin when canvassing for your candidate, as not everyone will agree with you.

### MEET RYAN GROZEN

Grozen, a senior and special education major at Northern Arizona University, in Flagstaff, was tired of seeing how a lack of support and resources affected many of his friends—especially People of Color and people with disabilities.

In 2022, he joined his AE campus chapter and became politically active, knocking on hundreds of doors during the 2022 midterm elections.

"We canvassed for ... pro-public education candidates in Arizona and got the majority of them elected!" Grozen says.

Those wins include the election of Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs, a strong supporter of public schools and union values.

"There will always be someone who disagrees with your candidate, but if we're truly advocating for people who need support and resources, ... then we need to work harder to elect people who have our best interest in mind."



PHOTOS: WEA/BROOKE MADDEOX (CORAN); COURTESY OF MEMBERS (KING AND GROZEN). ILLUSTRATIONS: LINDA BLECK

## The Noisemaker

### HABITAT

Look for crowds! Listen for noise! You'll never find noisemakers alone.

### CHARACTERISTICS

**A steady voice.** Alone, a noisemaker's song may not be special. But when combined with the voices of dozens of other future educators, sometimes hundreds or thousands, it is beautiful and powerful.

**A pack mentality.** Noisemakers work best when part of a strong team. They are willing to sit inside school board meetings or rally outside state capitols, and make some noise

for public education. They live our union value of solidarity!

### MEET ADRIANA PEREZ

After moving from Puerto Rico to South Carolina when she was six years old, Perez benefited greatly from English as a second language (ESL) classes. Today, Perez is a junior at South Carolina State University, in Orangeburg, where she is studying middle level education. Soon she will be a middle school ESL teacher, advocating for students like herself.



As president of her university's AE chapter and student president of the South Carolina Education Association, Perez isn't fighting by herself.

When it comes to making change, she says: "It's better in numbers. You can't do anything by yourself, especially when it comes to [students and public education]."

One person can advocate on issues alone, Perez explains, "but the collective power of many voices makes a lot more noise."



## The Good Troublemaker

### HABITAT

These Aspiring Educators can be found at chapter meetings sharing anti-racist literature with their peers. One day, they'll work in classrooms filled with books by diverse authors.

### CHARACTERISTICS

**Willing to be uncomfortable.** Conversations about race can be unsettling, but these Aspiring Educators are putting aside their discomfort to focus on what's best for all students and educators.

**Optimistic.** Despite generations of White supremacy, which have led to deep-rooted inequities in everything from school funding to home mortgages, these hopeful educators look around and think, "We can fix this."

When they have their own classrooms, they will teach an honest and accurate history of race and racism.

### MEET DAMIA ALI

For most of her life, Ali attended predominantly White schools.

"I never saw myself in school spaces," says Ali, who attends Illinois State University.

"That's why I wanted to be a Black teacher and be [the educator] I needed when I was younger."

Ali is the racial and social justice co-ordinator for the Illinois Education Association's AE Executive Board. This work is preparing her for a career as a special education teacher, serving students who are at times overlooked.



## The Messenger

### HABITAT

These future educators spend time in the quad or at a coffee house in deep conversation with a friend.

### CHARACTERISTICS

**An acute sense of hearing.** Amateur observers may think a messenger must be a good talker. Not so! The most effective messengers are better listeners. **Hopeful.** They believe they can make a difference in the classroom!

### MEET MARY KATE GEBHART

While working closely as a volunteer with the Gahanna Special Olympics program, in Ohio, Gebhart discovered her passion for working with individuals with disabilities.

"Being able to fully understand and communicate is my number one rule when it comes to anything," Gebhart says.



In the classroom, she prioritizes listening and creating an inclusive, safe environment.

Gebhart, a student at Capital University, in Columbus, is not only a messenger for the well-being of her students, but for her colleagues, too.

She shares: "When one of my peers is having a bad day, I say: 'You're one step closer to your end goal.'"



—Mary Ellen Flannery and Amanda Litvinov contributed to this article.



WHAT KIND OF CHANGEMAKER ARE YOU? SCAN THE QR CODE TO TAKE OUR QUIZ!

LEARN MORE

For NEA professional resources and support, visit [nea.org/EdPractice](https://nea.org/EdPractice).



# It's time to get connected with the Aspiring Educators digital experience.

NEA is about to give you easier access to the information you need about your career and your union!

- Stay up-to-date on what's happening in your chosen field.
- Connect with your union and fellow Aspiring Educators!

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# Safe

# on Campus?

School shootings are at an all-time high, but Aspiring Educators are taking action to stop the bloodshed

By Madelaine Vikse

On February 13, 2023, Reagan Williams finished a night class and went to an Aspiring Educators of Michigan State fundraiser at Raising Cane's Chicken Fingers, a popular campus gathering place. It was a normal Monday.

"Everything was going great, and spring break was on the horizon," says Williams, a senior elementary education major at Michigan State University (MSU) and president of her Aspiring Educators (AE) chapter.

But in a matter of minutes, everything changed.

"I was right across the street from where the first shots took place," she says. "I saw people running from the building, but I didn't think anything of it until I saw tens on tens of police cars pull up."

Williams then found a police officer to escort her from the restaurant.

What happened?

A gunman had started firing inside two campus buildings. Three students were killed and five others were injured before the gunman fatally shot himself.

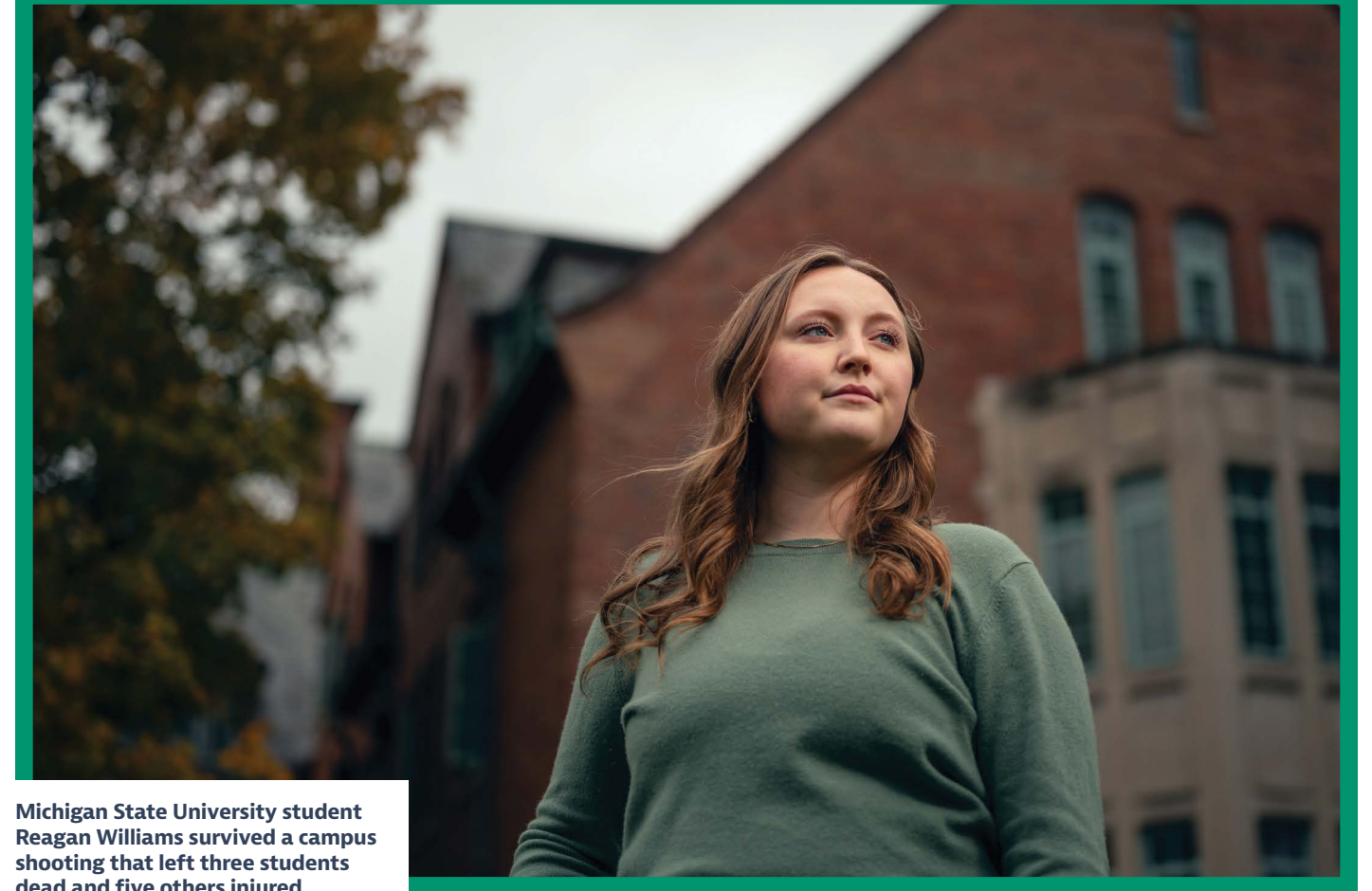
"It was just one of those moments I never thought would happen to me," Williams says. "Even though I was witnessing people across the street fighting for their lives, I knew the first thing I had to do was take care of myself, which was a hard realization."

## THE FEAR SPREADS

In a classroom across campus, MSU second-year student Jacinta Henry was in a club meeting with her friends. When they found out an active shooter was on campus, they ducked under tables and waited for hours in the dark.

**Jacinta Henry**

"The club is a safe place for me. It's a discussion place for different ideas and a [multiracial] learning community," says Henry, who is studying interdisciplinary social studies for secondary education. "So it was insane to have my safe space turned into a place where I wasn't sure if I was going to survive. ... It was a sense of terror that I had never experienced, and I hope I never do again."



Michigan State University student Reagan Williams survived a campus shooting that left three students dead and five others injured.

"It was one of those moments I never thought would happen to me. ... I knew the first thing I had to do was take care of myself, which was a hard realization."

—Reagan Williams

Sophomore Jessica Steller was also on campus when the violence took place. The elementary education major had spent the day with her boyfriend and friends. She, too, had attended the AE fundraiser before returning to her dorm to watch *The Bachelor* with friends.

That's when they heard the sirens. Then she received a text from a friend, a call from her mom, and an MSU email, all saying the same thing—there was an active shooter on campus.

"Three girls went to barricade the door, I went to barricade the window," Steller recalls.

"We all laid on the ground with the lights off. It was such a scary moment."

None of the students had to stop to figure out what to do. They had been training for this since kindergarten.

"We know what to do, we know how to hide, we know how to be quiet, which is super scary, but we were prepared for it," she says.

## GROWING UP IN AN ERA OF MASS SHOOTINGS

In 2022, the U.S. had the most school shootings ever in one year, according to the K-12 School Shooting Database.

Today's students don't need statistics to tell them this is true. They have lived it.

One of those students is Czaria Cole, a junior studying elementary education and Spanish at Grambling State University, in Louisiana. During homecoming celebrations in October 2021, two shootings took place on her campus within four days of each other. On October 13, an 18-year-old



**Jessica Steller**

# Are You Safe on Campus?

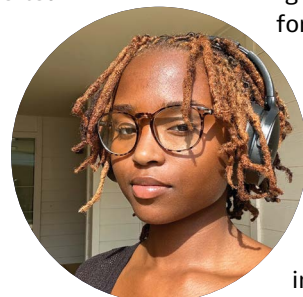
gunman started shooting in front of the student union, killing one person and injuring three others.

On October 17, a second shooting took place in a quad area, killing one person and injuring seven.

Cole did not witness the shootings firsthand. Tweets and emergency messages from her school alerted her to what was happening. But the experience was all-too familiar.

“Growing up, I’ve had other situations where we heard shootings outside where we lived,” says Cole, who is from Texas.

Like many other college students today, she has grown up with the fear of mass shootings.



**Czaria Cole**

University in May 2023, with a master’s in curriculum and instruction.

“If we were to ban assault rifles, we would see the risk of shootings decrease severely, which we did see when the ban on assault rifles did exist,” she explains, referring to the federal ban that was in place from 1994 – 2004.

Rigby is a relentless advocate for safe schools. In January 2023, she traveled to NEA headquarters, in Washington, D.C., with a group of AE members. They joined a gathering of educators from across the country—including local union presidents, teachers, school support staff, and others—to review NEA’s policy recommendations on gun violence.

“It was very inspiring,” Rigby says. The AE team helped to revamp *NEA’s School Crisis Guide*, adding plans that address emergencies and recovery from tragedies.



“Legislators often act like this is a rocket-science problem, ... but it has a pretty easy answer.”

—Alana Rigby (above)

## HOW DO WE MAKE SCHOOLS SAFER?

The sheer magnitude of the gun violence problem can be overwhelming. There is not one solution, but many that collectively can stop the killing. These are a few of the strategies that have been proven to make a real impact:

**Safe storage laws**, which require gun owners to lock up their firearms, are key to reversing current trends. The weapons used in nearly 70 percent of gun-related incidents in schools were taken from the home of a friend or relative, according to the RAND Corporation. These laws are among the most effective ways to reduce violent crime, suicide, and accidental death.

**Red flag laws**—which make it possible to prevent a person in crisis from accessing guns—have been proven to work. Also, programs that teach educators and older students to identify and report signs of trouble are showing promise.

Why does this work? Because more than 40 percent of school shooters are former students, and nearly all shared threatening messages or images before the incidents, reports Everytown for Gun Safety.

Case in point: 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.

**Communities can find common ground** to make schools safer. More than 60 percent of U.S. gun owners favor laws that are shown to reduce gun injuries, according to the gun violence prevention group 97Percent.

The data shows that these sensible approaches work to reduce gun violence. That’s why, Williams says, it’s important for future educators to demand action and change, and to work to make schools safe for all students. 🚀

## GUN LAWS WORK

“Legislators often act like this is a rocket-science problem that doesn’t have a simple answer to it. But it has a pretty easy answer,” says Alana Rigby, who graduated from Florida State

## Three Ways You Can Make a Difference!

### 1. Advocate for gun safety laws in your state

Find a rundown of your state’s gun laws at [everytown.org/states](https://everytown.org/states). Take a deeper dive into research about gun violence in your state at [everystat.org](https://everystat.org).

Use this information to educate state lawmakers about how they can reduce gun violence in your schools and community. You can connect with a local chapter of Everytown through the website as well.

### 2. Help make your school safer

If you’re student teaching, scour your district handbook to understand how violent incidents are supposed to be addressed and whether there are firearms 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.

Partner with other educators and ask your school board to run a campaign that informs families about the safe storage of firearms. Be SMART program, offered by Everytown for Gun Safety, offers a helpful toolkit at [besmartforkids.org](https://besmartforkids.org).

### 3. Push Congress to act

Email Congress through NEA’s Action Center, at [nea.org/ActionCenter](https://nea.org/ActionCenter). Introduce yourself as a future educator and explain how gun violence affects students and families.

Sign NEA’s Safe Schools, Safe Communities Pledge to start your journey as a gun violence prevention activist at [nea.org/SafeSchoolsPledge](https://nea.org/SafeSchoolsPledge).

**TAKE ACTION**

## 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 landmark Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, 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 the 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.

### 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.

**LEARN MORE**

Find more ways to create change as well as NEA resources on responding to gun violence at [nea.org/GunViolence](https://nea.org/GunViolence).

# Aspiring Educators Pen Award-Winning Children's Book

*Sammy Says School Is Scary* taps into the social and emotional needs of young students

By Summer Fitzgerald

Ever wonder what else you could squeeze into your schedule between classes, work, and so much “adulting”? Celina Lombardi and Victoria “Tori” Henry, students at Delaware Technical Community College, in Georgetown, somehow found time to write an award-winning children’s book, too!

The best friends met in high school, at Sussex Tech, in Georgetown, while participating in Educators Rising, a program that helps students in grades 7–12 explore careers in education. An NEA partner, the program recruits diverse, creative, and competent young people into the teaching profession.

Creativity does indeed run deep with Lombardi and Henry. They each wrote their first children’s book while still in high school and entered them into the Educators Rising statewide competition. Both placed first in their respective categories!

Now in college together, the pair decided to combine their literary talents.

## A FISHY FABLE

Lombardi and Henry started collaborating on the new book with three ideas in mind: There would be an underwater theme; the characters would be gender neutral; and the story would appeal to younger audiences. To reach as many students as possible, the book would be written in English and Spanish.

The co-authors’ inspiration? Their experiences as education

majors. The friends had both visited classrooms shortly after pandemic restrictions were lifted and saw many students dealing with social anxiety.

“There were kids who didn’t know how to make friends and were nervous to raise their hand in class,” Lombardi recalls in an interview with her school’s magazine, *Delaware Tech*.

From these concepts and experiences, *Sammy Says School Is Scary* came to life.

The authors bounced ideas off each other and then co-wrote and co-illustrated the story.

“Writing a book was already in our repertoire of skills,” Lombardi says. “So we wrote the entire story in a day!”

“Sammy” is a shark who navigates his first day back to school without his bubble—a metaphor for students returning to school without masks.

Along Sammy’s journey, he meets other species of underwater animals, like Ollie the octopus and Skye the seahorse.

Each of these new friends teaches Sammy important lessons. Skye, for example, is visually impaired and teaches Sammy about blindness.



(Left to right) Tori Henry and Celina Lombardi’s book earned an Educators Rising national award.

And all of the characters’ names are gender neutral, so readers can decide for themselves what gender each sea animal should be.

“Ultimately, Sammy learns that everyone is unique, ... and that’s what makes everyone special,” Lombardi says.

By the end of the book, Sammy has made many friends and learns that it’s not so bad to be without his bubble.

## THE BIG SPLASH

The authors chose to make their protagonist a shark because many children view the animal as ferocious and unsafe.

In reality, sharks are not as scary as they are made out to be—just like returning to school without a mask.

In March, Lombardi and Henry won gold in the Children’s Literature Collegiate category at the Delaware Educators Rising Conference.

Then they advanced to the national competition, in Orlando, Fla., in June. They won first place!

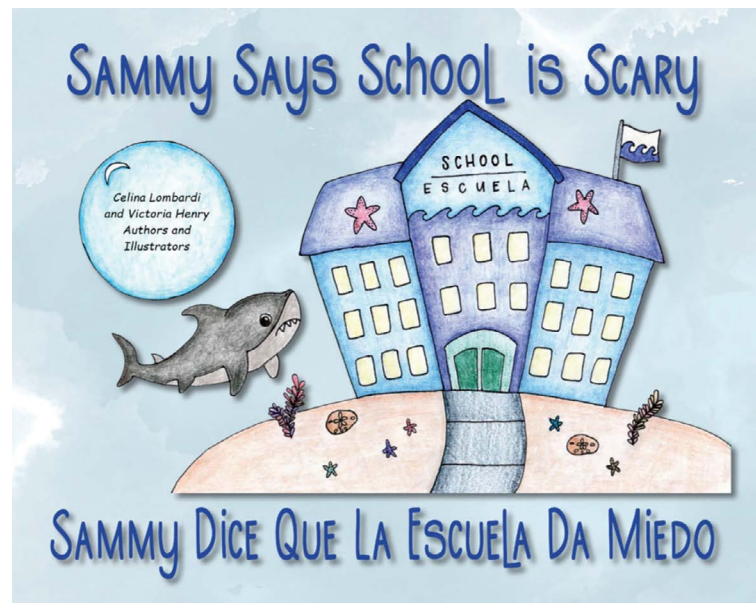
And the duo is not done with Sammy yet. The next step for the authors is to get their book published.

“We have been self-publishing, and with that we’ve sold over 300 copies so far,” Henry says. “That’s just us printing them out and locally distributing them.”

Now in their last year of college, the friends already have a plan for their next book and have set their sights once again on the 2024 National Conference. 🏊

“Writing a book was already in our repertoire of skills, so we wrote the entire story in a day.”

—Celina Lombardi, Aspiring Educator, Delaware



## Have a book idea? Here’s what you need to know.

To find advice for aspiring children’s book authors, *NEA Today* talked with Nancy Feresten, publisher of What on Earth Publishing—home of What on Earth Books and Britannica Books—which specializes in children’s nonfiction. Feresten has more than 25 years of publishing experience. Here are her words of wisdom for first-time authors:

### 1. How do you get started if you have an idea for a children’s book?

There is a wonderful organization, the Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators, which holds conferences and workshops for newcomers. Taking writing classes and/or finding a writer’s group can also be helpful.

### 2. What’s the difference between traditional publishing and self-publishing?

In traditional publishing, the author is supported by a big team of people—editors, book designers, marketing and publicity specialists, and salespeople. On the other hand, it can be hard to find a publisher, and you will make only 5–10 percent of the money the buyer pays for the book.

Self-publishing is a perfectly reasonable option for some authors. It’s as easy as writing the book, laying it out, and uploading it to a sales platform. Plus, you get to keep most of the money that comes in. If you have a strong social media presence or another platform where you can speak to a lot of people, self-publishing can work well.

### 3. If you want to go the traditional publishing route, is an agent required? And how would a new writer find one?

Some publishers won’t look at your proposal unless you have an agent. Agents can also sometimes get you a slightly better financial deal (though they charge you a commission, usually 15 percent of whatever you make). [LiteraryMarketplace.com](https://www.literarymarketplace.com) does a great job of maintaining lists of agents and publishers that review unsolicited manuscripts.

### 4. What’s the best way to pitch an idea to a publisher?

Do some online research to find publishers that put out books like yours. For example, do they specialize in picture books, young adult fiction, or nonfiction? When you find a publishing house that seems like a fit, summarize your book and give a brief biography of yourself. Tell the publisher if there’s a successful book that’s similar to yours: For example, “It’s the 21st century answer to *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, but with sea animals.”

Tell them why you think parents, teachers, librarians, or gift-givers would be likely to buy it. Is it part of a trend, or is it important in the curriculum for a specific age group? Or do you have a personal story that will elevate the book?

Also say what you would do to help promote your book. If it’s a picture book, attach the full manuscript. If it’s a longer book, include an outline and a couple of chapters.

Then be sure to follow up periodically. Editors and publishers are extremely busy, so don’t assume that if you haven’t heard back, they’re not interested. A reminder may help move up your pitch in their stack of proposals.

—JANET RIVERA MEDNIK

LEARN MORE

### Find a community of children’s book writers

You can network, find illustrators, and attend workshops through the Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators, at [scbwi.org](https://www.scbwi.org).

# Reasons Your Vote Matters

Elected officials will have a hand in determining your salary, the curriculum you teach, and the books your students can read. If this matters to you, then get ready to vote!

# 1

## Your Vote, Your Voice!

Aspiring Educators are headed to the polls this November to vote for candidates who support public education and unions.

“Education is already an undervalued profession,” says Emily Rubin, an elementary education major at Northern Arizona University, in Flagstaff. “We can’t afford to have policy-makers that don’t support us.”

In recent years, young voters have had a major impact on who gets elected.

In the 2020 U.S. presidential election, a record turnout was driven by young voters who became of age to vote, according to the voter data firm Catalist.

In an election that was decided by only a few thousand votes in a handful of states, the youth vote was a decisive force in securing Joe Biden’s win over Donald Trump.

**Biden is the most pro-public education and pro-union president in modern history.** And this November, you have a chance to re-elect him as the president who will support you—and your students!

### Beyond the White House

In Election 2024, it’s equally important to vote in local and state races. Here’s a look at how elected leaders at different levels of government can make or break your public schools.

### Federal elections

U.S. senators and representatives determine **education spending** for critical programs that help reduce inequities in schools. They also set federal standards for education.

### State elections

Governors can **block harmful proposals**, such as school voucher bills—which

siphon money from public education to fund private schools. They can also change state **education policies and programs** through executive orders, executive budgets, and legislative proposals.

Your state senators and representatives impact every aspect of public schools, from funding and **standardized testing** to educators’ **right to organize** and advocate for their students.

State attorneys general can assemble task forces to examine school safety, bullying, and standardized testing.

### School board

Your district’s school board makes key **budget** decisions about **salaries** and purchases of **textbooks** and **technology**. They also have the authority to hire and fire school administrators.

Electing pro-public school candidates to local school boards is essential to your day-to-day job.

—Aniya Greene-Santos and Amanda Litvinov contributed to these stories.



Emily Rubin

# 2

## Aspiring Educators Can Help Turn Out the Vote

College students turned out the vote in the 2018 and 2020 elections. They helped flip U.S. Senate seats and safeguarded pro-public education supporters in the U.S. House as well as in state and local elections. The wins were huge, and college students delivered a clear message: They value public schools and want leaders who will support and invest in them.

Educators are some of the most trusted voices in their communities. This applies to Aspiring Educators, too, who are leading critical work on college campuses nationwide in advance of the 2024 election. They’re organizing voter registration events and educating other students and community members about what’s at stake for public schools.

The collective strength of aspiring and active educators can make a significant impact on elections. Want to help turn out the vote on your campus? Follow these steps!



### EDUCATE AND INFORM

NEA has a list of pro-public education candidates across the country. Learn more about the candidates in your state. Then talk to your networks about electing people who support public education and want what educators want:

- Safe, welcoming classrooms for all students, with well-supported teachers and education support professionals.
- Smaller class sizes.
- New technologies and textbooks.
- More affordable college options.



### GET READY FOR THE POLLS

NEA makes it easy for you to help people check their voter registration status, request an absentee ballot, and pledge to be a pro-public education voter.

Tell your friends and family of your day-of-voting plan, and encourage them to make a plan, too.

[Vote.org](https://www.vote.org) can help people find their polling places—and even assist them in getting to the polls.



### ATTEND A LOCAL EVENT

Boost your civic involvement by joining your state association’s get-out-the-vote efforts.

From marches to canvassing for pro-public education candidates, plenty of opportunities exist to take action in your community.

Find your state affiliate at [nea.org/affiliates](https://www.nea.org/affiliates).



### BECOME AN NEA EDACTIVIST

You’re not only the future of our education system, you’re the architects of a more informed and engaged democracy.

Scan the QR code to download the NEA EdActivist app—and get ready to take action!



TAKE ACTION

Confirm your voter registration today at [EdVotes.org/Voter-Registration](https://www.EdVotes.org/Voter-Registration).

# 3

## Joe Biden Stands Up for Educators

President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris have earned the trust of the 3 million member NEA. Why? Because they know what educators need and are tireless supporters of public education. The Biden administration has partnered with parents and educators to strengthen public schools and expand opportunities for all students.

"They're setting up U.S. students to be successful members of society," says Isabelle Ayala, an integrated language arts education major at Ashland University, in Ohio. "[Biden's] efforts and his attitudes towards educators and labor show that he wants a better future ... and he is aware of the power and the effectiveness of unions."



### Here's why Joe Biden and Kamala Harris deserve your vote in Election 2024:

#### They delivered on student loan relief.

Last year, the Biden administration launched the Saving on a Valuable Education (SAVE) Plan, which calculates payments based on a borrower's income and family size—not on their loan balance.

The Biden administration released data showing that nearly 5.5 million borrowers are now enrolled in SAVE, including 2.9 million who have payments of zero dollars. All other borrowers enrolled in SAVE are saving an estimated \$102 a month (\$1,224 a year) compared

with what they would have paid previously. That's extra cash in Aspiring Educators' pockets as they make their way into the workforce.

#### They expanded mental health care.

The departments of Labor, Treasury, and Health and Human Services together announced new rules that will ensure people have the same access to mental health services as they have to medical benefits.

Plus, in June 2022, Biden signed the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, which brought the first meaningful gun law reform in 30 years and nearly \$1 billion for mental health resources for schools.

#### They made historic investments in public education.

The Biden administration set aside nearly \$170 billion in pandemic relief funds—the single largest federal investment in public schools. Biden's American Rescue Plan also requires states to include educator unions as partners in determining how the funds are spent.

#### They support paid student teaching.

In August 2022, the Biden administration announced its support for Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs), which provide more pathways to careers in education, with an emphasis on paid student teaching. So far, 21 RAPs for teaching have been created nationwide.



Isabelle Ayala

## THE BIDEN-HARRIS RECORD

Here's a look at some of Joe Biden's biggest wins for students, educators, and public schools:

**JANUARY 2022**

Plans to deliver 10 million COVID-19 tests to schools monthly.



**FEBRUARY 2022**

Nominates Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson to U.S. Supreme Court, fulfilling a campaign promise to nominate a Black woman.

**APRIL 2022**

Proposes cutting support for corporate charter schools after an outcry from NEA members.



**JULY 2022**

Curtails illegal gun sales and expands mental health services after push by NEA members.



**SEPTEMBER 2022**

Signs the Inflation Reduction Act, which invests in clean air and water and creates a more fair tax system for corporations that make over \$1 billion in profits, among other provisions.



**OCTOBER 2022**

Launches an initiative to bring electric school buses to districts everywhere.



**DECEMBER 2022**

Signs into law a bill that protects the rights of pregnant workers.

Passes a landmark law that recognizes same-sex and interracial marriages.



**FEBRUARY 2023**

Invests \$18 million, through the U.S. Department of Education to increase teacher diversity.

Nominates labor champion Julie Su to serve as secretary of labor.



**APRIL 2023**

Moves to protect transgender student athletes under Title IX.

Appoints NEA President Becky Pringle to the White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity for Black Americans.



**JUNE 2023**

Promotes education opportunity and diversity in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court ruling ending affirmative action in college admissions.

Launches affordable internet services for low-income individuals.



**SEPTEMBER 2023**

Commits to ending hunger by expanding access to school breakfast and lunch.

Announces new White House Office on Gun Violence Prevention.



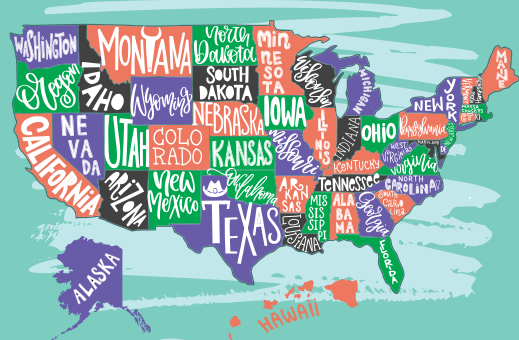
Check out the complete "Biden-Harris Wins for Educators and Students" timeline at [EdVotes.org/Biden](https://EdVotes.org/Biden).

# 4

## As an NEA Member, You Have Voting Power

With more than 3 million members spread across all U.S. congressional districts, NEA is the largest labor union in the United States and the world's largest professional association of educators. Together, we will decide the future of public education for decades to come.

### A Closer Look: NEA By the Numbers



**14,000**  
COMMUNITIES  
NATIONWIDE

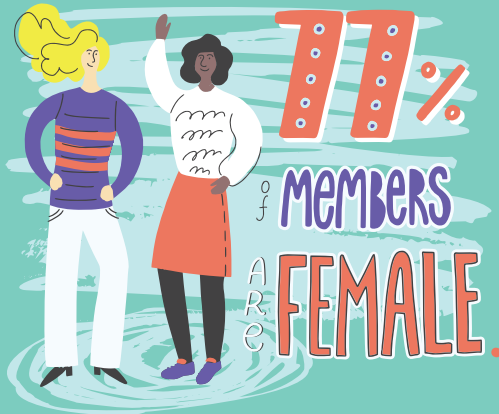
One out of every 100 Americans is an NEA member.

### KEY SWING POPULATIONS IN STATEWIDE ELECTIONS.



NEA members are primarily rural and suburban voters—key swing populations in statewide elections.

NEA delivers a key constituency—women voters—as 77 percent of members are female. Polls show that a candidate must win female voters to succeed.



**LARGEST UNION**  
in the MAJORITY  
of STATES

NEA is the largest labor union in most states—including the early primary states of New Hampshire and Iowa, as well as the battleground states of Ohio, Florida, Virginia, and Pennsylvania.



# 5

## Your Union Protects Democracy

How are public education and democracy connected? As the nation's largest labor union, educators are building a movement that champions justice, protects and advances the progress we've made as a nation, and provides individuals with the skills to be involved, informed, and engaged citizens.

This makes educators and future educators critical to defending our freedoms: The freedom to love who you love; to read the books you want to read; to choose when to start a family or not start one at all; to worship when and where you want—or not at all; and the freedom to be heard in the workplace and at the ballot box.

For example, according to a report from the Economic Policy Institute, states with a higher density of union members have fewer restrictive voting laws.

Shravani Williams, a secondary education in English major at Northern Arizona University, in Flagstaff, feels that the value of the union lies in our ability to take collective action on behalf of educators and students.

"Together, we are more powerful," Williams says. "We all have a voice and shouldn't be afraid to use it."

And when educators come together, we can create meaningful change in schools and communities—and win for all students.

*"Together, we are more powerful. We all have a voice and shouldn't be afraid to use it."*

—Shravani Williams (below)



LEARN MORE



Download graphics and messaging to share on your social media platforms. Go to [EdVotes.org/Social-Media-Toolkit](https://EdVotes.org/Social-Media-Toolkit).



# Benefits of Membership

A LOOK INSIDE NEA

## What is the National Education Association?

We are the nation's leading organization committed to advancing the cause of public education. Headquartered in Washington, D.C., NEA proudly claims 3 million members who work at every level of education—from preschool to university graduate programs. NEA affiliates are in every state and in more than 14,000 communities nationwide.

## How does NEA function?

NEA members from across the U.S. set association policy, most notably through an annual Representative Assembly—called the “RA”—held the last week of June and/or first week of July. NEA members at the state and local levels elect more than 7,000 RA delegates, who then elect NEA's top officers, debate issues, and set NEA policy. NEA's Board of Directors and Executive Committee serve as the top decision-making bodies. Staff at the local, state, and national levels carry out policies implemented by the governing bodies.

## How does NEA help Aspiring Educators?

Members of the NEA Aspiring Educators (AE) program belong to a network of more than 40,000 students who believe in improved teacher education and support for prospective teachers. As the nation's largest pre-professional association for future educators, NEA connects practicing teachers and fellow NEA Aspiring Educators through state and national leadership conferences, workshops, and public forums. Members can also enrich their teaching and advocacy skills by holding local, state, or national office, or serving as a delegate to NEA's annual RA. AE members also serve on the NEA Board of Directors and NEA Resolutions Committee, and they serve on committees that address a variety of issues, including human rights, legislation, and membership.

Communities Redefining Education Advocacy Through Empowerment (CREATE) grants provide members with funding to support chapter and/or statewide community service projects that promote AE members. Projects may enhance public education; increase advocacy and outreach to communities; and support young educators' involvement in the association as well as the development of innovative approaches and engagement (See Grants, Page 31). For help with applications, email NEA Senior Policy Analyst Blake West at [bwest@nea.org](mailto:bwest@nea.org).

Help with tuition costs is available through the Jack Kinnaman Memorial Scholarship (See Page 6). AE also provides information and assistance with student teacher certification and professional development.

**REBATE**  
 \$20 dues rebate for every year of membership to NEA Aspiring Educators (up to four years) during the first teaching year. Details at [nea.org/AERebate](http://nea.org/AERebate).

## NEA ASPIRING EDUCATORS receive:

### SERVICES AND BENEFITS

- Online access to *NEA Today for Aspiring Educators*, the magazine for members of the NEA Aspiring Educators program.
- Resources, job information, and links to other NEA student chapters at [nea.org/AspiringEducator](http://nea.org/AspiringEducator).
- \$1 million of in-classroom liability coverage through the NEA Educators Employment Liability Program.
- Opportunities at the national, state, and chapter levels to participate in outreach projects such as school renovation, literacy, and food bank support.
- Discounts for members and their parents on car purchases, magazine subscriptions, shopping, and more through the NEA Member Benefits programs. Details at [neamb.com](http://neamb.com).

### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- NEA National Leadership Summit: March 1 – 3, 2024. For more information, visit [nea.org/LeadershipDevelopment](http://nea.org/LeadershipDevelopment).
- NEA Aspiring Educators Conference: June 29 – July 1, 2024. For information about attending, please email [AspiringEd@nea.org](mailto:AspiringEd@nea.org).
- NEA's micro-credentials improve your practice and create better outcomes for your students. Go to [cgps.nea.org/Microcredentials](http://cgps.nea.org/Microcredentials) and get started on your personalized, professional-learning journey.

## NEA

### National Education Association

Check out NEA's website for association news; links to NEA publications, state affiliates, and member benefits; information on special events, such as NEA's Read Across America; and information for and about members. Be sure to follow NEA Aspiring Educators on Instagram to connect with fellow members.

[nea.org](http://nea.org)

Instagram: [@NEAAspinged](https://www.instagram.com/NEAAspiringEd)

### Education News

Get the latest education news and member stories, plus read articles about NEA activism, key issues facing educators, and more.

[nea.org/NEAToday](http://nea.org/NEAToday)

## New Teacher Tip

### BetterLesson

Founded by teachers for teachers, BetterLesson provides a simple way for educators to connect and share high-quality lesson plans. The Master Teacher Project contains comprehensive lessons in math, English language arts, and science, in addition to videos. BetterLesson also offers a full suite of professional development tools and services to schools, districts, and organizations.

[bit.ly/BetterLessonMasterTeacher](http://bit.ly/BetterLessonMasterTeacher)

## Community Engagement

### NEA's Read Across America

Celebrate a nation of diverse readers with resources from NEA's Read Across America website, where you'll find high-quality titles that will help your students see themselves and their experiences in the books they read. You'll also discover tips and project ideas for the annual event, free posters and bookmarks to download and print, and more ideas to use throughout the year. Be sure to sign up for the monthly email newsletter, too.

[ReadAcrossAmerica.org](http://ReadAcrossAmerica.org)

## Political Action

### NEA's Action Center

We're speaking up for fully funded public schools, dismantling unjust systems, and giving our students the opportunities they need to succeed. Visit NEA's Action Center to help.

[nea.org/Action](http://nea.org/Action)

## Social Justice

### NEA EdJustice

NEA EdJustice engages and mobilizes activists in the fight for racial, social, and economic justice in public education. Readers will find timely coverage of social justice issues in education and learn how to advocate for their students, schools, and communities.

[NEAEdJustice.org](http://NEAEdJustice.org)



### Human Rights Campaign (HRC)

The HRC defends the rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender citizens. The HRC effectively lobbies Congress, provides campaign support to candidates for federal office, and works to educate the public on a wide array of topics—including workplace, family, and discrimination issues affecting the LGBTQ+ community.

[hrc.org](http://hrc.org)

### Implicit Bias Resources

Get the latest NEA resources to sharpen your racial analysis and deepen your understanding of implicit bias, microaggressions, and stereotypes.

[nea.org/Implicit-Bias-Resources](http://nea.org/Implicit-Bias-Resources)

## Education News

### Education Week

Education Week covers local, state, and national education news from preschool through twelfth grade. Periodic special reports cover topics ranging from technology to textbooks.

[EdWeek.org](http://EdWeek.org)

## Grants

### CREATE

CREATE grants provide members with funding to support chapter and/or statewide community service projects that promote AE members. Projects may enhance public education; increase advocacy and outreach to communities; and support young educators' involvement in the association as well as the development of innovative approaches and engagement. Grants (up to \$2,000) are awarded for projects that align with one or more of AE's core values: educator quality, community engagement, political action, and social justice. Submission deadlines are February 1 and October 15.

[nea.org/CreateGrants](http://nea.org/CreateGrants)

### The NEA Foundation

The NEA Foundation awards grants to educators who propose innovative and promising ways to help all students experience academic success and reach their full potential—especially those who have been historically underserved by society's institutions. Members of NEA's Aspiring Educators can partner with experienced educators who submit grant applications. Examples of grant-funded work include study groups, action research, and innovative project-based learning that helps close achievement gaps. Grant amounts range from \$1,000 to \$3,000.

[NEAFoundation.org](http://NEAFoundation.org)

## Job Market

### GreatTeacher.net

This free service allows applicants to post resumes online and search for teaching openings by geographic location. Each ad includes a job description and contact information.

[GreatTeacher.net](https://www.greatteacher.net)

### K12JobSpot

This free website allows applicants to post their resumes and cover letters online, search for jobs by location, receive news about available teaching positions, view school websites, and send application materials electronically.

[k12jobspot.com](https://www.k12jobspot.com)

## 2023 – 2024 Committees, Boards, and Resolutions

### Advisory Committee of Aspiring Educators

**Sabreena Shaller, Chair**  
*Pennsylvania*  
**Jack Apple**  
*South Carolina*  
**Riley Artis**  
*Pennsylvania*  
**Jillian Buzzard**  
*Iowa*  
**Shantae Ferguson**  
*Indiana*  
**Paige Hodges**  
*Mississippi*  
**Aryana Jharia**  
*Michigan*  
**Kate Meyer**  
*Wisconsin*  
**Cali Reinhart**  
*Mississippi*  
**Zach Sheriff**  
*Texas*

### NEA Board of Directors—Aspiring Educators Representatives

**Jessica Bailey**  
*Virginia*  
**Demetrius Dove**  
*Georgia*  
**Jonathan Oyaga**  
*California*

### Resolutions Committee

**Will Crawford**  
*Tennessee*

### Standing Committees Aspiring Educators Representatives

#### COMMITTEE ON ETHNIC-MINORITY AFFAIRS

**Jessica Bailey**  
*Virginia*  
**Jonny Otero**  
*Arizona*  
**Breonna Robinson**  
*Georgia*

#### COMMITTEE ON WOMEN'S ISSUES

**Idaly Monarrez Vega**  
*Arizona*

#### COMMITTEE ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION/GENDER IDENTITY

**Brandon Scacca**  
*Connecticut*

NEA has everything you need to make a difference on your college campus and in your profession—from tips for building a strong campus chapter to professional development to community engagement opportunities. We've got you covered!

## Learn More

### AE Chapter Toolkit

If you're an AE chapter leader or interested in becoming one, check out NEA's "Aspiring Educators Chapter Toolkit" for an in-depth look at how to create, build, and expand your campus chapter.

[nea.org/AspiringEducatorsChapterToolkit](https://www.nea.org/AspiringEducatorsChapterToolkit)

### Gun Violence

Find more ways to create change as well as NEA resources on gun violence.

[nea.org/GunViolence](https://www.nea.org/GunViolence)

### Children's Book Writers

You can network, find illustrators, and attend workshops through the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators.

[scbwi.org](https://www.scbwi.org)

## Take Action

### Banned Books

Looking for a banned book to read? Text the code below to receive recommendations from NEA.

Text **BANNED** to **48744**

### Member Spotlight

Across the country, in all professional roles and career stages, NEA educators and allies make our schools and communities worthy of our students.

For member stories, go to [nea.org/Member-Spotlight](https://www.nea.org/Member-Spotlight), or submit the name of an Aspiring Educator you'd like to see featured at [nea.org/Submit-Member-Spotlight](https://www.nea.org/Submit-Member-Spotlight)

### Education Votes

Become an NEA EdActivist and help mobilize your networks to elect pro-public education candidates.

[EdVotes.org](https://www.EdVotes.org)

### Safe Schools Pledge

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

[nea.org/SafeSchoolsPledge](https://www.nea.org/SafeSchoolsPledge)



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**CIVIC ENGAGEMENT + PROJECT-BASED LEARNING + LEADERSHIP IN ACTION**

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 Annual challenge deadline: May 17, 2024

Check out our **FREE** lesson plans and resources

[ExploreActTell.org](https://www.ExploreActTell.org)



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visit [nea.org/NEAToday](https://nea.org/NEAToday)

Join the conversation



@neaaspiringed



# You Deserve a Rebate as a First Year Educator!

Former members of NEA Aspiring Educators are eligible to receive a \$20 rebate for each year of membership. That's up to \$80 of free money! It's our way of saying "Thanks" for continuing your NEA membership.

To qualify:

- Start your first year employed by a public school system.
- Join the local association as an NEA member during that same year.
- Submit your rebate application by June 1.

Visit [nea.org/AERebate](https://nea.org/AERebate) and apply for your rebate online.