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May 2024

neaToday

NEA TODAY for
**NEA-RETIRED
MEMBERS**

An edition of *NEA Today*

Retired Washington teacher Milke Ragan dances six days a week.

What's Your Next Move?

From dance studios to union halls, retired educators find a sense of belonging. You can, too! **PAGE 30**

NEA Members Insurance Trust Annual Report

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inside

Retirees help striking educators win! **PAGE 24**

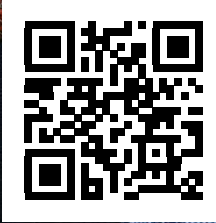
Caring for your aging parents **PAGE 26**

Taking back school boards **PAGE 38**



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**Travelers 2022 Community Report (travelers.com/community-relations/2022-community-report)

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JOIN THE CONVERSATION



Sign up for **NEA Today news!** For timely news about issues impacting educators, visit nea.org/NEAToday or sign up for *NEA Today's* biweekly e-newsletter at nea.org/signup.

Note: In the January 2024 issue, the article "Our Voices: Close-Up" used an incorrect page number when referencing an article about AP African American studies. You can read that article at nea.org/AAStudies.

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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.

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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.

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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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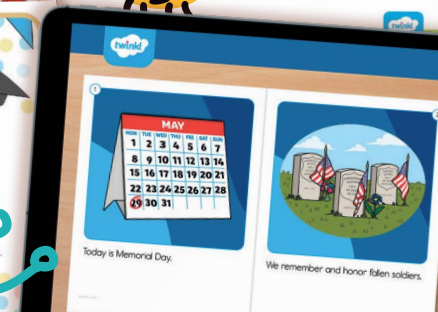
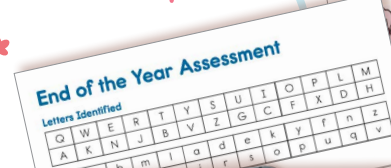
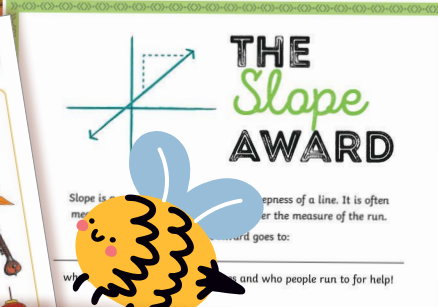
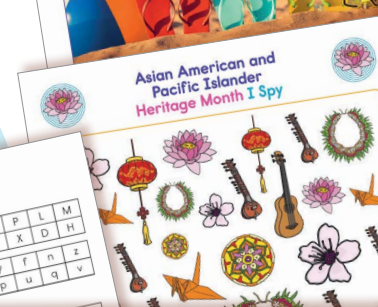
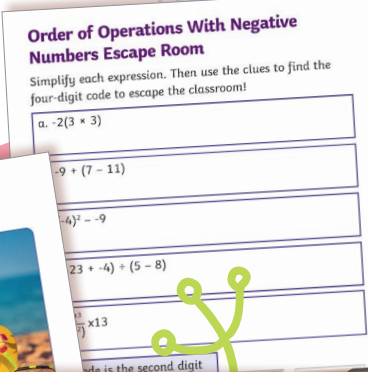
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PRESIDENT'S viewpoint

NEA-Retired President Anita Gibson anitagretired@gmail.com 256-717-7993



NEA-Retired Is Powering Up for Election 2024

The NEA-Retired Conference in Chicago, from March 3 - 5, was an awesome event! Participants received updates on Election 2024, took part in inspiring breakout sessions, and celebrated the 40th anniversary of Illinois workers winning the right to bargain collectively.

Summer is fast approaching, which means the 2024 NEA-Retired Annual Meeting is just around the corner. This year, NEA-Retired delegates will meet in Philadelphia on June 30 - July 1.

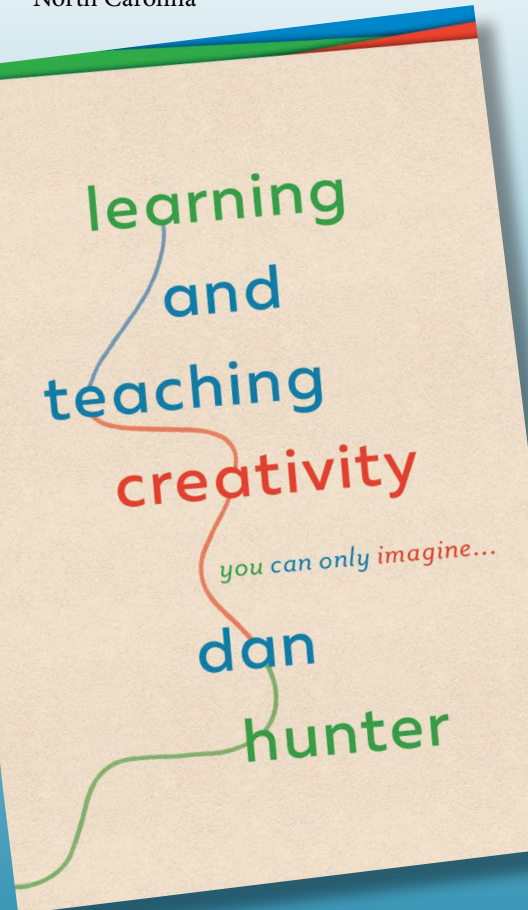
They will elect members to the NEA-Retired leadership team and will have an opportunity to participate in fundraising for our political action committee (EdVotes.org/Donate)—which supports candidates who are friends of education—and our Jack Kinnaman Scholarship Fund (DonateKinnaman.com), which helps NEA Aspiring Educators with their college expenses. For updates about the annual meeting, I encourage you to visit nea.org/Retired.

This year, we are heavily engaged in Election 2024 as we work to support candidates who will stand up for public education. As retirees, our K-12 educators count on us to be a force in getting out the vote. I am confident that this election will once again see us engaged and leading the way to the polls. Learn how to get involved at EdVotes.org.

As busy as NEA-Retired members are, you always seem to find time to volunteer in your communities and local schools. You make a tremendous impact through your work and on the lives you touch. Thank you for your advocacy for students and for your colleagues who are still in the classroom. Your commitment to your profession continues and is much appreciated.

“my students are thriving because of this book.... worth every minute spent in its pages.”

Les Schofield, Microlit Almanac, teacher, writer & artist, North Carolina



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In the News


"Books that once lined the shelves of the library in a Jacksonville, Florida, elementary school are now stored in boxes. The school librarian spends her days vetting titles to comply with new censorship laws passed by the state. ... When access to these titles is lost, our students lose the opportunity to build empathy toward others who might not look, or live, like them. Every student deserves to see themselves in the books they read. It is how they learn that their stories and their lives matter."

—Becky, with co-authors Caroline Tung Richmond and Ellen Oh, in their *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* op-ed, Nov. 30

Who I've Been Talking With

A few months ago, I connected with Maryland music teacher Keith Kelsey as part of my "Honesty in Education" Instagram Live series. Keith is one of the few people who knows I played violin as a child—and made the all-city orchestra in Philadelphia! However, the main topic of our conversation was not the enormous value of music education, but rather how community schools improve educator retention and student outcomes. "We're the ones who know what our neighborhoods need and what our children need," Keith told me. I know that's right! Learn more about community schools and NEA's efforts to expand their numbers at nea.org/communityschools.






Stay connected with me through X @BeckyPringle.

Becky Pringle @BeckyPringle

As I told the crowd in South Carolina yesterday:

In every office, we must support candidates who believe that every student deserves the resources, opportunities, access, and support to be fully human and fully free to pursue their wildest dreams.



1:00 PM · Jan 27, 2024 · 995 Views

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

Becky Pringle
NEA President



“

"We must—and we will—continue to unabashedly promote public education as the foundation of this or any democracy, and to defiantly protect public education from privatizers and voucherizers and eduvultures. We also must strengthen public education so it is a system designed around the joy of teaching and learning."

—Becky, at the Congressional Labor Caucus, January 30

Face to Face With NEA Members


"What's your why?" That's the question I asked Adriana, Alissa, K'Sean, and other members of The Student South Carolina Education Association (The Student SCEA) this winter when I traveled to Columbia, S.C., with first lady Jill Biden. Why a career in public education? Their answers inspired me, and I advised them to keep them always in mind. When we hear about yet another book ban or voucher scheme, those reasons will fuel our fire. When we see teachers attacked for teaching the truth about our nation, those reasons will keep us strong. As NEA members, our collective "whys" tie us together and empower our union. They provide hope that we will make public education what it should be for every student. Ask yourself, "What's your why?" And let your answer guide you in making our world a better place.



(Top, from left) I want to thank these leaders of The Student SCEA, Adriana Perez, Alissa Pressley, and K'Sean Dotch, for their welcome and insight. (Bottom) Everyone in this photo—including Jill Biden!—believes public education is the foundation of an inclusive democracy, and will support Joe Biden and candidates like him who stand up for educators.

JOIN ME

3 Things To Do For Yourself and Your Union

1. **Raise Your Voice!** Concerned about book bans? About attacks on public education? Attend a Public Schools Strong Training—and join educators and parents around the U.S. in learning how to show support for well-resourced and inclusive public education. Scan this code for more info. 
2. **Appreciate and be appreciated.** Teacher Appreciation Week is May 6–10. To participate in NEA-led activities, visit nea.org/TAW.
3. **Find Junie Kim.** Celebrate May's Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month with books that open windows into AAPI culture and mirror AAPI people. For example, try the book *Finding Junie Kim* by one of my favorite authors (and writing partner!) Ellen Oh. For additional recommendations, visit nea.org/readacross.

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



NEA Helps Striking Educators Win!

Thousands of Portland, Ore., educators went on strike for three weeks in November to fight for better working conditions. NEA President Becky Pringle rallied alongside educators, parents, and community members. NEA also provided strategic counsel and game-changing organizing support on the ground. The result? Victory!

- A 13.75 percent cost-of-living raise.
- Mental health support for students.
- 410 minutes of guaranteed planning time each week for elementary and middle school educators.
- A \$10 million investment to address extreme temperatures in schools.
- More pay for educators with large class sizes.

For more NEA wins, go to nea.org/Wins.

NEA Delivers on Student Loan Relief



In response to relentless advocacy by NEA members, President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris have taken major steps to provide student loan relief.

Their latest effort? In early spring, the administration canceled student loans for almost 153,000 additional borrowers enrolled in the Saving on a Valuable Education Plan (SAVE), adding to a combined total of at least \$138 billion in student debt cancellation for almost 3.9 million borrowers since the administration took office.

To sign up for SAVE and check if you're eligible for early loan forgiveness, visit studentaid.gov/SAVE.

NEA Supports Your Mental Health

During Mental Health Month and every month, take time to learn how to protect your well-being.

NEA has resources to help you get started at nea.org/MentalHealth.



NEA Bolsters State's Voucher Lawsuit

NEA provided legal guidance and strategic communications support to The South Carolina

Education Association in filing a voucher lawsuit. The suit asks the state's Supreme Court to strike down a voucher program that siphons millions of dollars in state tax revenue to pay for private school tuition.

Parents and the NAACP South Carolina State Conference have also joined in filing the lawsuit.

Learn how voucher programs hurt students and educators at nea.org/Vouchers.

Correction: In "NEA in Action, in the January 2024 issue, we incorrectly stated that NEA is taking six states to court over censorship laws. The correct number of states is five.



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NEW BOOK: PARENTS ARE MOBILIZING AGAINST EXTREMISM

Attacks against public schools are nothing new, but today the very idea of public education is being threatened. How did we get here? In her new book, *School Moms: Parent Activism, Partisan Politics, and the Battle for Public Education*, education journalist Laura Pappano explores the rampant disinformation that's fueling the so-called "culture wars." A line has been crossed, she told *NEA Today*, and we are no longer debating real education ideas and policies.

What compelled you to write this book?

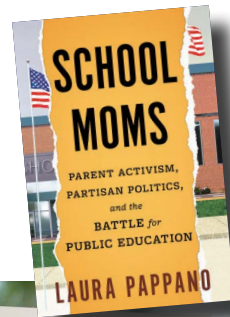
Laura Pappano: As a reporter, I saw things happening that involved schools but were not really about education. There's a lot of misinformation about inclusion, what kids are being taught, and what books they should read. We're in a moment right now where these sorts of attacks have gained too much traction.

I'm concerned about a lot of things in our schools, but I am not concerned at all with this nonsense that students are being indoctrinated by critical race theory; that libraries are collecting pornography; or that we are changing the gender of children. Those are untruths that are distracting from the work of figuring out how do we educate everyone who walks in the door.

Why were these attacks so successful, at least initially?

LP: The far right is nationalizing our local experiences and our local conversations around schools. I covered a school board election in Idaho last November. One of the main issues in that race was transgenderism. I was hearing people claim that their candidate was going to keep boys out of girls' bathrooms.

That was not the problem with schools in that community. This district was entering its second year without a K-6 English language arts curriculum. They have huge budget shortfalls. There were mice running over children's feet in the classroom, because they didn't have money to hire a cleaning service for the school. But that's not what they were talking about in this election.



I do think many people were slow to recognize what was happening. So the far right got a bit of a head start. But we're seeing much more grassroots action—especially from parents' groups that are on the ground pushing back.

In the book, you talk to pro-public education parent-activists. Has it been difficult for them to get colleagues and friends to take action?

LP: Well, the support has long been there, but we didn't necessarily feel we needed to act on it. We tend to take our schools for granted.

We are learning that we need to be involved. We need to pay attention to the school board races. We may even need to run.

New parent groups, like Red, Wine, and Blue, are doing a tremendous, labor-intensive public service.

Moms have done this for years with little recognition. This is one of the reasons I call the book *School Moms*, because they are the people on the ground.

They may have jobs and other responsibilities, but they are also very involved in public schools and are experts at networking and organizing and motivating.

They're doing what is necessary to protect the public schools. Parents and educators can be a powerful force when working together.

PHOTO: ADOBE STOCK IMAGES

SCHOOL BUS DRIVER SHORTAGE PERSISTS



Like many school staff positions, school bus driver employment remains far below pre-pandemic levels. In September 2023, there were approximately 192,400 bus drivers working in K-12 schools, down 15.1 percent from September 2019, according to the Economic Policy Institute (EPI).

School bus drivers remain a vital part of the education system. Roughly half of school children rely on bus services to get to school. Interrupted services and instability can disrupt learning time and contribute to absenteeism.

EPI reports that further wage increases are necessary in order to recruit new drivers.

In 2021, 7.8 percent of school bus drivers had incomes below the poverty line. That's greater than the 5.6 percent of private-sector workers and the 3.4 percent of public-sector workers who live in poverty.

Students who vape tend to earn lower grades over time.

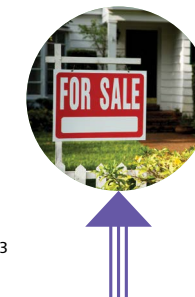
"We need to train and prepare our educators to be trauma-informed, but we also have to look at workload, lack of planning time, and lack of respect. We need to look at all the root causes why our profession is asking educators to go beyond their limits."

—Donna Christy, president, Prince George's County Educators' Association, Maryland

12%

The percentage of homes for sale that the average teacher can afford within commuting distance of school. The average teacher can afford only one-quarter of available rentals.

SOURCE: REDFIN, 2023



LAW HELPS BREASTFEEDING WORKERS

Congress approved new regulations for pumping breast milk in the workplace in December 2022. The Providing Urgent Maternal Protections for Nursing Mothers Act, or the PUMP Act, extends the rights of nursing mothers—including those who are educators—to have time and a private space to pump breast milk at work.

While the legislation passed more than a year ago, implementation is ongoing, and conditions are expected to improve for breastfeeding workers.

The measure closed loopholes in the Fair Labor Standards Act that excluded nearly 9 million women. That included more than 1 million Black women, 976,000 Hispanic women, 825,000 Asian women, 6 million White women, and 185,000 women of other races.

The PUMP Act also allows working women to take legal action and seek monetary remedies if their employer fails to comply. A lack of breastfeeding protections has led to economic harm, sexual harassment, and job insecurity.



LEARN MORE To learn more about protections under the PUMP Act, visit nea.org/Pump-Act.

Trust in School Librarians Remains High

Across the country, book-banning campaigns attempt to sow mistrust in the dedicated librarians who work in public schools and libraries. But librarians are trusted by families of various backgrounds and income levels and are valued in society.

A new survey, conducted by Book Riot and the EveryLibrary Institute, found that parents and guardians also believe libraries foster safe, engaging environments that support learning and creativity.

“Pro-censorship groups do not represent the vast majority of parents or guardians in their beliefs about librarians, reading, education, and civil society,” the report concludes.



92% of parents and guardians trust children’s librarians to select appropriate books and materials for the library.

92% trust librarians to recommend age- and content-appropriate books and materials to them and their children.

90% say they feel comfortable allowing their children to select their own materials (books, magazines, movies, audiobooks, games, etc.) from the library.

96% say they feel their children are safe in the library.

RURAL SCHOOLS: BY THE NUMBERS



7.3 million public school students are enrolled in rural school districts. That’s more than 1 in 7 students across the United States.

More U.S. students attend rural schools than attend the nation’s 100 largest school districts combined.

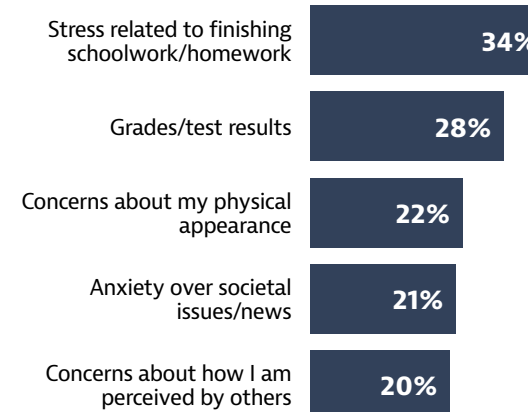
In 13 states, at least half of public schools are rural. In 14 other states, at least one-third of all schools are rural.

Nearly 1 in 7 rural students experience poverty; 1 in 15 lack health insurance; and 1 in 10 have changed residence in the previous 12 months.

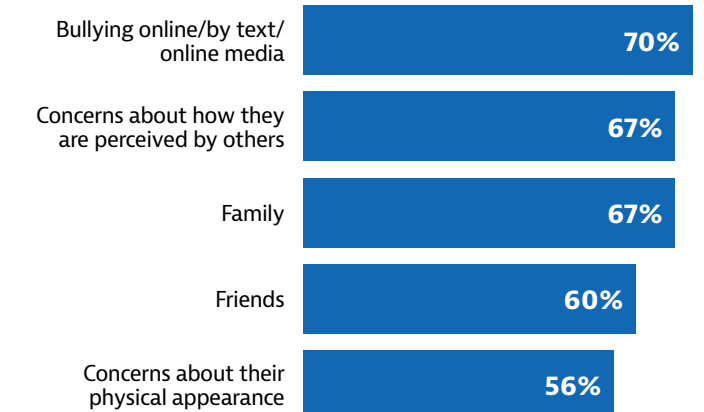
SOURCE: *WHY RURAL MATTERS 2023*, NATIONAL RURAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

What Factors Have the Most Impact on Students' Mental Health?

ACCORDING TO STUDENTS



ACCORDING TO EDUCATORS



SOURCE: EDWEEK RESEARCH CENTER SURVEY, 2023

WHAT REDUCES INCOME INEQUALITY? UNIONS!

By Amanda Litvinov

Laurel Smith-Doerr, a professor and organizational sociologist at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, studied the pay gap at her own university with mostly satisfying results: Female professors at the top of the pay scale make as much or even more than men in similar positions—which is not usually the case in higher education.

“That’s because the faculty union, the Massachusetts Society of Professors (MSP), spent decades working with the university administration at the bargaining table to support equal pay for women and policies that help them stay in their jobs—like paid leave and subsidized child care,” Smith-Doerr explains.

About 25 years ago, MSP successfully bargained for equity pay raises, which benefited professors of color as well as the women teaching there, who were often paid less than their White, male colleagues. Those negotiations left a legacy of fairer salaries for all who came after.

Unions are key to higher wages

Now, a first-of-its-kind report by the U.S. Department of the Treasury confirms that unions help reduce income inequality and help both union and non-union workers earn higher wages.



Prompted by the Biden administration, the Treasury Department set out to answer two key questions: Do policies that strengthen unions actually help the middle class? And do unions help the economy as a whole?

The answer to both questions is yes. The Treasury report confirms that unions help solve problems that plague the middle class, such as stagnant wages and reduced generational mobility. When the middle class has well-paying, stable jobs, the economy is less fragile.

The researchers also state that non-union workers benefit from union bargaining wins. Non-union employers often increase wages to keep employees from leaving for union jobs.

Laurel Smith-Doerr

All workers deserve a voice

President Joe Biden has called on Congress to pass the Public Service Freedom to Negotiate Act, which would ensure that all public employees—including educators—can come together through their unions to negotiate salaries, benefits, and working conditions.

NEA affiliates are working to elect leaders who support unions and to repeal state laws that take away workers’ rights. ✊

TAKE ACTION

Find out how unions lift educator voices at nea.org/collectivebargaining.

PHOTO: ISABELLA DELLOLIO



TEAR IT & SHARE IT

Post this in your break room and ask a colleague to join NEA. Scan to join!



Unions raise the wages of their members by 10–15 percent.

Union wins have a “spillover effect,” resulting in higher wages for non-union workers.



Unions reduce race- and gender-based wage gaps.



By reducing income inequality, unions contribute to overall economic growth and resilience.



A study of 4,000 workers

found that **52%** of non-union workers want to be in a union.



But only **6%** of private sector workers are union members. That gap shows the need for policies that better protect workers’ right to unionize.



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ILLUSTRATION: SHUTTERSTOCK; SOURCE: “LABOR UNIONS AND THE MIDDLE CLASS,” U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY, 2023



MEET THE 2024 ESP OF THE YEAR!

'IMPROVING THE LIVES OF MY FELLOW ESPs IS MY WHY,' SAYS AWARDEE JEN BRAMSON.

By Cindy Long

When Jen Bramson hands out cinnamon sticks to her young students, it's not time for hot cocoa or warm apple cider. They use the sticks to learn how to hold a pencil and make marks and strokes on paper, and to practice naming and writing letters.

"I try to camouflage learning by making lessons active, engaging, and fun," says Bramson, who teaches preschool in Park City, Utah.

Known for the Sundance Film Festival and expensive ski resorts, Park City is an enclave of the superwealthy. It's also home to the working people who keep the international tourist destination running.

"My class is made up of children who haven't had the same opportunities, and they enter preschool on an uneven playing field," Bramson says. "I scaffold lessons to the individual child's needs."

Some of the most important lessons Bramson imparts to her preschoolers are about communication, listening, and problem-solving. Bramson models those same skills, making her an exceptional educator, union activist, and leader. Her accomplishments have earned her the title of 2024 NEA Education Support Professional (ESP) of the Year.

"NEA and its 3 million members are proud to recognize Jen's dedication to her students, her school, and her union," said NEA President Becky Pringle when she announced the award, in March. "Jen represents the essence of ESPs and the critical role they play in our school communities, including in our rural areas. In her work with our youngest learners, she inspires joy in learning, meeting their curiosity, and ensuring they are prepared for elementary school. Jen sees the potential in every child."

Finding solutions for learning challenges

Bramson has worked for the Park City School District since 2013 and also teaches at McPolin Elementary School. The Title 1 school has a diverse student population, a dual-language program in Spanish and English, and strong community involvement.

Bramson, who struggled with ADHD and dyslexia as a student, knew from an early age that she wanted to help students recognize their strengths and learn how to learn.

She helps English language learners reach required benchmarks, works with the district's special education

"We are making change every day," says NEA ESP of the Year Jen Bramson (at left, with union colleagues, and below, accepting the award). "We are demanding what we need for our students."

department to provide interventions, and collects data to get individualized education plans for students before they begin kindergarten. She has also taken behavior technician training.

Last year, a student joined her class after being kicked out of a previous day care. The young girl had boundless energy during quiet time and almost no impulse control.



Bramson worked with a special education teacher to develop a plan.

During whole group, the girl would jump on the trampoline. Other times, she would sit in the quiet area so she could reset before the next activity. She was given a wobbly stool and also the choice to stand if she wanted, and they played games like Operation and Jenga to practice self-control.

This creative problem-solving is a hallmark of Bramson's work, says fellow preschool educator Laura Holbrook-Jorgensen.

"Jen's talents really shine when she encounters a student with learning, social-emotional, health issues, or difficulties at home," shares Holbrook-Jorgensen.

"She approaches these challenges with fresh thinking and is always open to trying something new for the benefit of her students."

Speaking out for school staff

Bramson's innovative thinking is helping her get more resources for the rural schools in her district, including her own elementary school.

As a board member of the Utah School Employees Association, representing ESPs across the state, she is developing a pilot program to bring seven rural district associations together to form a coalition.

"We understand that rural districts have different needs and, using surveys, we are finding out what those needs are to customize support," she says.

In her board role, Bramson will also embark on a listening tour to interview paraeducators across the state.

"I am the paraeducator representative, ... and I hear from other paras that they are in crisis and leaving the profession in record numbers," she says. "Paras are asking for training to keep themselves and their students physically and mentally safe. They need help negotiating for fair pay and professional respect."

She hopes to create a statewide communication channel with these para groups, so they can discuss what trainings they need, get help with negotiations, and share information. She also plans to organize group trips to the state capital, where ESPs can share their stories with legislators and ask for their support.

Bramson has spent many "Educator Days" on Salt Lake City's Capitol Hill, raising awareness about ESP needs and contributions, and challenging lawmakers to "actually read the bills."

In Utah, ESPs are still referred to as "classified employees." Bramson has

been looking for a lawmaker who will sponsor legislation to officially change this job title to education support professionals.

"I want people to understand that we are skilled professionals dedicated to our craft," she says.

Among her fans is Gina Cox, a Park City school bus driver and president of the Park City Classified Employees Association.

"A respectful disagreement with Jen often turns into a productive work session," Cox says. "She is resolute in her beliefs but humble enough to see others' point of view. She can introduce uncomfortable subject matter in a way that is palatable and encourages the people around her to embrace the opportunity to make necessary changes."

Bramson served with Cox on the negotiating team representing ESPs in her district. They conducted a job study in collaboration with the district and discovered that district wages weren't competitive, leaving schools critically short-staffed.

The team was able to negotiate a significant raise for ESPs, bringing the lowest paid position to \$20 dollars per hour and raising all steps by \$8 an hour. They also negotiated the same 16 percent raise that the teachers received.

"This has been a life-changing raise for the ESPs in my district," Bramson explains. "We have heard that members have been able to quit second jobs and have postponed retirement to earn higher Social Security. One woman was able to save her house, and many more have said that they feel valued."

Bramson says, "Improving the lives of my fellow ESPs is my why." 🌟

LEARN
MORE

Read about the ESP of the Year Award, 2024 nominees, and previous winners at nea.org/espy.



Theresa Ziebarth-Moritz's Indigenous lessons includes bead work and poetry.

INDIGENOUS HISTORY GETS A BOOST

The Ojibwe, Dakota, and other Indigenous tribal nations have called Minnesota home for thousands of years, and residents have experienced their presence and impact for centuries.

Still, many students have minimal or inaccurate knowledge of Native history.

"Indigenous people are still here," says Tanis Henderson, a White Earth Nation descendant and counselor at Minnesota's Grand Rapids High School. "Educators are ready and willing to learn more about Indigenous communities," she adds.

To close students' knowledge gap, a state law passed in 2023 requires K-12 educators to receive training about Native American history and culture in order to renew their teaching licenses.

Until now, the history and culture of Native students has not

"Educators are ready and willing to learn more about Indigenous communities."

—Tanis Henderson, counselor, Minnesota

HONOR NATIVE PEOPLE IN YOUR CLASSROOM

One way to recognize Indigenous people is through a Native land acknowledgment, a formal statement that recognizes the relationship that exists between Indigenous people and their traditional territories. They often start like this:

"We begin by acknowledging that we gather today on the ancestral lands of [name of local tribe or tribes] who were removed unjustly, and that we in this community are the beneficiaries of that removal. We honor them as we live, work, and study here at [your school or organization's name]."

This is a great way for students to learn about the Indigenous people who originally inhabited the land.

For an in-depth guide to land acknowledgments, visit nea.org/LandAcknowledgment.

been represented in the general curriculum, says Indigenous educator Theresa Ziebarth-Moritz.

She has been working with the Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board to develop an outline and framework covering what students and teachers need to know about Indigenous history and culture in the state.

She wants teachers to understand the concept of sovereignty—the ability of Native tribes to govern, enforce laws, and protect and enhance the health, safety, and welfare of tribal citizens within tribal territory. Recognizing past traumas and the complete history of Native Americans is also an important part of this learning, she explains.

"Teachers need to know about the boarding school trauma and its generational effects," Ziebarth-Moritz says. The training's should focus on presenting an accurate portrayal of Native students' identities and history, she adds.

When Ziebarth-Moritz was a student, she recalls not feeling comfortable sharing the dehumanization and brutalization she knew her relatives experienced at Native American boarding schools.

She wants a different reality for Native students today.

—ANIYA GREENE-SANTOS AND BRENDA ÁLVAREZ

LEARN MORE

Explore lessons, activities, and resources related to Native People at nea.org/IndigenousCultures.

member spotlight

Instilling Pride in Native Cultures

Leslie Montemayor
INDIAN EDUCATION COORDINATOR
OKEMAH, OKLAHOMA

"Most Americans are unaware that a Native American was a heartbeat away from serving as the U.S. president; that Native Americans were not granted U.S. citizenship until 1924; and that federal law did not allow tribes to teach their Native languages until 1972. What many people do know—or think they know—is often based on stereotypes and fallacies.

Even worse, our Native American students, from past to present, have been deprived of feeling pride in their rich culture. Native history is packed with valuable contributions and knowledge. Long before anyone else arrived to these lands, many tribes modeled how to form a democracy rooted in a desire for peace. Most knew how to cultivate crops that are still essential today. And Native "code talkers" helped the U.S. win World War II by using their languages to develop secret codes.

As the Indian Education Coordinator for 77 counties in Oklahoma and a Native American myself, I help teachers facilitate lessons about Native history and traditions, and teach students about the contributions of Oklahoma tribes. All American school children need to learn the truth of Native American history."

LEARN MORE

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

member spotlight

STAR PLAYER IN IOWA

By Barbara Cunningham,
as told to Janet R. Mednik

As a college field hockey and softball player in the mid-1960s, my female teammates and I played with hand-me-down equipment, back-seat scheduling, and little, if any, fan promotion.

I was a goalie and catcher at Emporia State University, in Kansas. And despite this lack of resources and fanfare, I am grateful for the experience and credit it with making me a successful union leader and community activist.

I learned to stay on my toes, deal with pressure, and prevent the opponent from getting a step ahead. More importantly, I learned to look at the entire field and use that broader vision to my team's advantage.

Those skills came in handy both as a high school physical education teacher in my adopted hometown of Shenandoah, Iowa, and as an activist with my local and the Iowa State Education Association (ISEA).



Barbara Cunningham

Getting women off the bench

As a gym teacher for nearly 40 years, I saw firsthand how laws like Title IX could change lives. Passed in 1972, Title IX protects people from sex-based discrimination in education programs and other federally funded activities.

According to the Women's Sports Foundation, before Title IX, only 1 in 27 girls in the United States played sports; by 2016, that number had exploded

to 1 in 5. Clearly, more girls and women are getting off the sidelines and into the game. This, I believe, translates into more women influencing the workplace, politics, and public policy.

My second half

I hung up my trusty PE teacher's whistle 23 years ago, but the lessons I learned in sports and the workplace have stayed with me as a retired union member. I am privileged to have served as the ISEA-Retired president, elected in 2002, and on the NEA Board of Directors from 2010 – 2016.

Today, I am a board member with the Iowa Unity Coalition, a group dedicated to electing progressive leaders. The organization screens political candidates who seek an endorsement, evaluating their stance on topics like workers' rights, health care, and public education.

The coalition's questionnaire, which I helped craft, asks candidates if they support local gun safety measures and would vote in favor of public workers earning a living wage of at least \$20 per hour, among other queries.

Some 70 percent of the candidates we have endorsed and supported have won their races. Not bad for a state that is increasingly conservative.

Through my union and the coalition, I do everything I can to elect progressive candidates in 2024, and I encourage others to do the same.

Time is running out on the game clock, but I believe if we play it smart and use our muscle and money correctly, victory will be ours come Election Day. 🇺🇸

LEARN
MORE

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

PHOTO: COURTESY OF BARBARA CUNNINGHAM

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- Freedom to choose your own doctors who accept Medicare
- Nationwide coverage with multiple plan options
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The latest news on
NEA-Retired members
around the country

Oregon Retirees Help Striking Teachers Win!

When Oregon's Portland Association of Teachers (PAT) went on strike for the first time in history, Oregon Education Association-Retired (OEA-Retired) members walked the picket line in solidarity, rallied alongside them, and helped provide critical financial support.

The Portland educators were fed up with inadequate pay, lack of planning time, crowded classrooms, and extreme temperatures in schools.

Their 15-day strike ended in November with big wins, including a 13.75 percent cost-of-living raise over 3 years; 410 minutes of guaranteed planning time each week for elementary and middle school teachers; additional mental health resources; and an agreement from the state to address unhealthy classroom temperatures, among other improvements.

"Our role was to do everything in our power to support the striking educators, who had put so much on the line—their jobs, the financial security of their families, as well as the education of their students," says OEA-Retired President Eileen Wende.

In addition to putting their



Eileen Wende (third from right, back row) and other Oregon retirees support Portland teachers on strike.

"boots on the ground," the retirees were able to help striking educators make ends meet.



Marleen Wallingford

The assessment was discontinued when the fund reached \$10 million, but the contributions were invested, and the fund's value increased substantially over time.

During the strike, Wende and OEA-Retired At-Large Board Director Marleen Wallingford formed a committee with local Retired president and OEA-Retired Board Director Al Rabchuk that reviewed and approved grants to members facing financial hardship.

"It was extremely empowering for OEA-Retired members to be so instrumental in this successful strike," Wallingford says. "And the emergency fund played a big role in keeping morale high even when negotiations seemed to stall."

—JANET R. MEDNIK

Thrifting for Her Union

Thanks to the steadfast work of retired educator Corley Byras, a hospice store in Augusta, Maine, has been transformed into a secondhand clothing and merchandise boutique.

Each day, the Androscoggin Hospice Thrift Store draws about 100 shoppers and generates up to \$2,000 in sales. Byras' union has also benefited from her marketing skills, as she curates "Fifty Fantastic



Corley Byras

Items" to be raffled annually. The proceeds go to her union's political action committee, which supports candidates who are friends of public education.

"It's important to me to help make the world a better place, whether it's people who want a good deal or who are going through tough financial times," Byras says. "Both my work in the thrift store and my work for the union helps people, and that's all the motivation I need."

—JANET R. MEDNIK

DISCOVER. LEAD. ACHIEVE!

As public education and the world continues to change, association activists and leaders need ongoing leadership development and support. That is why leadership development is a strategic priority for the NEA. Below is a list of resources to help support your leadership development journey:

- Leadership Development 101: A Foundational Course for Activists and Leaders**
- Leadership Development 102: A Strategic Approach to Leadership Development**
www.nea.org/pep
- NEA Leadership Competency Framework**
- Leadership Competency Self-Assessment(s)**
- NEA Leadership Development Guide Planning Tool**
www.nea.org/leadership-development
- NEA National Leadership Summit**
www.nea.org/leadershipsummit



SCAN ME



When Retirement Means Caring for Your Parents

When Robin Aslakson started caring for her father two years ago, she discovered a person she hardly knew growing up. As a child, she only saw glimpses of him when he came home from long days at the paper mill along Michigan's Muskegon Lake.

"He often worked 12–16 hours a day, 6–7 days a week. So when he was home, he was mostly exhausted and did not have time for five children," says Aslakson, a retired computer literacy teacher.

"I was the oldest and was never really close to him. But ... I've realized that he has a very good sense of humor. I've really gotten to know him much better, and I have come to be very protective of him," shares Aslakson, who lives in Ludington, Mich., a short distance from her father's apartment in an independent living community. "I'm so glad that I have gotten to see him in a different way."

She takes her father on weekly shopping trips and to doctor appointments. She fills his pill containers and makes sure he is taking his daily medications. And she

just sits with him to keep him company.

Aslakson's experience is familiar to many retired people today. About 20 million adult children are caring for a parent or in-law, according to Frances Hall, executive director of Adult Children of Aging Parents. And that number is increasing rapidly, according to AARP.

"Parents are living longer—perhaps even long enough that people helping a parent are simultaneously caring for a spouse," says Kate Granigan, president of the Aging Life Care Association.

"It can be a challenging, frustrating, and confusing time—and more people are facing it."

While the burden of caregiving should not be shouldered by one person, that is usually what ends up

happening. And educators may be more inclined to step into that roll.

"[Educators] have a lot of energy, often have a 'get it done' attitude," Granigan explains. "And they have been in a type of caregiver role as an educator, so they are perhaps more likely to take on a big part of this job."

The tasks required may seem overwhelming.

"It can involve interpreting medical advice and test results, helping loved ones stay engaged physically and emotionally, managing financial affairs, preparing meals, or taking care of housekeeping—and constantly being on alert for when the next shoe is going to drop," Granigan says, acknowledging that this uncertainty creates anxiety. "Many people in these roles

Being there for aging parents can feel both trying and sacred. Sharing the load can help you treasure the time spent with them—and strengthen bonds with other family members.

By James Paterson

"[Being a caregiver] provides time to know a parent better as a person ... and to give back to them for the care [they] provided."

—Frances Hall, executive director, Adult Children of Aging Parents



Retired teacher Robin Aslakson (right and below) says taking care of her father, John Stafford (left), has brought them closer together.



don't see themselves as caregivers, but they are."

She points out that families often don't anticipate or identify future needs early enough and stumble into the role through "caregiver creep." What begins as an occasional visit or a few rides to the doctor becomes much more responsibility.

Families should determine caregiving responsibilities early and distribute them fairly, Granigan advises.

"All it takes is one fall, one accident, or one diagnosis to send everything into a tailspin and turn a family's world upside down," Hall says. "Sometimes critical decisions must be made quickly. Families should do their homework before it is an emergency."

She adds, "There is something every member can do, regardless of where they live or their circumstances.

Caregiving for a parent should be a family effort."

When a family shares the responsibility and has healthy communication about plans, she explains, it can bring members together and heighten their care and compassion for each other and the older person alike.

Caregiving can be a healing process

Research shows that people who take care of their aging parents overwhelmingly believe the caregiving journey is worth the difficulties, Hall says.

"[Being a caregiver] provides time to know a parent better as a person ... and to give back to them for the care [they] provided," she explains. "It can allow time for old wounds to be healed and give some caregivers an important sense of purpose."



"My daughter ... reminded me that I was only human and that my mother knew I loved her."

—Toni Smith, president, Georgia Association of Educators-Retired

Retired teacher Judy Hinsley's mother lived with her for more than seven years at her home in Saint Charles, Mo., before eventually moving into assisted living.

"It was very valuable to me to help my mother," says the former elementary school educator, whose mother died in 1990. "I was there every day. I got involved with the facility and helped with things like bingo nights and other events. I felt good about how I had that time with her."

After Hinsley's husband died, in 1990, she also cared for her mother-in-law, until her death in 2017.

Hinsley's oldest son, Greg, helped with both of his grandmothers—an experience that Hinsley feels was enriching for him. It gave him the chance to know his grandparents better and learn more about their generation, she says.



(Left to right) Judy Hinsley's mother, Eleanor Barlow; Judy's youngest son, Scott Hinsley; and her mother-in-law, Mary Hinsley, in 1976.

The shared experience strengthened Judy's relationship with her son as well.

The time with her mother and mother-in-law was often challenging and draining, but she has no regrets.

"It was probably inevitable for me to be the primary caregiver, and I'm glad it turned out that way," she shares.

Seeing your family in new ways

"I was so happy to have my family around, so we could all say goodbye when my mother died," says Georgia Association of Educators-Retired President Toni Smith, who cared for her mother and a disabled sister while also helping with grandchildren near her home, in Covington, Ga.

Smith helped her mother and sister with groceries, doctor appointments, medications, and meals, and often just read the newspaper to her mother each day. Simple routines like this, Hall says, can be the most memorable.

"I really enjoyed time with both of them, but honestly,

"It was very valuable to me to help my mother. I was there every day. ... I felt good about how I had that time with her."

—Judy Hinsley (below), retired elementary school teacher, Missouri



I don't know how I did it," Smith says. "I have to say, it wore me down."

As Smith's children stepped in to help, she began to see them in a different light. Even her grandson, who was only 3 years old at the time, seemed to understand that Smith's autistic sister was struggling. Her grandson connected with her sister by touching her hand—something she would allow no one else to do.

"There were a lot of good moments like that. My daughter was such a big help, and she reminded me that I was only human and that my mother knew I loved her. That was a nice sentiment that touched all three of us." ❄️

CAREGIVING: How to Prepare and Share Responsibilities

Be proactive. Changes can happen quickly in an elderly person's health and in their ability to care for themselves. While there are often unknowns, families should plan for where the person will go if more care is needed or if the person can stay at home. Questions to consider: What will trigger a move? Will someone come into the house to care for an elder? Who will handle finances or legal issues? Is a will in place and is it clear about the person's wishes?

Discuss openly. Before a family member needs assistance, discuss their wishes and needs when it comes to finances, where they will live, and what kind of funeral they wish to have. Don't avoid talking about the end of life, just because it's difficult. Having a plan can help you and your older family member feel more peaceful.

Understand the aging brain. Older people are sometimes less patient and more obstinate. Most become a bit more forgetful and confused. Be patient and keep an open dialogue.

Monitor mental health. If you are concerned that a family member is impaired to the extent that it impacts the person's judgment, seek a professional assessment. Keep an eye out for memory, cognition, depression, and anxiety issues.

Document decisions. Put all agreements in writing. It may seem awkward, but memories fade and people change their minds.

Establish roles early. Before decisions have to be made, determine which decisions can be made by individuals and which should be made by a group of family members or others.

Also determine who will take care of legal and financial concerns, groceries, transportation, and other needs.

Don't demand, ask. "Older people have been making decisions all their lives, and they can make many, if not most, for themselves now. Change is difficult, but it is much easier to accept if the older person is involved in the decision," says Kate Granigan, president of the Aging Life Care Association. "Don't worry if the house isn't quite as clean, for instance, if they are safe."

Ask for help. "Don't feel guilty if you can't do it all," says Georgia Association of Educators-Retired President Toni Smith, who cared for an aging mother and a sister who was disabled.

Set boundaries, too, Granigan advises. "You have to sometimes say no to the person needing care and ask others to step in and help."

Learn about health care. Designate a family member or close friend to be responsible for health care. That person should understand the person's health concerns, medications, and health insurance, and identify the best professionals to meet the person's needs.

This area is too often overlooked or left in the hands of the elderly person, who may lose track. Improper use of medications or not taking them at all is a major problem, Granigan points out.

A positive approach. People needing care will likely experience stress and anxiety and may not be themselves. Lifelong battles among family members and money issues frequently surface as well.

Recognize that all of this is uneasy territory, and everyone should try to work together for the best outcome.

Where Everybody Knows Your Name

A few years before he retired, Mike Ragan took a daring step: He walked into an Arthur Murray dance studio in his hometown of Federal Way, Wash., and asked about lessons. His wife was dying, his career was ending, and he knew he needed to “invest in living,” as he puts it.

“All I was doing was working and taking care of her, and I knew I needed to do something else—and I would say that’s true of most people who retire,” says Ragan, a former physics and engineering teacher who is vice president of Washington Education Association-Retired. “You need to find something that gets you up and out of your shell. It could be a part-time job, it could be volunteering at a local hospital. It doesn’t matter what it is, so long as you aren’t just sitting at home.”

Today, about five years after that first tentative step, Ragan waltzes, foxtrots, rumbas, cha-chas, tangos, and hustles for up to several hours a day, six days a week.

“Years ago, I used to go to a gym, and I felt pretty good afterward, but I never looked

Sociologists call them “third places.” Retirees may call them a home away from home. What’s yours?

By Mary Ellen Flannery

forward to going there,” he says. “I look forward to going dancing!”

Ragan’s dance studio is what sociologists call his “third place.” It’s where Ragan smiles and sweats and connects with others. “I’m out with people—and they’re happy people!” he says.

What is a ‘third place’?

The theory around third places originated with sociologist Roy Oldenburg, author of the book *Celebrating the Third Place*. Your first place? It’s your home, wrote Oldenburg, who died in 2022. Your second place? Until retirement, it’s work. But each of us needs an additional third place to relax

Looking for Washington’s Mike Ragan? You’ll likely find him on the dance floor.

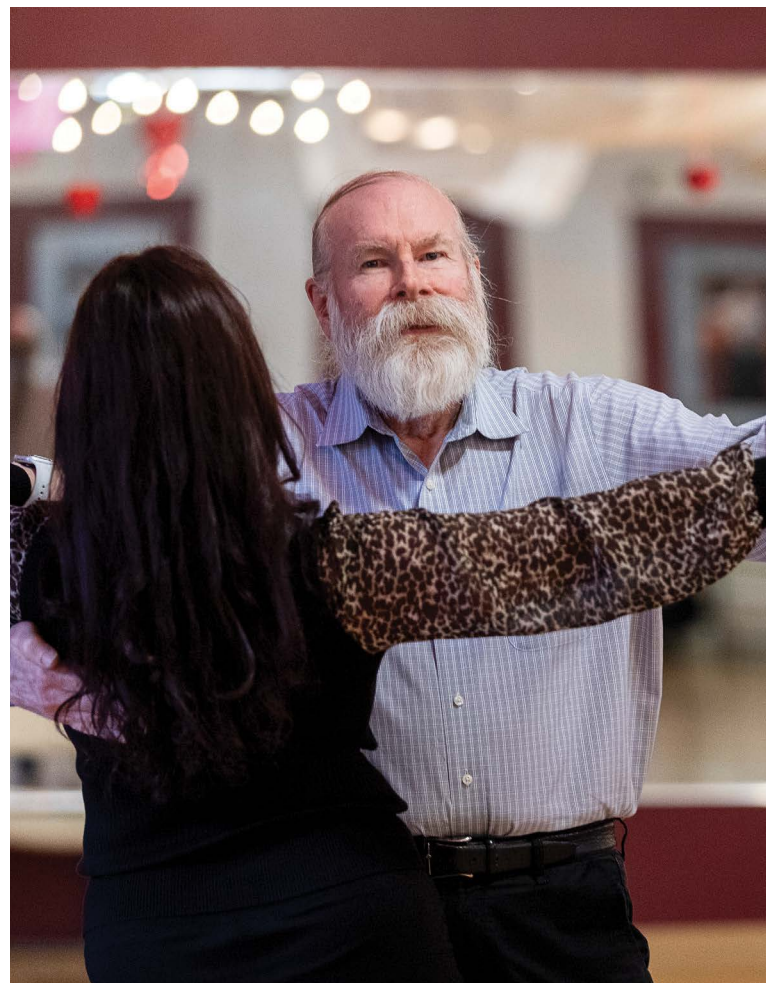


PHOTO: DANIEL SHEEHAN



Cynthia Miles-Peebles’ “three places” are her family, her union, and her church in Tuscaloosa, Ala. She’s pictured here (on right) with the UniServ Director LaKeitha Benson.

“These places help us connect with other people and make us feel like we belong,” Rhubart says. And, in case you are wondering, Facebook doesn’t count. “Face-to-face interaction really matters,” Rhubart explains.

You have to reach out

For retirees, it’s complicated. Not only do you need a third place, but retirement means you’ve recently lost your second place. And, if you’re like Kari Vanderjack, of Illinois, you’ve also uprooted your first place.

When Vanderjack retired, in 2020, in the middle of the pandemic, she sold her suburban Chicago home and moved three hours south to a lakefront community in Effingham, Ill.

“All of a sudden, we had nobody,” she recalls. “We had no friends down here—and we couldn’t go anywhere. Everything was closed!”

When businesses started opening up, in late 2020, Vanderjack was intentional in reaching out. She’d always been an active Illinois Education Association (IEA)

in public, encounter familiar faces, and make new acquaintances, Oldenburg suggested.

Warm and welcoming, third places are where we make friends and have a little fun, which makes them critical to our well-being. The more interactions we have, whether with strangers or old friends, the happier we tend to be, a 2022 Harvard University study found.

Friendships among older adults are also tied to better health and longer lives. But third places don’t just benefit individuals, they make for healthier communities by tying us together, says Penn

State sociology professor Danielle Rhubart.

For Alabama retired teacher Cynthia Miles-Peebles, the 8 a.m. service at Tuscaloosa’s Elizabeth Baptist Church is a third place. “It’s an assembly with like-minded people—and I draw strength from that,” Miles-Peebles says.

Think dog parks, coffee shops, churches, neighborhood bars or fast-food joints, and senior centers—all of these are third places (if we put down our phones while we’re there!). Anyone can walk in and linger. Cost is minimal. Conversation is almost guaranteed.

“These places help us connect with other people and make us feel like we belong.”

—Danielle Rhubart, sociologist, Penn State

PHOTO: MICHAEL J. MOORE

NEA-
RETIRED
feature



"Knowing that there are people out there who care about each other gives me peace of mind."

—Annie Baker, retired computer technician, Alaska

member, so she started with the local IEA-Retired chapter. That became her new second place, as Vanderjack attends monthly chapter meetings and social events, and serves as the retired liaison to the local active union.

After that, her third place was a cinch. "My husband and I ... joined four bowling leagues!" she says.

Vanderjack, who is 59, has been bowling almost all her life. When she was a kid, she pedaled her bike to a bowling alley about a half-mile from her childhood home to practice her sport. As an educator, she coached the local high school's team. And one of her sons bowled in college.

"We're a bowling family," Vanderjack says.

As soon as she could, Vanderjack reached out to bowling leagues in her new hometown. "I put my name

out there," she says. She was quickly offered several roster slots.

To make social connections, you have to make an effort, she advises. The door may be open, but you have to walk through.

'Just start talking'

Another Oldenburg-style third place is the YMCA. When Arizona retiree Janice Dwosh turned 65, her Medicare Advantage plan offered a free gym membership.

"I was walking, but I wanted to participate in activities with other people," recalls the former elementary school teacher. "So I said OK!"

Dwosh signed up for trainer-led, older-adult classes at the YMCA Desert Foothills, in Scottsdale, joining about 60 women and 5 men.

"I met a woman who I basically grew up with in

Southern California. We were in next-door high schools, both on drill team. Never met until this class, and now I've been to her house, and she's been to mine," Dwosh says. "You just start talking to people, and then you're making friends, going out for coffee."

When Dwosh hurt her shoulder, she turned the physical therapy office into a temporary third place, making friends among the other patients.

Dwosh has also dug deeper into the Arizona Education Association Retired and NEA-Retired. In recent years, she has developed and provided trainings on social and racial justice for aspiring, active, and retired educators.

"I can see my knowledge being used for good purposes," she says, adding that it's "tremendously enjoyable" and rewarding.

Don't forget your union!

Can NEA-Retired or your local chapter be a third place? Local union meetings have many welcoming characteristics. They're also fun!

Vanderjack's retired chapter investigates the best local hamburgers, hosts game days, and more. At meetings, you'll see old friends and make new ones.

Still, you have to be a retired educator and union member to attend. In that respect, your retiree union should be considered your new second place.

Illinois' Kari Vanderjack has always been able to find friends—and roll a strike—at a bowling alley.



How to Find Your Third Place

- 1) Start with your union,** suggests Washington retiree Mike Ragan. Your NEA state affiliate can help you connect with your local NEA-Retired chapter. Mark your calendar for their events, which likely range from lobbying days to game nights at a local coffee shop.
- 2) Find a hobby that interests you.** From knitting to blacksmithing, there's probably a local shop or club you can join. Hobbies don't have to be the same activities you did as an educator, says Arizona retiree Janice Dwosh. These days, she and her husband like to go to wine tastings!
- 3) Be creative,** suggests Penn State's Danielle Rhubarb. If your community doesn't have a "third place," think about starting one in underutilized spaces. Rhubarb points to a small New York town that shows movies in a park on Friday nights. Residents bring their own chairs and chat before the film rolls.

When Annie Baker retired from Alaska's Fairbanks North Star Borough School District, in 2020, she felt a little lost. She had worked as a computer technician for 30 years and had been a union member since age 16.

"It's something I need in my life! I missed it," she says. She jumped at the chance to serve on an NEA-Alaska organizing team that traverses the massive state to talk with current and potential members.

Baker also volunteers as communications chair for NEA-Alaska/Retired. "I hate to say [retirees] have more time on their hands, but I do think we have more time than active members," she says.

If union organizing is your passion, dive in, she says. If you live in Alaska and sharing recipes is your thing, send

one to Baker, and she'll put it in the newsletter! Her union is a big tent where everybody looks out for each other.

"Knowing that there are people out there who care about each other gives me peace of mind," she says.

Similarly, when Miles-Peebles retired, she asked herself, "OK, what do I love?" "I kept saying to myself, 'I love children.' But I also am an advocate for educators," she says.

"I want to fight for the rights of educators. Whether you're a classroom teacher, administrator, bus driver, lunchroom worker, janitor—I don't care. We're all working for the betterment of students."

This sense of mission fuels Miles-Peebles, who is president of the Tuscaloosa Education Retirees Associa-

tion and a district director. As she travels throughout her state, she organizes Alabama Education Association members and meets with state legislators to advocate for educators and students.

"I've been to about seven legislative contact dinners in the last 30 days, ... and that's a really important space for me," Miles-Peebles says. "I explain to [state lawmakers] the importance of supporting retirees. Here in Alabama, 60 percent of ... retirees live below the federal poverty level. That's terrible!"

She adds: "That's my passion—that's what gets me riled up."

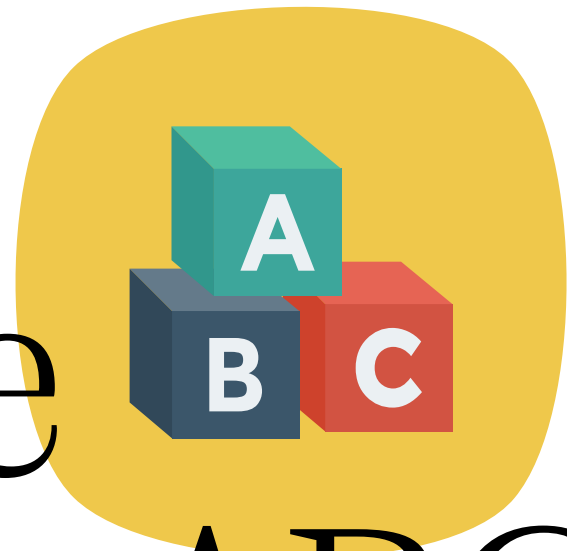
Her advice to retirees? "Dig into your heart and find your passion. Life is short. When you retire, don't just look out the window. Get outside." ☘



"You just start talking to people, and then you're making friends, going out for coffee."

—Janice Dwosh, former elementary school teacher, Arizona

More Than ABCs



At Arcola Elementary School, in Maryland, Rita Bamba's students play with blocks to develop fine motor skills and social skills.

By Cindy Long

INVESTING IN QUALITY PRESCHOOLS DELIVERS RESULTS FOR STUDENTS AND OUR COUNTRY

There's magic in Rita Bamba's preschool classroom. It's filled with color and light, and it hums with chatter and music, punctuated by squeals of delight.

Vibrant bulletin boards, posters, and children's artwork cover the walls, streamers hang from the ceiling, and shelves brim with treasures, like Play-Doh, colorful blocks, and tiny instruments for tiny hands.

"We have all of these things for a reason," Bamba says. "We want to spark their imaginations and foster learning through play."

Most students in her class at Arcola Elementary School, in Silver Spring, Md., are eligible to attend the program for free, based on their family's income.

"I work with a lot of students who are English language learners, and many come in with little to no English," Bamba says. "The earlier these children are in school and exposed to language and vocabulary, the better. All children need to learn how to express themselves, manage behavior, and follow routines. It's so important to their future learning. They need this foundation."

But a huge population of children in the United States don't get that foundation.



Rita Bamba

Setting up students for success

The KIDS COUNT Data Center tracked national preschool enrollment by family income level each year from 2005 – 2019. During that time period, about 60 percent of low-income kids (those below 200 percent of the federal poverty guideline) did not attend preschool, while 46 percent of higher-income kids (those above 200 percent of the poverty level) also did not attend. (The federal poverty guideline for a family of four in the contiguous United States was \$19,350 in 2005 and \$25,750 in 2019.)

The U.S. lags behind many countries in providing critical early-learning opportunities for children, despite abundant research proving the benefits for students and for the country's population as a whole.

In the 2023 report *Early Childhood Education: Health, Equity, and Economics*, authors Robert A. Hahn and W. Steven Barnett conducted a review of scientific evidence about preschool. The researchers found that preschool education for 3- and 4-year-olds can reduce educational gaps and improve health and even lead to longer lifespans.

"The evidence suggests greater gains for those in poverty, but because children in middle-income

households also benefit, gains accrue to the population as a whole," they write. "We recommend public funding for preschool education for all 3- and 4-year-olds."

These outcomes hinge on a key factor—attending a high-quality preschool.

"High-quality preschool programs provide much more than just the ABCs and counting. They support the development of the whole child—cognitive, social, emotional, and physical," write Hahn and Barnett. "The programs we found to be effective had better-prepared, better-paid teachers and smaller classes."

Lack of fair compensation is a major barrier to high-quality preschool.

Tilesa McFee is a paraeducator with the Colonial Early Education Program, in New Castle, Del., who led a training at NEA's 2024 Education Support Professional conference called "Preschool is Real School."

Lacking fair compensation

She knows what a high-quality preschool program looks like, but the funding and salaries don't reflect the education she and other early educators provide.

"We need a salary that fairly compensates us for what we are expected to do," McFee says. Preschool educators typically earn less than half of what other classroom teachers make, but

The Benefits of Pre-K

The federal Head Start program reduces depression and the use of alcohol and tobacco by middle school.

SOURCE: WASHINGTON STATE INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY



Head Start participation leads to reduced mortality as well as educational gains.

SOURCE: NATIONAL BUREAU OF ECONOMIC RESEARCH



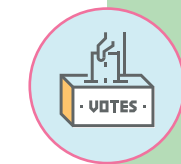
Students who attend preschool are more likely to enroll in Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate courses; less likely to fail courses or be chronically absent; and more likely to graduate high school on time and enroll in college.

SOURCE: GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY



They are even more likely to be registered to vote and participate in civic engagement.

SOURCE: GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY



More Than ABCs

their work, as the research shows, has far-reaching impacts—all of which makes the jobs of elementary, middle, and high school teachers easier.

"The educators throughout the district say they love our students," McFee says. "They recognize they're well prepared for school because they know routines and have the behavior and emotional balance needed to start the academic process. They achieve more in class because they have a solid foundation."

McFee's goals for her students are self-regulation, fine-motor skills, social skills, creativity, and problem-solving. "Exposure to literacy and numeracy is important, but we focus on helping the children express themselves, be creative and curious, and solve problems without giving up," she says.

(Below) Bamba teaches words and syllables with the help of pictures and blocks. Frog is one block, puppy is two. (Right) A child explores music with a small keyboard.



Teaching students to be 'comeback kids'

Anyone who has spent time with 3- and 4-year-olds knows that when something they build falls apart or another child has a toy they want, emotional fireworks flare. Early educators know how to handle these meltdowns.

"[We] don't take for granted how hard waiting in line is for little ones," McFee says.

To help them build coping skills, she continually repeats affirmations.

"I'm like a broken record, but soon the kids will repeat what I'm saying and internalize it," she says.



"You can do hard things," she'll say when a child struggles. "I know this is hard for you, but you can do hard things."

"I can do hard things," the child repeats.

"You can handle this," she'll say when a child is crying from frustration. "I can handle this," the child eventually repeats.

"No biggie, no sweat," she'll say after an accident or mistake. "We won't make small problems into big problems."

One of her favorites? "You can be a comeback kid."

"I tell them that no matter what happened a minute ago, an hour ago, a day ago, they can start fresh and be a comeback kid," McFee says.

Sometimes she and the other educators will have to sit with a child, tell them they are safe, and take time to breathe, reset, and recover.

"We are always modeling this," she says. "We work through it with them."

McFee guides students but also steps back to allow them to develop social skills. A key component of preschool is fostering the ability to form peer relationships.



Deneshia Smith, a paraeducator in Bamba's classroom, tells stories as the children learn to sit quietly and listen.

Letting imagination run wild

In Rita Bamba's classroom, she and paraeducator Deneshia Smith also step back and let the children lead.

"We have some structured activities, but we don't limit them to use lessons or materials the way we planned," Bamba says. "They are more creative than we are!"

One day, the educators asked students to create a movie theater—and let them run with the idea.

The children taped together big pieces of paper for the screen, set up rows of chairs, and ripped and crumpled yellow sheets of construction paper because, obviously, they needed popcorn. They even made candy and soda machines.

"We ask them guiding questions, but they think of anything and everything on their own," Bamba says. "It's so exciting to see their creativity. Let the children lead the way!" 🎬

"Exposure to literacy and numeracy is important, but we focus on helping the children express themselves, be creative and curious, and solve problems without giving up."

—Tilisha McFee (right), paraeducator, Delaware



For example, she had a boy in her class with aggressive behavior, and the other students steered clear of him. He had special toys in the room that he guarded protectively.

One day a little girl decided she wanted to sit next to him to play. She asked, and McFee agreed. The boy ignored her, but they played peaceably side by side. She sat next to him the next day, and the next day, and the day after that. One day, he gave her one of his special toys.

"Here was a girl who decided to be his friend, and something in her was able to unlock him," McFee recalls. "We'd been working with him on social and emotional skills, but nothing we did was as effective as another child reaching out in friendship."

Before long, the other kids wanted to be his friend, too. Eventually, the boy said he couldn't wait to go outside and play with his new friends.

LEARN MORE

Take a look inside Rita Bamba's magical classroom at nea.org/prek.

Winning Streak

By Amanda Litvinov

HOW NEA LOCALS ARE DEFEATING TOXIC, FAR-RIGHT SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDATES—AND YOURS CAN, TOO.

Community pride was on vivid display during the annual homecoming parade in Johnston, Iowa—a conservative-leaning suburb of Des Moines with a small-town vibe.

At the September event, Johnston High School athletes proudly wore their purple-and-black school colors as they tossed candy to youngsters from flatbed floats. The dance troupe performed to the beat of the marching band, and the mayor waved from the back of a convertible.

But many students, parents, and educators felt unsettled when a red Jeep festooned with Donald Trump flags rolled past. It followed a truck that was plastered with signs for four school board candidates endorsed by Moms 4 Liberty (M4L)—an ultra-conservative political group founded by three former school board members from Florida. Floats promoting presidential candidates are prohibited under parade guidelines. But M4L had become emboldened in Johnston after the group swept the 2021 school board election, taking three of the board’s seven seats.

“It was a huge wake-up call for our local,” says middle school band teacher Patrick Kearney, who is also president of the Johnston Education Association. “I’ve served alongside probably a hundred school board members—most of them, I couldn’t have told you what their political affiliations were. But that all changed in 2021.”

That’s when M4L targeted Johnston and several other communities across the country for school board takeovers. By 2023, M4L needed to win just one more seat to have a majority.

In Iowa, school boards vote on whether to negotiate a contract with the local educator unions. With an M4L majority, it’s likely that the Johnston Education Association’s contract would have been gutted.

The stakes last November could not have been higher.

The real Moms 4 Liberty agenda

In summer 2023, a speaker at the M4L conference in Philadelphia applauded the group’s school board “blitz strategy”—pushing a flurry of ultra-conservative

policies at the same time so communities have little opportunity to resist.

M4L’s ultimate goal is to stamp out curricula, books, and discussions that examine gender, sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity. Their chapters use tactics like banning books, grandstanding at school board meetings, and relentlessly targeting individual board members and educators with harassing and even threatening messages online.

Maurice Cunningham, a retired professor from the University of Massachusetts Boston and author of *Dark Money and the Politics of School Privatization*, explains M4L’s unlikely “origin story,” which involves three moms around a kitchen table. The reality, he says, looks more like this: Well-connected billionaires funded and launched M4L and called upon the conservative media to elevate the group, seemingly overnight.

Who are these funders? “Wealthy, White oligarchs, the most right-wing and tax averse people who don’t want to spend their

Iowa band teacher and local leader Patrick Kearney helped stop a Moms 4 Liberty takeover of his school board.



billions to give other people’s kids a fair chance,” Cunningham adds.

The professor’s years of research revealed that most of these groups are connected to one of two major operations that have long sought to privatize public education.

The first is the Koch network, headed by libertarian billionaire Charles Koch, famous for his efforts to eliminate government and privatize public services. The other is the Council for National Policy, an umbrella group of far-right donors, evangelical advocacy groups, and organizations like Turning Point USA, which has promoted anti-LGBTQ+ conspiracy theories, and the National Rifle Association.

M4L is the latest attempt in the radical right’s decades-long quest to ripen communities for privatization. Their strategy? Pit small groups of parents against local public schools and educators.

In that effort, M4L employs such damaging rhetoric against educators, People of Color, LGBTQ+ people, and the government that they were labeled an “extremist” group by the Southern Poverty Law Center in 2022.

‘My world would just crumble into chaos’

Last year, ninth-grade English teacher Bill Senavaitis had terrific mornings and nightmarish afternoons.

“I was teaching one of my favorite groups of kids I’ve ever taught in my career.

They were just goofy, smart, lovable kids, and I had such a good start to my day with them,” says Senavaitis, who has worked in the Central Bucks School District, in Pennsylvania, for his entire 21-year career. “Then my local president release time would start in the afternoon, and my world would just crumble into chaos.”

The M4L majority that had controlled the school board since 2021 seemed to

“I’ve served alongside probably a hundred school board members—most of them, I couldn’t have told you what their political affiliations were. But that all changed in 2021.”

—Patrick Kearney, Johnston Education Association, Iowa



Bill Senavaitis

Winning Streak

be going down a checklist of culture war items—banning books and political statements, which M4L said included Pride flags.

“That really affected some of our educators deeply,” Senavaitis says.

As specific books were banned, teachers got nervous and pulled other similar titles. “I had one member who gave away her entire classroom library over the summer,” he recalls.

Members called him in tears. He attended at least a dozen disciplinary hearings, including one for a librarian who had displayed a quote from Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel on Holocaust Remembrance Day.

By then, Senavaitis felt unsafe attending board meetings—ever since a man armed with a gun and knife had started showing up. The situation was reported to the school board president, who did nothing.

“We used to have such a sense of pride about working in Central Bucks,” says Cara Alderfer, who took over from Senavaitis as Central Bucks Education Association president this year. “But last year, when I told people where I worked, they were like, ‘Oh, I’m so sorry to hear what you have been going through.’”

Reclaiming school boards

Diana Leygerman, a former teacher and the parent of two school-age children, saw what was happening. Leygerman, who lost a bid for school board in 2021, had helped found Central Bucks Neighbors United (CB Neighbors), a political action committee (PAC) that raises funds for pro-public education candidates.

“I decided that my job in the year and a half leading up to the 2023 school board elections

Diana Leygerman

was to make sure that as many people in the community as possible heard what was really going on with the school board and all the money that was being wasted,” she says, referring to the board’s decision to give the superintendent an \$85,000 raise followed by a \$700,000 separation agreement when he resigned.

CB Neighbors recruited five candidates to run on a pro-public education platform. They also signed up volunteers to knock on doors and make phone calls.

“I knew we could win because we did not run on fear,” she says. “We did not run on anger and smear campaigns. ... We ran on



‘Students need us to run’

Ava Chiao (right) was a high school science teacher with 19 years of experience—and the only candidate with a teaching credential when she ran for the Cupertino Union School District board, in 2022. It wasn’t easy. She had to endure a smear campaign from well-funded opponents. But she stayed true to her values. “The truth is, our students need us to run,” Chiao says.

Her bid was successful, thanks in part to the skills she acquired at NEA’s See Educators Run candidate training program. Hear Ava’s story and those of other educators who have run for office at nea.org/SeeEducatorsRun.

making our schools better and overturning the extremist policies.” Still, she cried “happy tears” on election night, after all of their candidates triumphed.

Election night was cause for celebration back in Johnston, Iowa, too. There, the pro-public education candidates backed by the local and the Iowa State Education Association (ISEA) shut out all four M4L candidates. ISEA had joined forces with Alliance for a Better Iowa and other local allies to inform voters through mail, text messages, and digital campaigns about what was at stake.

“We clearly identified for voters the differences between those two slates of candidates on every issue, from book banning to supporting our LGBTQ kids,” Kearney says. “The results weren’t even that close.”

Across Iowa, more than 90 percent of school board candidates recommended by ISEA beat M4L candidates.

Nationwide, nearly 80 percent of school board candidates recommended by NEA affiliates won their races in 2023.

If they can do it ...

When Pennsylvania’s Central York Education Association (CYEA) set out to elect pro-public education candidates to their school board, they had to face a tough fact: According to the data, they could not win.

Voters in their district had favored Donald Trump in 2016 by more than 25 percentage points. But then-CYEA Vice President Gina Grolemond wasn’t cowed by the data.

“We were tired of having no voice in the school district,” she says, recalling a string of harmful moves by the board, including their refusal to reverse a failed instructional program and their attempt to shutter summer meals programs at three schools.

Grolemond was determined to help good candidates run, but lacked campaign experience. By chance, she met fellow



(Left to right) Teachers Mike Mountz and Gina Grolemond teamed up with Samantha Schlundt, of the Pennsylvania State Education Association, to reclaim the school board in Central York County.

Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA) member Mike Mountz, a high school social studies teacher who—incredibly—had spent a decade running congressional, state, and local campaigns as his second job.

Mountz works in the York Suburban School District, but lives in neighboring Central York. After politely declining Grolemond’s invitation to run for school board, Mountz agreed to help with the race. He later founded the bipartisan Citizens for Central York School District PAC.

Grolemond and Mountz organized a cadre of members, parents, and other community volunteers who did everything from signature gathering to data entry to phone banking and canvassing.

With the help of PSEA data guru Samantha Schlundt, they curated precise lists of voters likely to connect with their messages.

Door knockers focused conversations on the damage the current school board was inflicting on students—including an infamous book ban that blocked more than 300 titles. They spelled out how electing

pro-public education candidates would make things better.

“When I explained to volunteers that it’s really going door-to-door to educate voters, not to convince them to change their mind, they were much more comfortable,” Grolemond says.

Today, after winning seats in 2021 and 2023, the Central York school board is pro-public education and includes two PSEA members. It is also more diverse. There are now two Black board members and another who identifies as gender non-conforming. “[That’s] in a district that previously banned the biographies of Martin Luther King Jr., and Harvey Milk,” Mountz notes.

The Central York school board wins may sound like a small miracle, but they were achieved through smart strategy and hard work.

“I want other locals to know that you don’t need a book ban or a huge protest or \$100,000 or CNN coverage to win tough school board races,” Mountz says. “It’s about talking to the right voters. Any other local could do this, too.” 🗳️

Knock, knock. Who’s there?



Canvassing (or door knocking) is one of the best ways to get voters to the polls for pro-public education candidates. Listen along as NEA member Stephanie Bernholz-Leuschner (above) makes the rounds in her town.



SCAN THE QR CODE to hear the audio story, or go to nea.org/doorknocking.

GIVE ME A BATHROOM BREAK!

By Mary Ellen Flannery

NO TIME TO 'GO'? IT CAN LEAD TO SERIOUS HEALTH ISSUES. YOUR UNION CAN HELP.

Virginia teacher Liz Boddye might be wearing incontinence underwear today. "If I'm sick or coughing, there's no hope for me. I'm going to be frank about that," she says.

Boddye is only 42. But she's also a mother and a teacher—and these factors don't work in her favor when it comes to bladder issues and bathroom access.

How hard is it for most classroom educators to use the bathroom when they need to? Too hard, educators say. Despite federal requirements that guarantee U.S. workers the right to use an employer-provided toilet when they need to, the reality is that many teachers regularly stretch their bladders for hours.

"That's so cute when you say federally protected rights. It's also in county code!" says Boddye, who works in a self-contained classroom for students with emotional disabilities in Prince William County, Virginia. She can't just leave her kids, not even for a duty-free lunch.

"Today, for example, I didn't get lunch—and I didn't go to the bathroom for like three hours after I had to go," she says.

Holding in a half-liter of pee through reading, math, and science, or back-to-back-to-back block periods, can have lifelong consequences. There's a

reason that urologists call it "teacher bladder." Is there another profession that requires a master's degree, but also demands you put on Depends?

But solutions are possible, union leaders say. Working through your building reps, sitting down at the bargaining table, and taking the issue to state lawmakers are all viable strategies to protect your right to toilet access.

'I hope I don't drip'

Incontinence supplies are not the solution, says South Carolina professor Jonathan Coker. Relaxing teacher dress codes so that educators can wear easy-to-slide-off yoga pants is another non-answer, he says.

For his 2022 research on teachers' bathroom breaks, Coker talked to a Georgia high school teacher who miscarried because of chronic dehydration. She avoided drinking because she didn't have time for the toilet.

"We have six minutes between bells. We're supposed to be in the hallway for those whole six minutes," she told Coker.

A second teacher told him she packs lunch with an eye to what might cause a bowel movement. (She doesn't have time in her workday for bowel movements.)



Educator Liz Boddye finds it almost impossible to get coverage for bathroom breaks. Now her body is saying she better get it, fast.

Hear what educators are saying about their urinary tracts

When we asked on *NEA Today's* Facebook page about the physical toll of teaching, this is what we heard:

"I have had two procedures because of my 'overactive' bladder. I retire in six months and can't wait to go to the bathroom anytime I need to."

—Emily M.

"Interstitial cystitis, aka painful bladder syndrome."

—Sherri J.

"Four kidney stones and six UTI infections in one year!!"

—Joycelyn W.

"I restricted my fluid intake while teaching a SPED class, so I would not have to leave to go to the bathroom. I came down with a kidney infection and kidney stones."

—Susan D.

"Three letters: UTI."

—Betsy C.

"A urologist told me once that teachers, truck drivers, and nurses have the worst bladders."

—Mary Jane B.

"Today, for example, I didn't get lunch—and I didn't go to the bathroom for like three hours after I had to go."

—Liz Boddye, special education teacher, Virginia

GIVE ME A BATHROOM BREAK!

"I'm really proud that we thought of this [contract language], but I'm also sad it has to be in there, because it speaks to a larger systemic issue."

—Liv Perez, co-president of the Coalition of Educators for Change, California

A Maine educator recounted how menstrual blood once dripped down her leg, in her classroom, because she hadn't had time to change her tampon. "I kept thinking, I hope I don't drip on the floor," she told Coker.

"The stories are just so harrowing," he says. "Hearing people describe in graphic detail their bodies being hurt, every day. I wasn't expecting to be addressing so much violence."

Coker, who did this research as part of his doctoral dissertation, notes the problem is often overlooked or dismissed, probably because it mostly affects women.

To Coker, the answer is funding. "The question is, who is going to supervise these kids if I run out of the room?" he says. "We need to put more pressure on school districts, on governments, to provide more funding so that we can have more teachers' aides. Teachers with aides don't have bathroom problems," he says.

Your union has answers

Teachers at six charter schools in Oakland, Calif., also don't have bathroom problems. Their contract, which they bargained in 2020, guarantees them a lavatory within 400 feet of their classrooms. Where that's not possible, they go no more than two consecutive hours of work without a bathroom break.

"There aren't many professions that expect professionals to do their work without bathroom breaks," says Liv Perez, co-president of the

Oakland union, the Coalition of Educators for Change. Since ratifying their first contract in 2020, Perez says coalition members have not experienced any delays in getting the breaks they need.

"I'm really proud that we thought of this [contract language], but I'm also sad it has to be in there, because it speaks to a larger systemic issue," she adds.



Liv Perez

Similarly, in Orange County, Florida, contract language added in 2019 guarantees teachers the right to call the office at any time of day and get classroom coverage without delay.

Before negotiations, union leaders surveyed members and found that 47 percent were supervising students for three or more continuous hours.

Two-thirds said they avoided drinking water and 20 percent had sought medical care for bladder-related issues.

Most of all, speak up!

Bargaining for more planning time can also help create opportunities for teachers to go to the bathroom.

After teachers went on strike in Portland, Ore., in 2023, their guaranteed planning time jumped from 320 minutes per week to 410. And, in Andover, Mass., teachers recently won 15 minutes a day of unstructured time through bargaining.

In places where collective bargaining rights are curtailed, go to your statehouse. In 2022, South Carolina elementary and special education teachers persuaded lawmakers to guarantee at least 30 minutes a day of duty-free time for the educators. At least 23 other states have similar laws, according to *Education Week*.

Most of all, speak up, urges Sarah Polda, a Washington high school teacher who has experienced bladder issues.

"My generation suffered in silence," says Polda, who is 63. "Call the office and make someone show up. Have building [or association] reps make this a part of their agenda when meeting with administration."

After decades of inadequate bathroom breaks, retired educator Kenneth Haines needs 24/7 access to a toilet, making it impossible for him to continue teaching.

When she was a building representative, Polda worked on expanding the number of administrators and employees who could watch a class for five minutes. The more people, the better.

The 'happy' bladder

Urologists do indeed call it 'teacher bladder,' confirms Dr. Lori Lerner, a Massachusetts urologist. Imagine your bladder works like a pair of elastic-waist pants, she says. Stretch them, and stretch them, and you get saggy pants, right?

"We see people who hold [pee] in to such a degree that it will take several contractions for them to empty. In the worst scenario, those people will lose bladder function. They've stretched the muscle to such a degree that it can't contract," she warns.

While plenty of men have incontinence, it's far more common among women. Shorter urethras and post-pregnancy loss of muscle tone in the urethra can lead to stress incontinence, which—after giving birth five times—is Boddye's issue.

A "happy bladder" is hydrated and emptied regularly, Lerner says. Coffee is an irritant, but water is great, she adds.

Retired Maryland teacher Kenneth Haines did hydrate, he says—at 4:30 a.m., when he woke up to grade papers, drink water, and pee. But frequently, 12 hours would pass before he saw a toilet again. His high school campus was huge—the few staff bathrooms were far apart—and he simply didn't have time to go.

After 30 years of "holding it in," Haines now needs 24-hour access to a toilet (per his urologist), and it takes him three to five minutes to empty his bladder. He'd love to be teaching today, but these issues make it impossible. It's a poor reason to lose a successful educator, he grimly points out.

Retired Michigan teacher Karen Eglinton has also been in the care of a urologist for 30 years. "When I started, in 1975, we didn't usually get any breaks until lunch," she says. And even then, it wasn't guaranteed. "I had a colleague who got desperate once and went to the kids' bathroom. She had a kid look over the top of the stall and say, 'Hi, missus!'"

Today, Eglinton has stress incontinence, frequent bladder infections, and is unable to urinate without the help of gravity. "When you're young, you don't think it's an important thing," she sighs. ☹️



PHOTO: JATI LINDSEY

PHOTO: COURTESY OF LIV PEREZ

59%

OF TEACHERS SURVEYED COULDN'T EASILY TAKE A RESTROOM BREAK.

54.7%

CONSUMED LESS THAN 2 CUPS OF WATER PER WORKDAY.

SOURCE: WINCHESTER, HOOPER & KERCH, INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND ERGONOMICS, 2022

Want to negotiate for bathroom access?

Share this contract language, from Florida's Orange County Classroom Teachers Association, with your local union leaders:

"Administrators will cooperate with employees in making arrangements for a break in either the morning or afternoon. Employees needing to use the restroom may call the office at any time of the day to receive relief without a delay."

BARGAIN THIS

For more, go to nea.org/bathroombreaks.

The World's Oldest Hatred

EVERY STUDENT SHOULD BE SAFE FROM FEAR AND HATE.
YOU CAN HELP END ANTISEMITISM.



By Brenda Álvarez

With the rise of white nationalism, the number of antisemitic threats in K–12 schools has escalated—increasing even more since the Israel-Hamas war began. How we talk to students about antisemitism is critical. We can help them learn how to stand up to hate, bigotry, and bias.

To that end, NEA has curated a list of resources from respected organizations. These tools can help you teach the history and significance of the Holocaust and address antisemitism, including anti-Jewish incidents and bias in schools.

LEARN
MORE

For more curated resources, visit
nea.org/EndAntisemitism.

AN ANTISEMITISM CHECKLIST

The NEA Jewish Affairs Caucus has developed a checklist, **“Screening Out Jew Hate: An Antisemitism Checklist for Pre-K through Higher Education,”** to help educators identify and respond to anti-Jewish hate crimes and hate incidents in educational spaces. This tool provides clear examples of when a hate crime or hate bias incident has occurred.

Download at bit.ly/NEAJACTool.

RESPONDING TO ANTISEMITISM IN THE CLASSROOM

The organization **Facing History & Ourselves** uses research-based resources to challenge teachers and students to stand up to bigotry and hate. Their ready-to-use lessons provide historical context and also connect past antisemitism to the present uptick in antisemitic violence. One such lesson presents examples of young people standing up to hate.

Learn more at bit.ly/AntisemitismResponses.

A BRIEF GUIDE TO ANTISEMITISM

The organization **T’ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights** empowers rabbis and cantors to advance democracy and human rights for all people in the United States, Canada, Israel, and the occupied Palestinian territories. The group’s free booklet, ***A Very Brief Guide to Antisemitism***, provides context, language, and tools to help fight antisemitism, along with all other forms of racial, cultural, religious, and gender oppression.

Visit truah.org/antisemitism.

TEACHING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HOLOCAUST

With a library of comprehensive Holocaust content, **Echoes & Reflections** empowers middle school and high school educators with dynamic classroom materials and professional development to help teach the history and significance of the Holocaust. These resources include lesson plans, activities, podcasts, and a timeline. The group also offers educator programs that foster confidence and amplify the skills needed to teach about the Holocaust in a comprehensive and meaningful way.

Go to echoesandreflections.org/teach.

JEWISH AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

Students are more successful when they can see themselves in their schools and curriculum; and all students benefit when they can learn from a variety of experiences and perspectives. May is Jewish American Heritage month and offers an opportunity to honor the past and present contributions of Jewish Americans.

Find curated resources and lesson plans that explore Jewish Americans’ diversity, history, and more, at jewishamericanheritage.org.

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7 Ways to Reduce Classroom Noise and Chatter

By Madelaine Vikse



1. Build relationships with students.

Spend time getting to know your students. Figure out what they like and don't like and what kind of learners they are. This can help you to understand your students' individual needs. If certain students are more introverted and work better alone, consider giving them a chance to work on their own during a group activity.



2. Set classroom rules and expectations.

The first time you meet with your students, establish classroom rules—such as listen and don't interrupt while others are speaking. This way students know what's expected of them from the beginning of the school year.



3. Explain what will happen in class that day.

What topics will be covered? What activities will students do? Will there be time for discussion? What assignments will they have? This way your students will know what's coming.



4. Make lessons engaging.

Plan exercises to keep students focused. These can relate to the lesson and help foster discussion and communication among the students. They'll have the chance to connect with each other while also diving deeper into the topic.



5. Start class with an activity.

Have a few ideas in your back pocket and use the one that suits the mood of the class that day.



6. Set discussion times.

Let students know in advance when they will be able to talk to each other. This structure encourages them to hold their conversations for the appropriate time.



7. Reward a class if they are on track.

If the group is staying focused and listening respectfully while others are talking, reward them with a movie day, or dedicate one class to a study period. Pick whatever works best for you and your students.



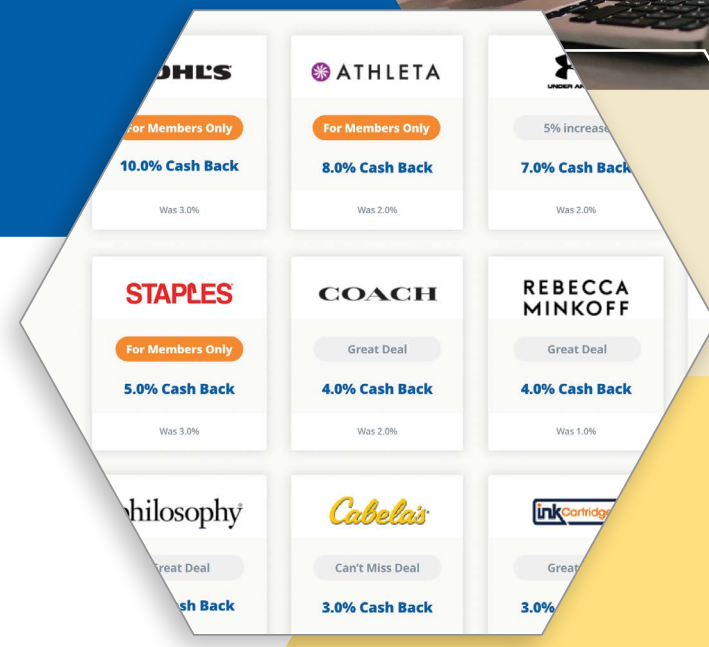
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