

neaToday

NEA TODAY for NEA-RETIRED MEMBERS

An edition of NEA Today

NEA
Members
Insurance Trust
Annual Report
PAGE 39



inside

Social Security Fairness Act: What
it means for you SEE PAGE 26

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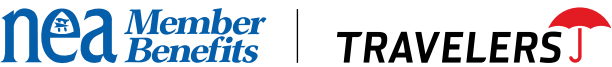
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JOIN THE
CONVERSATION



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.

COVER: DIEGO BLANCO; ABOVE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: DIEGO BLANCO; MARY RAFFERTY; COURTESY OF PAIGE KISTNER/PAWS & PEERS; COURTESY OF JUDITH GENONE

Neighbor

Teacher

Volunteer



It's your moment to volunteer
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This year marks the 60th anniversary of the AmeriCorps Seniors Foster Grandparent Program - six decades of older adults making a lasting impact on the lives of children in their communities. When you become a Foster Grandparent Program volunteer, you'll provide guidance, mentorship, and emotional support to a child who needs you. In return, you'll find purpose, connection, and the joy of making a difference. Help celebrate 60 years of service by starting your journey today.

AmeriCorps.gov/YourMoment



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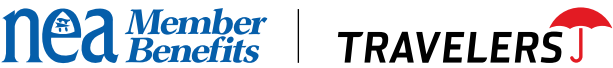
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MISSION, VISION, AND values



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OUR VISION IS A GREAT PUBLIC SCHOOL FOR EVERY STUDENT.

OUR MISSION

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

OUR CORE VALUES

These principles guide our work and define our mission:

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY.

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

A JUST SOCIETY.

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

DEMOCRACY.

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

PROFESSIONALISM.

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

PARTNERSHIP.

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

COLLECTIVE ACTION.

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

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PRESIDENT'S *viewpoint*

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



The Importance of Membership

Retirement marks the conclusion of our active professional careers, but it does not signify the end of intellectual engagement and contribution to our field. Maintaining membership in our local, state, and national professional associations holds great significance.

So what are we waiting for? Membership is everyone's responsibility. NEA-Retired makes it easy to transition an educator's active membership to Retired with discounted rates and the option to join as a lifetime member for one low price, as well as further dues discounts to our ESP members. Let's not keep this a secret as we talk to our colleagues who are retiring at the end of this school year.

NEA and its state affiliates offer opportunities for continuous learning and staying current with advancements in the field. Retirees can benefit from access to journals, webinars, and conferences, and stay informed about new developments and emerging trends. This knowledge enables us to contribute meaningfully to ongoing discussions and to mentor younger educators.

NEA and its state affiliates also provide a platform for networking and social engagement. Retirement can sometimes lead to feelings of isolation as we leave the camaraderie of the workplace. By remaining active in our professional community, we can sustain and even expand our social networks. Belonging to NEA-Retired also presents retirees with opportunities to volunteer and give back to the community.

And finally, the financial benefits of membership should not be overlooked. NEA and its state affiliates offer discounted rates for retirees, providing a more affordable way to enjoy discounts on publications, insurance, and even travel opportunities tailored for NEA-Retired members. It's up to us to spread the word about what it means to belong to NEA-Retired.

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PUBLISHER AND
DIRECTOR
Anitra Speight

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR
EDITORIAL CONTENT
AND PRODUCTION
Giovanna Bechard

MANAGER
PRODUCTION AND
PUBLICATIONS
Shawn Stabell

EDITOR
Robin Terry Brown

SR. WRITER/EDITORS
Brenda Álvarez
Mary Ellen Flannery
Amanda Litvinov
Cindy Long

COPY EDITOR
Judy Rowe

PROGRAM AND
PRODUCTION
SPECIALIST
Tammy Funderburk

NEA.ORG/NEATODAY
Tim Walker

SR. CONTENT
STRATEGIST, NEA.ORG
Michelle Chovan

DESIGN AND
ART DIRECTION
Groff Creative LLC

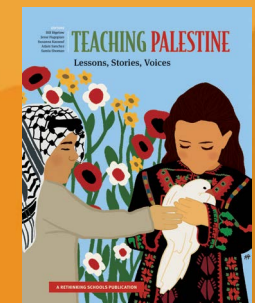
ADVERTISING SALES
Carson Helsper
chelsper@neamb.com
301-527-2195

CONTRIBUTORS
Joel Berger
Takier George
James Paterson
Kalie Walker

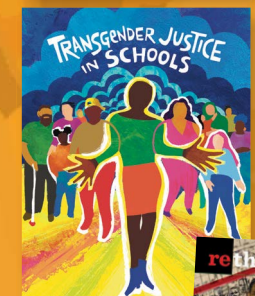
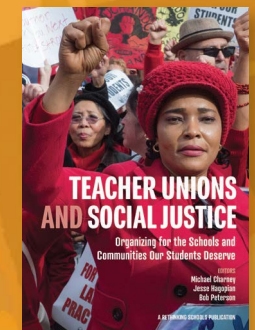
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Joy, Justice, and Excellence

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

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

Becky Pringle

Becky Pringle
NEA President



“

We, the NEA, will always fight like hell when people come for our kids, for our professions, and our communities.

—Becky, to NEA members, shortly after President Donald Trump announced his plan to shutter the U.S. Department of Education.

Face to Face with NEA members

Shoulder to shoulder, hearts united, I was honored to join educators, parents, students, and neighbors at Maryland's Takoma Park Middle School this spring, at one of hundreds of school walk-ins across the nation. Together, we will protect every student and public education. Together, we will ensure our students are not harmed by these dangerous cuts to services—we will fight every step of the way! We cannot allow billionaires to get tax breaks, while educators, nurses, and other public service workers are asked to pay more! Together, we are educating, organizing, and mobilizing—and we're not done yet. Find out how you can help at nea.org/Protect.



(Top) I am thankful to the Takoma Park, Md., educators and neighbors who welcomed me to their March 19 walk-in to protect public schools! (Bottom) I am joined by Maryland educators, including Montgomery County Education Association President David Stein (in the red jacket).

PHOTOS: JATI LINDSEY (LEFT); NEA (ABOVE)

JOIN ME 3 Things To Do For Yourself and Your Union

- 1. Speak up!**
Visit the online NEA Action Center, which makes it easy to email your senators and representatives on *all* the current issues facing educators today, at nea.org/Action.
- 2. Appreciate and be appreciated.**
May 5–9 was Teacher Appreciation Week. Please know that I see and appreciate every one of you, every day. I also understand that teacher appreciation should look more like fair pay and supportive working conditions. Find NEA's latest state-by-state pay data at nea.org/FairPay.
- 3. Rest. Recharge. Return.**
These days, I sometimes feel like the women described in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*, whose “idle moments” are filled with “the seep of rage.” Current efforts to harm our students weigh heavy and compel action. But I also know that we must pause to rest and recharge—and this summer season is the time. Please take care of yourselves. Our students and communities need us to be healthy.

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

PHOTO: JAY FRAM

In the News: Public Education

“Teachers and support staff all over this country are standing up [to federal funding and staffing cuts] and using their voice to say no. We will live up to the promise that this country has made to our students, every one of them. ... You are not taking resources out of our public schools. When we say every student, we mean every student. This is what parents are asking for, and this is what our students need.”

—Becky, on CBS News New York, on Feb. 6.

What I’m Talking About: Solidarity

I recently joined thousands of Colorado Education Association members at the Colorado State Capitol, rallying for public schools and students. Together, we demanded the funding we know our schools, educators, and students need to succeed. This spring has seen so many events like this, with tens of thousands of educators, parents, students, siblings, friends, and neighbors, standing in solidarity. We will not only meet the challenges of today, we will organize for power to create the future our students and educators deserve. Unions are made for moments like this.



My video message to all of you—on the power of solidarity—is available online at nea.org/BeckysJournalMay25.



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Public schools are the heart of our communities. That is why today, educators, parents, students, and more are rallying to defend our public schools from the people in power who want to destroy public education.

Join us: sign the pledge to [#ProtectOurKids](https://neapresident.bsky.social).

Pledge to Protect Students and Public Schools | NEA
We will be heard at every level of government—from the school board to the Senate—to reject any efforts to gut public schools, expand vouchers, or dismantle the U.S. ...

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NEA Helps Schools Support Immigrant Students

As immigration policies shift under the Trump administration, NEA is working to protect students and uphold their right to public education, regardless of immigration status, according to the 1982 *Plyler v. Doe* Supreme Court decision. NEA urges educators to work with their local union to take immediate action:

- **Declare schools as safe zones:** Ban immigration data collection and establish strict response protocols for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.
- **Empower families with legal knowledge:** Distribute "Know Your Rights" materials (nea.org/Immigration), host information workshops, and promote the Notifica app, which sends alerts during immigration raids.
- **Ensure emergency preparedness:** Help families create guardianship plans and secure legal contacts. Learn more at bit.ly/ILRCFamilyPrep.
- **Equip families with red cards:** This wallet-size card helps individuals invoke legal protections. Order free cards at ilrc.org/Red-Cards.

Take action at nea.org/SafeZones.

NEA Sues Trump Administration

On March 24, 2025, NEA and other advocacy groups sued the Trump Administration for its unlawful attempt to dismantle the U.S. Department of Education (ED)—a move that harms students and blatantly defies constitutional limits on executive power.

On March 5, 2025, NEA, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the New Hampshire affiliates of both

organizations filed a lawsuit against ED for its Feb. 14, 2025, "Dear Colleague" letter, which threatens to withhold federal funds from public schools for engaging in diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.

The lawsuit argues that the letter imposes unlawful restrictions on what educators can teach and students can learn. At press time, both suits were pending.



NEA Organizes School "Walk-Ins" to Protest Federal Cuts to Education

On March 19, 2025, as President Donald Trump prepared to sign an executive order to dismantle the U.S. Department of Education, thousands of educators, parents, students, and community leaders across the country gathered in front of their schools in the morning and "walked in" together in solidarity. Organized by NEA, the walk-ins sent a loud and clear message to elected officials everywhere: The Trump administration is hurting millions of students so they can give tax handouts to billionaires. School communities have had enough and are standing strong to support public schools! Raise your voice at nea.org/Protect.



Educators and parents at a school "walk-in" in Portland, Maine

PHOTOS CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: ASSOCIATED PRESS; SHUTTERSTOCK; SAM BURDICK

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May Morning Work

Trace and write:

butterfly butterfly

What coin is this?



Write the numerals:

twelve

fifteen

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CUTS TO FEDERAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS HURT STUDENTS

President Donald Trump has issued a series of reckless and destructive directives to dismantle the federal government's role in protecting and strengthening public education. When his administration talks about abolishing the U.S. Department of Education (ED), it uses divisive and misleading rhetoric (such as "ending radical indoctrination") to obscure the fact that students—especially lower-income students in rural, suburban, and urban communities as well as students with disabilities—would lose the most. Dismantling the department would mean defunding programs, such as Title I, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and Pell Grants, that feed, educate, and protect our most vulnerable and underserved students. Without these programs, many families and communities will be left reeling. These and other deliberate acts are part of a broader strategy to manufacture crises that justify consolidating power, dismantling federal agencies that help people, and reallocating public tax dollars to fund tax breaks for Trump, his billionaire donors, and Elon Musk, his "CEO" and the world's richest man.

On February 12, parents, educators, community leaders, and elected officials (top, right) from across the country rallied outside the U.S. Capitol to take a stand for students and public schools. Speaker after speaker shared the negative impact that shutting down ED would have on students, educators, and public schools across the country. "The idea of dismantling the Department of Education and the programs that fall under it, it's not just numbers on a page. There's a human piece as well," explained Brian Skinner (right), a special education teacher in Kansas. "Taking funds from a system that serves 90 percent of our kids disproportionately hurts those who either cannot choose or are not chosen by a private school."

TAKE ACTION

Scan the code to find out how you can stand up for schools.



Rural communities would be hit especially hard, as many of its public schools rely heavily on federal funding. Without these resources, small districts, for example, would struggle to keep schools open, leading to school closures. "[Parents] do not want to dismantle public schools and privatize them," said NEA President Becky Pringle. "They want to partner with us—at the state and federal level—to make sure our schools have what they need."



PHOTOS: JATI LINDSEY

How Teachers View Their Pay and Benefits



Too many educators are still facing a challenging financial climate, unable to make ends meet or even afford to live in the communities where they work. It's no surprise then that teachers' perceptions of their pay have not changed—and may have worsened, according to the 2024 "State of the American Teacher Survey" by RAND Corporation. According to the survey, about 1 in 4 teachers who received less than a 3 percent raise said they planned to leave the profession at the end of the 2023 – 2024 school year. Of their counterparts whose pay rose 5 percent to 10 percent in the same period, just over 1 in 10 said they planned to stop teaching. Low pay was cited as a top source of job-related stress for 1 in 3 teachers. The survey revealed that 65 percent of teachers reported taking on extra school duties, such as coaching sports, mentoring, or serving as department chair. Some teachers reported that the extra duties helped boost their pay, but 1 in 4 teachers said they were not paid for this extra work. Better perceptions of pay are significantly more likely in states that allow collective bargaining. In these states, the survey found that teachers reported not only higher pay, but access to a wider array of other benefits than teachers in states that prohibit collective bargaining. Read more about the RAND survey results at nea.org/RAND.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING = HIGHER PAY

Average teacher salaries—and salary increases—are significantly higher in states that require collective bargaining.

Average Salary 2022 – 2023 Average Salary 2023 – 2024



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK; CHART SOURCE: RAND CORPORATION, 2024 STATE OF THE AMERICAN TEACHER SURVEY

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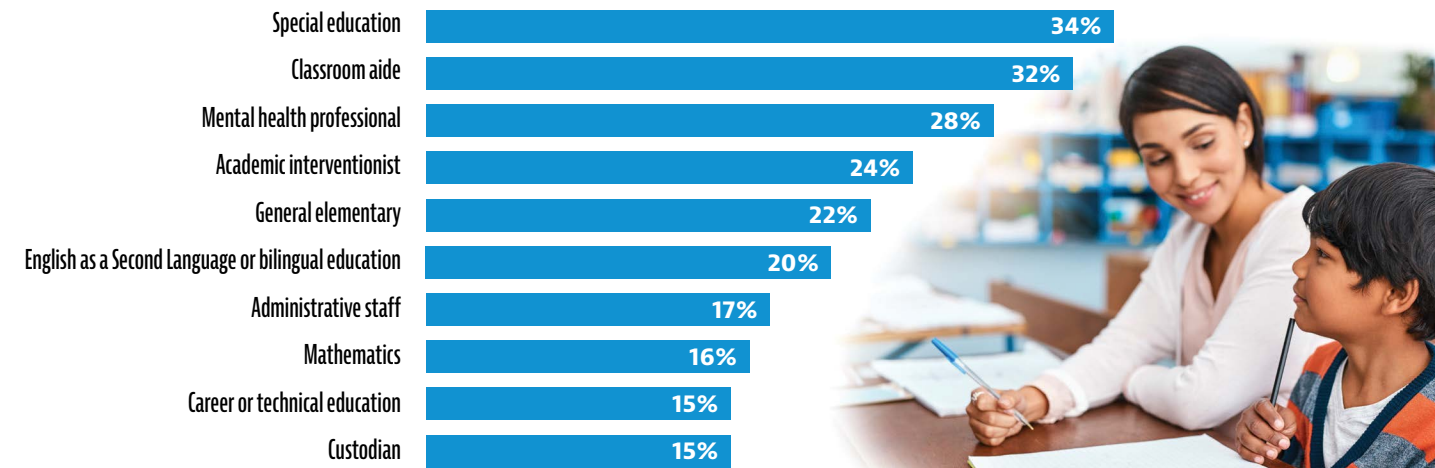


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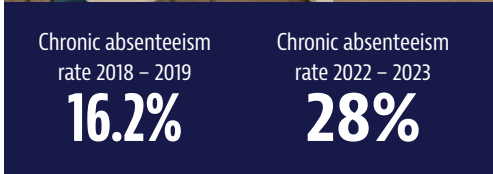
The Most Understaffed Roles in Schools

The percentage of schools that reported being understaffed in these K–12 positions at the start of the 2024 – 2025 school year:



SOURCE: NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS

Chronic Absenteeism Is Still Too High



Student chronic absenteeism is often cited by educators as one of the top challenges facing public schools. Already a problem before the COVID-19 pandemic, it worsened in the subsequent school years. But recent data suggests that at least some progress has been made. According to an analysis by Attendance Works, chronic absenteeism dipped slightly from a high of 30 percent nationally in 2021 – 2022 to 28 percent for the 2022 – 2023 school year. Attendance Works defines chronic absenteeism as when a student misses 10 percent or more school days over a school year—or about 18 days—due to absence for any reason, including those that are excused, unexcused, and suspensions. Research shows that such elevated levels of chronic absence can easily overwhelm school staff and negatively affect teaching and learning for all students. While any decline is welcome, chronic absenteeism is still at historically high levels. The majority of schools still had a chronic absence rate of 20 percent or higher.

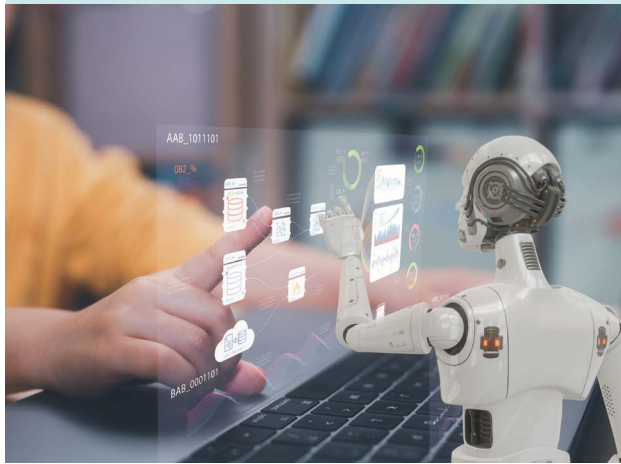
What's Keeping You Up at Night?

We all have problems sleeping at times. We often start thinking about tomorrow and the challenges it may bring. *Education Week* recently asked teachers about the stress that may cause them to lose sleep. Here are the top 10 responses:



SOURCE: EDUCATION WEEK RESEARCH CENTER, NOVEMBER 2024

AI Use in Schools Increases



Students' and teachers' use of artificial intelligence (AI) notably increased from the 2022 – 2023 school year to the 2023 – 2024 school year, according to a report by the Center for Democracy & Technology. During that period, the percentage of teachers who reported using generative AI rose from 51 percent to 67 percent, while use by high school students increased from 58 percent to 70 percent. Teachers were more likely to tap into AI for school uses over personal uses, while students reported the opposite. Two-thirds of teachers said they have not received guidance from their schools regarding response and discipline procedures when a student uses the technology for prohibited behaviors, such as plagiarism or cyberbullying.

THE TRUE VALUE OF NO-COST SCHOOL MEALS

By Amanda Litvinov

When Cheryl Cochran started teaching in Tennessee's Hardin County School District, in the mid-1980s, it nearly broke her heart to know that some of her high school students had to go hungry.

"Back then, on Mondays, students on free or reduced-price meals picked up an envelope with green tickets in it," Cochran explains. But if something happened to those tickets—like, "My mom washed my jeans and the tickets were in the pocket!"—they might have to go without lunch Tuesday through Friday, she adds.

Even when students did keep hold of their tickets, they had to use them in front of peers, who would then know that those families had financial struggles.

But these problems vanished once the school district adopted the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, says Cochran, who has served as the district's school nutrition program director for 29 years. The provision allowed the district to offer free breakfast and lunch to all students, and the positive effects were immediate: No more meal debt, no more embarrassment, and no more students distracted by hunger pangs.

"Now all students are on a level playing field," she explains.

How much is a child's health worth?

Research shows that CEP increases school meal participation, boosts school attendance and test scores, and reduces disciplinary problems. Despite CEP's popularity and proven benefits, the program could be targeted for spending

cuts. In fact, some politicians in Congress have called to eliminate CEP entirely.

Why? Because to some out-of-touch politicians, easing child hunger is simply not worth the price tag.

"If Congress refuses to fund universal school meals, expanding [CEP] is the next best way to help schools win the battle against student hunger," says NEA's Angelica Castañon, an expert in student learning conditions. "NEA continues to advocate for CEP, and all the federal programs that help students get the healthy meals they need."

How community eligibility works

CEP is available to schools in which at least 25 percent of students come from low-income families. Nearly 60 percent of the 3,275 students in rural Hardin County qualified for free and reduced-price lunch before the district adopted CEP, in 2014, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. As of the 2022 – 2023 school year, more than 362,000 students (36%) in Tennessee had access to no-cost meals through CEP, according to the Food Research & Action Center.

CEP helps educators, too. Well-nourished kids have better focus in class, and educators aren't paying for students' lunches out of their pockets.

Cochran can't stomach the thought that Congress could roll back or eliminate the program.

"We live in a great, prosperous country, and it's the right thing to make sure all students are fed," Cochran says. "We provide transportation and textbooks—providing school meals is just as important." 🍴



Cheryl Cochran

PHOTO: COURTESY OF CHERYL COCHRAN

CHEW ON THIS!

We can curb student hunger

The number of schools adopting the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act surged during the 2023 – 2024 school year. Why? Because lawmakers in Congress let the national universal school meals program—funded by the Biden administration's pandemic recovery plan—expire in 2022, which resulted in a spike in hungry students.

IN THE 2023 – 2024 SCHOOL YEAR:

7,717
U.S. SCHOOL DISTRICTS HAD ONE OR MORE SCHOOLS UNDER CEP, UP 20% OVER THE PRIOR SCHOOL YEAR.



23.6
MILLION CHILDREN ATTENDED A CEP SCHOOL—A 6.2% INCREASE OVER THE PREVIOUS SCHOOL YEAR.



84.7%
OF ELIGIBLE SCHOOLS HAD ADOPTED CEP



SOURCE: "COMMUNITY ELIGIBILITY: THE KEY TO HUNGER-FREE SCHOOLS" FOOD RESEARCH ACTION CENTER, 2024

1 in 5
CHILDREN IN THE U.S. LIVE IN FOOD INSECURE HOUSEHOLDS—THAT'S 14 MILLION KIDS WHO DON'T HAVE CONSISTENT ACCESS TO MEALS AT HOME.



FOOD INSECURITY RATES ARE FAR HIGHER FOR BLACK AND HISPANIC HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN THAN FOR WHITE HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN.



SOURCE: "HOUSEHOLD FOOD SECURITY IN THE UNITED STATES IN 2023," USDA (THE MOST RECENT DATA AVAILABLE)

TAKE
ACTION

Call on your members of Congress to keep critical anti-hunger programs intact. Go to nea.org/ChildNutrition.

UTAH SCHOOL CUSTODIAN NAMED 2025 ESP OF THE YEAR

By Cindy Long



A custodian is “one who guards, protects, or maintains,” according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, and Andy Markus does all of those things for his students, his school, and his union.

For all of these reasons, Markus earned the title of 2025 Education Support Professional (ESP) of the Year. He received the award from NEA President Becky Pringle, in March, at the NEA ESP National Conference, in Louisville, Ky.

Markus, who is assistant facilities manager at Draper Park Middle School, in Utah’s Canyons School District, not only shines in his work, he’s also a dedicated mentor to students as well as a fierce union activist and ESP advocate.

“NEA is proud to recognize Andy’s dedication to his students, his school and his union,” Pringle said. “He consistently goes above and beyond to be a welcoming presence to all. ... He inspires each of the students to be better versions of themselves.”

The award spotlights the work of ESPs across the country and honors one member who demonstrates extraordinary achievements and dedication to public education.

Over his 13 years with the district, first at Midvale Elementary School, then at Bella Vista Elementary School, before starting at Draper Park, Markus has played a critical role in transforming his schools. He not only maintains the building and grounds, he also mentors students and fosters a community.

“The pride and care we put into our environment are reflected in the success of our students, and I’m grateful to be a part of that positive change,” he says.

When he arrived at Draper Park three years ago, the grounds were overgrown, littered with trash, and neglected after years of minimal maintenance. The bushes were full of debris, and the fields had patches of dirt where grass should have grown.

During his first four months, Markus focused on cleaning up the grounds, starting with picking up trash and replacing damaged sod on the fields.

“It breathed new life into the school, with students, staff, and community members expressing their excitement about seeing the grounds looking presentable again,” he says.

Then Markus turned his attention to the inside. With the help of his department, he brought in extra

NEA 2025 Education
Support Professional (ESP)
of the Year Andy Markus
accepts his award at the
ESP National Conference,
in Louisville, Ky.

extractor machines, and they diligently deep cleaned the carpets and floors. The building started to shine again.

“What was remarkable was the impact that these changes had on school culture,” he says.

Students began taking pride in their environment, cleaning up after themselves, and showing greater respect for the building. Teachers reported fewer behavior issues in their classrooms, and students were more engaged.

Even better, the school’s overall grade improved. For the past two years, it’s been ranked among the top five middle schools in Utah.

“It’s been incredible to see how a clean and welcoming environment can make such a big difference for everyone,” Markus says.

After-school mentor

Markus strives to build strong relationships with his students as well.

“Many come to me when they’re having a tough day,” he says. “These connections started through the after-school mentoring program I launched, where students help with tasks around the school as a constructive way to stay out of trouble and earn responsibility. It’s a difficult time for many kids, as they’re still figuring out who they are, and sometimes all they need is someone to listen.”

A school counselor set up what she called “Andy Talk Sessions,” where students would walk the halls with me while I cleaned, using that time to share their struggles.

Markus has had many memorable interactions with students, including one who recently confided in him that he identified as LGBTQ+. “He wanted to say it aloud to me before telling his parents. It was a powerful moment and

a reminder of how much students rely on the adults around them for support,” Markus recalls. “Moments like these are why I believe that everything we do as school employees matters—students notice, and they care.”

In his after-school program, he mentored a student on the verge of dismissal from school because of poor behavior and skipping class.

Over three months, the student’s attitude and approach to life completely changed. He started attending class regularly, stopped negative behavior patterns, and began taking pride in his schoolwork.

“I remember the first time he earned an A. He rushed to share the news with me before telling his parents,” Markus says. “It was a moment I’ll never forget. In just a few months, this student went from failing to passing most classes. He is now on the honor roll in high school.”

Recently, the student visited Markus to share his plans to graduate and pursue a career as a counselor for at-risk youth.

Union activist

Raised by dedicated educators and union members, Markus was immersed in the world of advocacy from a young age—handing out campaign flyers with his dad and standing at intersections holding signs.

He recently joined fellow union members at the state Capitol to fight against an anti-union payroll deduction bill.

“I approached legislators directly, meeting with the bill’s sponsor and other key supporters, and asked them about their understanding of

the bill’s impact, explaining why union and bargaining rights are essential, especially for ESPs,” he explains. “I provided examples of the affordable benefits our part-time employees receive for as little as \$200 per year, including dental, vision, and telemedicine services.”

Unfortunately, the fight continues. Utah’s governor ignored calls for a veto and signed the bill into law. Now, the Utah School Employees Association (USEA) is part of a coalition that seeks to overturn the state’s collective bargaining ban at the ballot.

As president of the Canyons Education Support Professionals

Association, Markus helped negotiate major wins for ESPs over the past five years, including, a 28.5 percent cost-of-living adjustment, step raises, and stipends for employees who are at the top of their current pay scale. He also helped increase night shift differentials by 50 cents an hour and graveyard shifts by \$1.00

an hour; he improved ESP leave policies; and he negotiated a professional development day with pay for all ESPs in his district.

Markus believes in showing respect, too. He ensures that his district recognizes national career days, such as National Custodian Day, National Food Service Workers Day, Administrative Professionals Day, and National Transit Employee Appreciation Day—in addition to celebrating National ESP Day. 🏆



Andy Markus

LEARN
MORE

Check out the other finalists
for ESP of the Year at
nea.org/2025ESPfinalists.

OUR VOICES
close-up



At the Crow Agency school, in Montana (right), Lucy Real Bird leads preschoolers through a full day of activities in the Apsáalooke language (left and far right).

that often overlooks Indigenous cultures and the needs of her community.

A personal mission

Her story began at the Crow Agency school where she teaches. She became troubled by a pervasive issue: Lateral violence—bullying within Indigenous communities. Rooted in historical trauma, this behavior arises when long oppressed individuals redirect fear and frustration toward their own community members, Real Bird explains.

“It’s usually our own people who are against us,” she says. “We’re like crabs in a bucket. Whenever someone does good, others try to bring them down. I knew I had to do something.”

She reached out to Amanda Curtis, president of MFPE, who recognized the significance of Real Bird’s concerns and connected her with the National Indian Education Association (NIEA). This was the first step in what became a transformational experience.

A call for decolonization

At the 2022 NIEA annual conference in Oklahoma City, Real Bird heard Indigenous education scholar Cornel Pewewardy speak. The co-editor of *Unsettling Settler-Colonial Education: The Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model*, Pewewardy advocated for school systems designed around Native knowledge, languages, and culturally relevant

PHOTO: TOMMY ROBINSON



teaching methods, rather than settler-centric curricula that often erase or misrepresent Indigenous cultures.

Pewewardy’s message about promoting equity, inclusion, and healing struck a deep chord with Real Bird.

“I realized that our people needed to hear this,” she says. “We needed to understand that the trauma we’re experiencing is not just personal, it’s collective. It’s been passed down from generation to generation. But we can heal, and we can do it together.”

Inspired, Real Bird returned to Montana and worked with Curtis to secure an NEA Community Advocacy and Partnership Engagement grant to conduct a series of professional development events that would share this vision across the state.

Pewewardy led discussions at each event site and explored the relationship between education and Indigenous identity in Montana.

Cultural revitalization in action

Decolonization is the process of reclaiming cultural identity, traditions, and autonomy after colonial disruption. This effort is thriving on the Blackfoot Indian Reservation, in Browning, Mont.

PHOTO: TOMMY ROBINSON



A language immersion program in the reservation’s schools is a shining example of success under Montana’s Indian Education for All law, which mandates the inclusion of Indigenous heritage in public school curricula.

The program allows K–12 students

to learn academic subjects in the Āmsskāapiikūni (Blackfeet) language, preserving the language and embedding cultural relevance into education.

Āmsskāapiikūni educator Dana Bremner is president of the Browning Federation of Teachers and a reading interventionist at Stamiksiitsiikin (Bullshoe) Elementary School. She explains that the program’s goal is to integrate traditional Indigenous knowledge systems into mainstream education.

“We need to give educators the freedom to teach in a way that reflects Indigenous cultures,” she says. “Why should we teach from a curriculum designed for someone else’s worldview? We need to create our own curriculum models ... [and] restore our cultural knowledge, family stories, and teach our kids who they are.”

—BRENDA ÁLVAREZ

Who is Lucy Real Bird?

Lucy Real Bird is an Apsáalooke educator, cultural advocate, and proud bearer of her family’s rich heritage.

“There are so many misconceptions about who we are as Indigenous people,” she says. “Sometimes, people think we’re all Navajo because they’ve met one or two people. But we have our own identities ... and stories. It’s time we tell them ourselves.”

Named Baachuaiigaalaakoosh (Sees Many Berry Seasons), Real Bird’s name was gifted by her great-grandmother, reflecting a legacy of resilience and abundance. Her father, Henry Real Bird, a celebrated cowboy poet and Montana’s Poet Laureate from 2009 – 2011, was raised by his grandfather, Xaxxe Askinneesh (Rides Painted Horses), or Mark Real Bird, and his grandmother, Baauhtah (Attends Things), or Florence Medicine Tell Real Bird. Mark Real Bird is a son of Chief Medicine Crow, and Florence is the daughter of Chief Medicine Tail.

Lucy Real Bird’s lineage is deeply rooted in her people’s history. Her maternal ancestry connects her to Chief Grey Bull and Sitting Bull, and she is a member of the Piegan Clan. They are known for their treacherousness like their enemy the Piegan (different from the Piegan Clan), made up of the Pikuni (Blackfoot), Kainai (Blood), and Siksika. As a child of the Big Lodge Clan through her father, Real Bird embrace the values and traditions passed down through generations. 🌟

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“Sometimes, people think we’re all Navajo because they’ve met one or two people. But we have our own identities ... and stories. It’s time we tell them ourselves.”

—Lucy Real Bird

A Lifelong Commitment to Advocacy

NEA-Retired member Ed Foglia received the 2024 Distinguished Service Award for his exceptional lifetime service to the union and public schools. “Ed Foglia is the personification of education excellence,” says NEA-Retired President Anita Gibson. “[His] contributions to our retirees and public education continue to make a difference for so many.” The annual award is the highest honor that an NEA-Retired member can receive.



Distinguished Service Award Winner Ed Foglia

Foglia’s contributions to public education span 70 years. He began his education career in 1957 as a middle school reading teacher in San Jose, Calif. He was elected

as president of the Cambrian District Teachers Association in 1960 and again in 1966. He was elected as the California Teachers Association (CTA) president in 1978 and reelected in 1986, serving the longest tenure in the association’s history. He has also served on the NEA Board of Directors. In 1988, Foglia led the union’s campaign to pass Proposition 98, which constitutionally guarantees that 40 percent of California’s budget will go toward funding K–12 schools and community colleges. This success earned him the nickname “The Father of Proposition 98.”

He credits his activism to his strong passion and commitment to his family, union, and profession. Since retiring, Foglia has held numerous positions at CTA/NEA-Retired, including serving as president from 2008 to 2012, and later serving on the board of directors and as chair of the Liaison Committee to the California State Teachers’ Retirement System. Foglia led successful campaigns to increase the pension death benefit for the state’s retired public school teachers and to increase their loss of purchasing power. Foglia currently serves on the NEA-Retired Board of Directors. “Age should never be a barrier to getting things done,” he says. “For age brings experience, and experience brings wisdom.” —TAKIER GEORGE

To learn about the Distinguished Service Award, please visit nea.org/NEA-Retired-Awards.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF ED FOGLIA

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DIG INTO ORGANIC GARDENING

By James Paterson

In worn spiral notebooks, Amy Bondurant Bridges lovingly collects details about her “friends”—the plants she has gotten to know and love throughout her life, and even more so after she retired from teaching.

The North Carolina native dutifully logs information about each one, noting the soil they grow in and how they perform. “Plants were always fascinating to me, and organic gardening seemed to have so many benefits for me and the environment. The more I learned, the more I wanted to know.”

Emma O’Neil, head gardener of Garden Organic, in Warwickshire, England, defines organic gardening as working with natural systems, taking into consideration the interdependence of life-forms and using sustainable practices to promote a healthy and productive growing environment with no synthetic chemicals.

An added bonus: Researchers have found that gardening is good for our physical and mental health.

“I just feel really good when I’m digging in the dirt,” Bondurant Bridges says.

Get the lay of the land

Bondurant Bridges is in good company. Gardening is one of the most popular hobbies for retirees.

But if you haven’t developed your green thumb yet, it’s easy to get started, says Emily Murphy, an organic gardening expert and author of the book *Grow What You Love*.

“Grow the things you love to cook and eat,” she suggests. “You’ll soon discover that growing some of your own food involves a lot of fun and a lot of

learning as you go. Start small and, even with a few plants, you’ll discover that what you receive is greater than your efforts.”

The first step is to plan the garden, maybe even draw it on paper. What size will it be? Will you plant in the ground or in raised beds? Where can you locate the garden that gets 10 to 12 hours of sunlight a day?

Rows should run north to south, ensuring the tallest plants won’t shade others. Also, pick a location where you can easily access water.

Make friends with dirt

The quality and composition of the soil in your garden matters, says Bill Sciarappa, an associate professor with the Rutgers University Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources. “Test soil drainage by digging a hole 6 to 8 inches deep and filling it with water,” he explains. “If it doesn’t drain in two hours, you’ll have to loosen it up by rototilling or by applying gypsum.”

Bondurant Bridges says she has her soil tested regularly for its nutrient and pH levels. Most states have cooperative extension offices that offer testing services.

For organic gardening it is important to treat the soil following certain guidelines, O’Neil advises, adding that compost is a primary additive.

You can create a compost pile or purchase materials to make

one. Compost can include coffee grounds, banana peels, eggshells, shredded leaves, grass clippings, fireplace ashes (in small amounts), and sawdust. You can also add peat moss, cow manure, or purchased bags of potting mix.

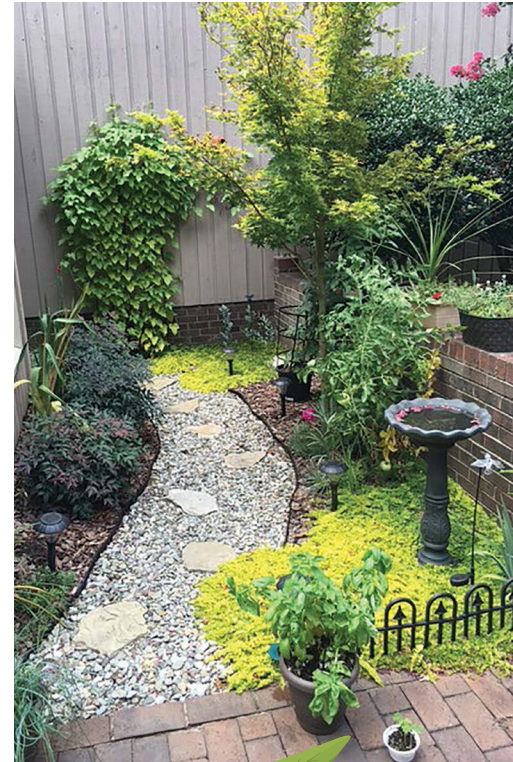
Every so often, water your compost and turn it over, Bondurant Bridges recommends. Compost can take two weeks to a year to degrade, but usually takes about a month. When it’s ready, it will feel warm to the touch inside. Then work it into your soil. (Garden Organic offers more advice about creating and working with organic soil at bit.ly/GardenOrganicSoil.)



Amy Bondurant Bridges



(Clockwise from top) Organically grown radishes; Garden Organic’s “bug hotels”—pinecone-stuffed pots that provide overwintering habitats for ladybugs, centipedes, and other helpful insects; retiree Amy Bondurant Bridges’ lovingly planted raised bed and garden pathway.



Choose your crop

“When you buy the little pots and seedlings from the garden center, don’t worry too much about whether they are organic,” writes Stephanie Rose, an award-winning author of 12 gardening books. “As soon as you put them in your garden, the soil will act as an amazing biofilter. The non-organic elements will filter into the soil quite quickly.”

The decision to start with seeds or small plants really depends on timing, the kind of plants you are growing, and how much patience you have.

Tomato and pepper plants, for instance, might take a month to produce fruit, so small plants may be more practical. But lettuce and spinach grown from seeds would be ready to harvest in a month, Murphy says.

One gardener’s rule of thumb: Check the seed packet for the length of time it takes the seeds to germinate and become ready to harvest. If the total time is less than two months, grow from seeds; if it’s longer, buy small plants.

Sciarappa recommends planting “companion crops” that support each other. Basil repels certain tomato pests, including moths that produce unfriendly tomato hornworms. And planting a row of garlic can help keep damaging aphids away from your potatoes. (The *Farmers’ Almanac* offers more information about companion planting at bit.ly/FACompanionPlants.)

Try a model garden with tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, bean varieties, leafy greens, and strawberries, Sciarappa proposes. Mixing different crops in your garden bed also reduces pests.

When you are done planting, don’t forget to mulch! Wood chips, pine needles, or other organic material help reduce weeds, retain moisture in the soil, and decompose to improve the soil.

Sow the benefits

When you taste that first juicy tomato of the summer, take pride in knowing that you grew it yourself and helped nourish your environment. Organic gardening can lower emissions, reduce the risk of pollution in waterways, and capture and store carbon, O’Neil says.

At the end of the growing season, your garden still has more to offer. Bondurant Bridges says she leaves plants to die in the fall so birds can snack on the remains. 🌱

‘I can actually retire with security’

NEA’s huge victory on Social Security will change many educators’ lives. What could this win mean for you?

By Amanda Litvinov

Retired Nevada teacher Judith Genone estimates that over the past 10 years, she has lost roughly \$100,000 in Social Security benefits.

But when former President Joe Biden signed the Social Security Fairness Act into law, on Jan. 5, the future suddenly looked brighter for her and many other retired educators.

The law repealed the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP), rules that became part of Social Security law in 1983, unfairly reducing the benefits that public employees or their spouses earned.

The victory means everything to Genone and educators like her.

At age 67, Genone was still teaching full-time. She also began drawing Social Security benefits she had earned through decades of side jobs and summer work.

“I received \$1,200 each month,” she says. “But when

I retired two years later and started drawing my pension, my Social Security benefit was immediately cut to \$300 a month.”

What little was left went to covering the essentials: insurance, mortgage, taxes, food, and clothes.

“Who would have thought [our society] would be this unfair to people who go into education?” she asks.

Now, under the new rules, the full benefits she earned have been restored. Genone is thrilled to be able to save money and pay for plane fare to see family.

While the victory celebration continues, educators have reached out to NEA with questions about what happens next.

The following guidance from NEA is based on the information available at press time. For updates, go to nea.org/SSFAQ.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT WAS THE WINDFALL ELIMINATION PROVISION?

WEP reduced the Social Security benefits of people who, over the course of their careers, work in jobs covered by Social Security and in jobs not covered by Social Security—for example, career-changers or educators who were compelled to take part-time or summer jobs to make ends meet.

WHAT WAS THE GOVERNMENT PENSION OFFSET?

GPO reduced—or eliminated—the Social Security spousal or survivor

“I have spent 40 years working for the repeal of this law. Thanks to my union, I may finally receive my full [Social Security] benefits!”

—Mae Smith, Illinois

benefits of people who also earned a pension through federal, state, or local government employment that was not covered by Social Security. Two-thirds of the pension amount was deducted from the Social Security benefit.

For someone getting a \$1,500 pension, for example, the Social Security benefit decreased by \$1,000. More than 70 percent of those impacted by GPO lost their entire spousal or survivor benefit.

WHO WAS AFFECTED BY GPO AND WEP?

Educators who worked in 15 states where, as public employees, they paid into their state pension system but not into Social Security, could have been impacted. Those states are Alaska, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Maine, Missouri, Nevada, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Texas. Spouses of public employees may also have been affected since their spousal or survivor benefits would also be reduced.

WHAT WILL MY SOCIAL SECURITY PAYMENTS BE NOW THAT GPO AND WEP HAVE BEEN REPEALED?

Impacted individuals will see an estimated average



Judith Genone handcrafts beads—a favorite lesson from her career as an art teacher. She says her retirement is much more secure thanks to the Social Security Fairness Act.

Then contact the SSA, which can provide you with personalized information about how these changes in the Social Security Fairness Act may impact your benefits. They can also help you calculate your new monthly benefits. Visit ssa.gov for more information and resources, or call SSA during business hours, at (800) 772-1213.

WHEN CAN I EXPECT MY FULL SOCIAL SECURITY PAYMENT NOW THAT GPO AND WEP HAVE BEEN REPEALED?

Now that the Social Security Fairness Act is law, the SSA is determining how to implement it. We do not know how long this process will take, but many people have already started receiving checks.

WILL I RECEIVE RETROACTIVE PAYMENTS IF I WAS IMPACTED BY GPO AND WEP?

The new law includes a provision to pay some recipients retroactively for 2024. The SSA will provide more information soon on lump sum retroactive payments.

increase of \$360 per month, but actual amounts will vary based on employment history. There will also be a lump sum payment for those impacted in 2024, compensating them for lost benefits for that year. Additionally, spouses, widows, and widowers will no longer see reductions in survivor benefits due to GPO.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I AM ALREADY RETIRED AND MY SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS WERE PARTIALLY OR COMPLETELY OFFSET?

At this time, you do not need to take any action except to verify that the Social Security Administration (SSA)

has your current mailing address and direct deposit information. You can do this online at ssa.gov/MyAccount, or you can visit the Social Security office.

IF I HAVE NOT YET RETIRED, HOW WILL I KNOW IF THE SOCIAL SECURITY FAIRNESS ACT IMPACTS ME?

First, review your employment history. WEP affects state and local government employees who have also worked in jobs that required them to pay into Social Security.

FOR MORE

Scan the QR code for more guidance and resources from NEA, or go to nea.org/SSFAQ.



NEA- RETIRED *feature*

MORE LIVES CHANGED

Retired members across the country have shared with NEA how the Social Security Fairness Act will transform their lives:

David Beane, Maine
“If GPO and WEP hadn’t been repealed, I wouldn’t be able to retire. I lost my wife to cancer in 2013 and subsequently lost my home of 18 years, as we put every penny we had into her treatment. I’ve been rebuilding my life since then. I’m thankful for the work of NEA and our allied public sector unions.”

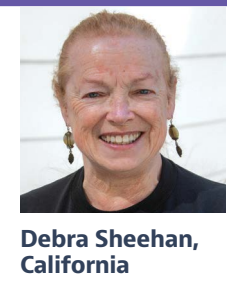
Marci Morrison, Arizona
“I worked in Arizona public schools for 10 years, in addition to many jobs where I paid into Social Security. ... But my benefits were severely diminished just because I also spent 25 years as a school social worker in Illinois, a GPO and WEP state.
“When my husband passed away a year ago, I wasn’t eligible for any Social Security benefits. Now I can receive the benefits we both earned. Thanks so much for a brighter future!”

Antoinette Smith, Georgia
“This possibly means that I can finally stop working to add to my income. It also means that I



A \$44,000 Surprise!

“On March 5, I checked my bank account to see if I had enough money to pay my Verizon bill—that’s how I’ve been living the last couple of years, hopscotching between bills. I was stunned to see a deposit of \$44,000 in my bank account. I cried for a while, and then I said, “This can’t be real.” But it is! It’s my retroactive payment from Social Security for 2024.
When my husband died 24 years ago, I received survivor benefits based on his career as an engineer. But when I retired,



in 2016, and started to draw my pension, I was no longer eligible to receive survivor benefits, or even the modest Social Security benefits I had earned from jobs I held before becoming a public school teacher in my 40s. It was all due to GPO and WEP.
I’ve sent hundreds of letters, if not thousands, to elected leaders to repeal these provisions. I’m still thrilled for all the public employees affected.
My shoulders feel 50 pounds lighter. I don’t plan on going crazy with the money. I just want to pay my bills without having to juggle which one.”

will have survivor benefits if my husband passes before me. That’s life-changing.”

June Davison, Connecticut
“This repeal will help me (age 78) and my son (age 38), who is also a teacher. My grandmother, a teacher for 55 years, must be rejoicing with us in heaven—she who taught 14 years before she had the right to vote!”

Twila Keaveny, Alaska
“Before and during my school career, I worked over 30 years of side jobs where I paid into Social Security. This victory ... means I can actually retire with security for myself and my family. Thank you, NEA, for encouraging all of us to continue the fight for 40 years!”



Mae Smith, Illinois
“I taught in Michigan, where I paid into Social Security for 10 years prior to becoming a teacher in Illinois, a GPO and WEP state. When I retired, I received only one-third of the benefits I had earned. I was a member of the NEA Board of Directors in 1983, when GPO and WEP passed, and I have spent 40 years working for the repeal of this law. Thanks to my union, I may finally receive my full benefits!” 🍀

Want to get more involved in NEA-Retired?



Talk with your NEA-Retired state president about getting involved with one of these committees.

- NEA-Retired Communications Committee**
This committee is charged with overseeing the growth and development of a communications network for local, state, and national NEA-Retired chapters and affiliates. All forms of media and communications should be explored to help expand existing communications, all the while serving to better educate our members.
- NEA-Retired Elections Committee**
The purpose of this committee is to ensure open and democratic elections for NEA-Retired at their annual meeting, via mail-out ballots and/or electronic ballots.
- NEA-Retired Governance Committee**
This committee deals with the governing documents of NEA-Retired. Those documents include the standing rules for the NEA-Retired Annual Meeting, the NEA-Retired bylaws, the procedures for amending the NEA-Retired bylaws, the guidelines for the submission, and the adoption of new business items at the NEA-Retired Annual Meeting.
- NEA-Retired Jack Kinnaman Scholarship Committee**
This committee supports Aspiring Educators by providing scholarships in memory of former NEA-Retired Vice President Jack Kinnaman. These competitive scholarships are funded through donations to the Jack Kinnaman Scholarship Fund. The committee actively promotes the growth of the fund through multiple approaches, including the distribution of brochures and flyers, person-to-person contacts, and soliciting donations both online and in-person annually. The funds available determine the number and the value of scholarships awarded each year.
- NEA-Retired Legislative Committee**
This committee’s purpose is to safeguard public education as well as to protect and to improve pensions, Social Security, Medicare, and other benefits for our members, including current and future retirees. Committee members receive the latest updates on federal legislation, important resources for sharing information with members in their respective states, and ways to engage members in opportunities for political action.
- NEA-Retired Member Benefits Committee**
The purpose of this committee is to add value to membership by enriching the lives of members. Members serving on this committee will discover ways to utilize all of the benefits to engage and recruit members and help them save money. Committee members will learn methods of sharing this information with Retired members.
- NEA-Retired Membership Committee**
This committee is responsible for assisting state presidents and membership chairpersons with best practices for organizing and engaging Retired members and potential members.
- NEA-Retired Political Action Committee**
The members serving on this committee will assist their state leadership with PAC fundraising activities in their respective states and at NEA meetings, as well as with any other political action activities.
- NEA-Retired Racial and Social Justice Committee**
The mission and purpose of this committee is to increase our knowledge and understanding as well as address racial and social justice issues. This committee will share this knowledge with our NEA-Retired affiliates and NEA.



The 2024 winners of the Jack Kinnaman Scholarship

Interested in Serving on a Committee?
NEA-Retired members who are interested in serving on a committee should contact their NEA-Retired state affiliate president, who can nominate individuals to serve on these committees.

For more information about NEA-Retired committees, go to nea.org/RETCommittees.

7 Fun Jobs for Retired Educators

When Lisa Gutierrez Guzmán retired from the San Francisco Unified School District, in 2013, she wasn't done with education. "[Teaching was] still in my blood," she says.

Like many former educators, working as a tutor was a natural fit for her. But career coach Laura Litwiller says the next step for retirees isn't always so clear.

"That teacher inside of you is not going away," says Litwiller, who specializes in working with educators. "But in retirement, it can come out and manifest in different ways."

Just ask these NEA-Retired members, who have turned their school experience into new careers as a mentor, museum educator, music coach, and even a candymaker!

Museum Educator

Lori Mertes
Fairbanks, Alaska

First career: Taught special education for 30 years.

How she found her next role: Mertes met the director of the Fairbanks Children's Museum through work on their district's school board. The director loved Mertes'

teaching background and thought she would be a great asset to the museum.

It took a while for Mertes to agree, but then she said, "You finally got me!"

What she does: The museum often asks Mertes to lead themed learning camps. "One was all about trains," Mertes explains. "The kids read about trains; they built a train; they explored all kinds of different things."

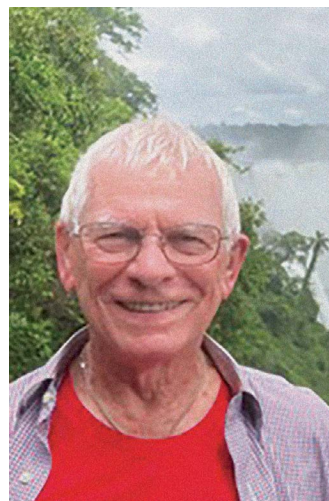
Bonus! "I still use things that I always did as a teacher, but what's nice is it's just so relaxing," she says. Plus, she loves the flexibility of having a part-time position.

Mentor Teacher

Ray Johnson
Portland, Oregon

First career: Taught high school math for 34 years.

How he found his next role: Two Portland State University professors



who he had worked with suggested he apply for the job.

What he did: For 10 years, Johnson supervised student teachers from the Portland State University School of Education.

"Portland State liked that I was willing to work with any discipline or grade level," says Johnson, who supervised in kindergarten,

history, French, math, and even art classes.

"Teaching is a process, so it was easy for me to tell if my [student teachers] were engaging their students and that learning was going on, regardless of the content."

Bonus! The role allowed Johnson to give back to the profession, he says.

And he relished the flexibility of the work. He could easily arrange his schedule to accommodate his new retired lifestyle.

Retail worker (and candymaker!)

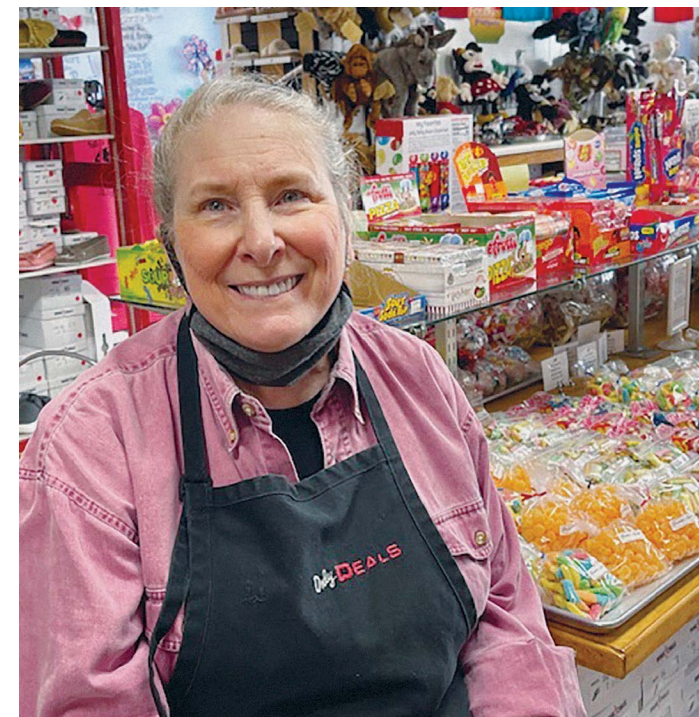
Roberta "Bobbie" Margo
Virginia, Minnesota

First career: Served as a school librarian/media specialist for 34 years.

How she found her next role: Margo would often visit Canelake's Candies in downtown Virginia. The



(Above) Retiree Lori Mertes puts her training to work as an educator at a children's museum in Alaska; (right) NEA-Retired Executive Council member Bobbie Margo loves her sweet job at a historic candy shop in Minnesota. (Opposite) After retiring as a math teacher, Ray Johnson supervised student teachers in Oregon.



store opened in 1905 and is the oldest continually operating candy store in Minnesota. Before long, Margo found herself working there part-time.

What she does: "When you work there, you do everything," she says. "You make the candy, you wait on the customers, you order product."

She works one to two days a week, but often takes on more days during the busy holiday seasons.

Bonus! Virginia is a small town, so working at the candy store allows Margo to keep in touch with former students and colleagues because, as she puts it, "Sooner or later everybody comes to that store."

Last year—Margo's 20th year at Canelake's—she experienced a full-circle moment.

Around the holidays, two newly retired teachers came to work at the store as seasonal employees. Not only had these teachers worked with Margo later in her career, but they were also former students!

School Nurse Mentor
Jeanne Kiefner
Cherry Hill, New Jersey

First career: Worked as a school nurse for 28 years.
How she found her next role: After retiring, she helped Rutgers University-Camden establish a pilot program to recruit bachelor-prepared nurses to work in schools.
After that program got underway, the Rowan

University School of Education recruited Kiefner to serve as an adjunct professor for school nurse candidates.
What she did: For 14 years, Kiefner helped her mentees understand the scope, practice, and advocacy involved in their work.
"It's not an easy profession," she explains. "[Decades ago], you went to the school nurse when you

had a tummy ache. ... Now, I educate school nurses about policy, law, and physical and mental health within the school and the community."
Bonus! Even today, former mentees still reach out to Kiefner for advice. "If they have a dilemma, I work through it with them," she explains. "It's something I really have a passion for."



Jeanne Kiefner

Vocal Music Coach
Ina Allen
Evanston/Skokie, Illinois

First career: Taught music for 39 years and worked as a professional classical singer.
How she found her next role: "I was enjoying being totally retired when a former colleague called and told me he was the guest artist at the high school a few blocks from my home," Allen explains. She went to his concert, and afterward, the choir conductors asked if she was free during the week to work with students.
"Soon, I was filling out paperwork to work in the district!" she says.
What she does: Allen teaches private voice lessons to high school students. Allen has her students explore different musical genres and works with them on voice placement, range development, and clarity of sound, she says.



Lisa Gutierrez Guzman



Phyllis Murray Robinette



Former Illinois music teacher and professional singer Ina Allen helps high schoolers find their perfect pitch.

Ask a Career Coach

"This is the perfect time in your life to do what you want." That's what career coach Laura Litwiller tells newly retired teachers. She walks former educators through this multistep framework to help them make clear, confident decisions about the next phase of their professional life:

Step 1: Self-awareness: Look at any self-limiting beliefs you have about what you could do for work. These beliefs might be holding you back from doing something that you really love, so become aware of whatever voices might be raising doubts.

Step 2: Self-reflection and self-assessment: Get familiar with what you care about at this point in your life. What's important to you? What are your skills and strengths? What makes you come alive, and what brings you joy? Sometimes we separate "work" and "what brings you joy," but this stage of life is an opportunity to really merge those two things.

Step 3: Career exploration: Check out what's out there and discover new possibilities. You may get ideas by talking to people in different fields, through online research, or both.

Learn more about Litwiller's work and find additional resources at lauralitwiller.com.

Bonus! The lessons get her out of the house. "I love working with the students," she says.

Tutor
Lisa Gutierrez Guzmán
San Francisco

First career: Taught bilingual elementary education for 25 years.
How she found her next role: She saw a post on the Nextdoor app from a neighborhood parent who was looking for a tutor for her kids.
What she did: Guzmán tutored three middle school students. "I helped them with whatever their homework was for the day. ... It was kind of like elementary school, where you teach all the subjects," she says, noting that they covered math, language arts, and social studies.
Bonus! "It's really important to ... do something worthwhile,"

she says. "Everyone has a different definition of what 'worthwhile' means. In my case, it was continuing to educate children."

Nonprofit Marketing Specialist
Phyllis Murray Robinette
Colorado Springs, Colorado

First career: Taught elementary school for 34 years.
How she found her next role: Robinette was forced to medically retire during the pandemic. After this sudden change, she jumped into volunteering with her NEA-Retired chapter and with Alpha Delta Kappa (ADK), an international honorary organization for women educators.
Robinette helped ADK plan for the group's first-ever virtual convention in the summer of 2021.

"I ran the green room and went live," she explains. "In the fall of 2022 they hired me as their first remote worker."
What she does: Robinette works on growing ADK's membership and supports leadership development for

women educators around the world.
"My work from coaching and learning all the skills with membership and marketing through the NEA and the Colorado Education Association really built my skillset ... because I learned from the best," she says.
Her advice to newly retired educators? "Do a little heart tug. Ask 'If I'm really passionate about something, and I've done it for years, do I want to continue that work?'"
For Robinette, the answer to that question was a resounding yes. 🦋

Average Salaries for Common Jobs Held By Retired Educators

- Archivists, Curators, and Museum Workers: \$57,120 per year; \$27.46 per hour
- Curriculum Specialist/Instructional Coordinator: \$74,620 per year; \$35.87 per hour
- Fitness Trainer and Instructor: \$46,480 per year; \$22.35 per hour
- Personal Financial Advisor: \$99,580 per year; \$47.88 per hour
- Tutor: \$39,580 per year

*ALL FIGURES FROM 2023 DATA FROM THE U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS. ALL STATISTICS ARE MEDIAN STATISTICS FOR FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT

FIGHT FOR EQUITY? EDUCATORS SAY YES!

By Amanda Litvinov

THE MOVEMENT IS GROWING: EDUCATORS ARE PUSHING BACK AGAINST RECKLESS CUTS THAT WOULD HURT SCHOOLS EVERYWHERE.

The Trump administration has wasted no time embarking on its agenda to shutter the U.S. Department of Education (ED), despite the agency’s critical role in helping schools meet student needs.

In March, President Donald Trump issued an executive order directing Secretary of Education Linda McMahon to do everything in her power to shut down the agency.

By that time, the administration had cut the staff at ED by nearly 50 percent—that’s around 1,900 employees whose tasks included conducting research on student success; supporting teacher development; enforcing accountability in how districts spend federal funds; and investigating and helping to resolve civil rights issues in public schools.

Educators, parents, and administrators know how profoundly public school students will be hurt if Trump’s ultimate goal to shutter the

agency becomes a reality. More than 50 million students across the country rely on programs funded through federal dollars.

“If you believe students in every ZIP code deserve access to a quality public education, then you believe in the work of the federal Department of Education,” says Susana O’Daniel, NEA’s manager of federal partnerships.

“One of the agency’s core functions is protecting students’ civil rights, and its programs—including Title I, Pell Grants, and the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)—are important for Black and brown children, lower-income families, and students with disabilities,” O’Daniel says.

Is our country about to roll back progress on equity in public education? Not if educators have their say.

Raise your voice

Educators, parents, and allies across the country are mobilizing and speaking out

against potential federal education cuts.

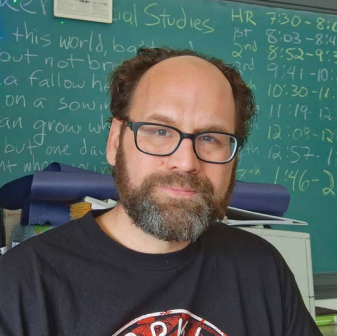
“We won’t be silent as anti-public education politicians try to steal opportunities from our students, our families, and our communities to finance tax cuts for billionaires,” says NEA President Becky Pringle.

There’s no better way to speak out than through your union, says Janice Dwosh, a retired educator who taught in a Title I school in Arizona.

“We can all stand up to these cuts by telling our story,” she says. “Your voice matters!” Dwosh’s top suggestions:

- Speak up at local school board meetings.
- Meet with state legislators.
- Contact members of Congress.
- Participate in town halls, school walk-ins, and other union-planned events.

On the next page, educators share how cuts to federal programs would hurt them and their students.



Title I

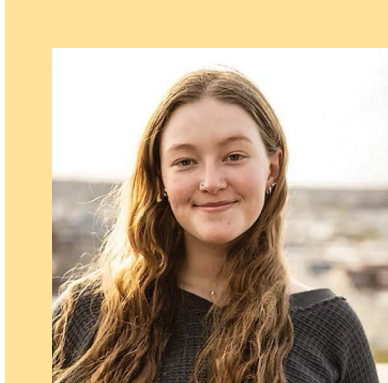
The Big Picture:

More than half of U.S. schools receive Title I funding. This funding helps schools in lower-income communities hire additional staff to provide tutoring, small group instruction, after-school programs, and parent-engagement initiatives.

How Cuts Would Hurt:

“I’VE HAD UP TO 42 STUDENTS IN MY CLASSROOM. WHAT IF WE LOSE TITLE I FUNDING? SOME STUDENTS WILL LOSE THE ONLY MEALS THEY GET DAILY. ALL WILL FACE LARGER CLASS SIZES, LESS ONE-ON-ONE ATTENTION, AND FEWER AFTER-SCHOOL AND SUMMER SUPPORTS—DEVASTATING.”

—Joe Decker, alternative middle school teacher, Ohio



Pell Grants

The Big Picture:

About 1 in 6 college students currently rely on Pell Grants to pay for college tuition and expenses. The Pell program has helped more than 200 million people from low-income families go to college since the program launched in 1972.

How Cuts Would Hurt:

“I HAVE THREE ROOMMATES, AND WORK THREE PART-TIME JOBS. I DON’T BUY EXPENSIVE GROCERIES, LIKE STRAWBERRIES OR CHICKEN. BUT NO MATTER HOW FRUGALLY I LIVE, IF I LOST MY PELL GRANT, I COULD NOT CONTINUE SCHOOL!”

—Alayna Nance, junior at Illinois State University, studying special education



IDEA Funding

The Big Picture:

The number of students served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act reached an all-time high of 7.5 million in 2023, the most recent year for which data is available.

How Cuts Would Hurt:

“AS A SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER IN A TITLE I SCHOOL, I’M AFRAID THAT SOON I WON’T HAVE A JOB. I’M ALSO A SINGLE MOM WITH TWO HARD-WORKING CHILDREN IN COLLEGE ON PELL GRANTS. IS THIS COUNTRY GOING TO ABANDON ITS COMMITMENT TO HELP EVERY CHILD REACH THEIR FULL POTENTIAL?”

—Sonya Allcock, middle school special education teacher, Georgia

What were schools like before the Department of Education?

Equity in education was not the norm before Congress created the Department of Education (ED) in 1979.

Jim Crow laws segregated White and Black students, preventing them from going to school together. Native American students were often sent to boarding schools to assimilate into White culture. Girls were often taught different curricula with fewer opportunities for higher education.

And most students with disabilities were shut out of schools.

“Students with disabilities weren’t educated in most cases,” says Jack Schneider, a professor and director of the Center for Education Policy at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. “They were turned away, and their families were told that the school didn’t have the facilities [or] the resources to serve their kids.”

Some students with disabilities were in school, but with few accommodations or none at all. No one counted the number of young people with disabilities who were entirely left out of the education system.

Before the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) passed, many state laws said schools only had to educate students with disabilities if they were aware of them.

“They tried not to find the kids, because if they found them, they had to do something with them,” says Edwin Martin, the first assistant secretary of education for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, which opened when ED was founded. “So, we wrote ‘Child Find’ into the law as a requirement.”

A section of IDEA, Child Find, specifies that states must identify, locate, and evaluate all children with disabilities who are in need of special education services. Read more about schools before IDEA at [nea.org/BeforeIDEA](https://www.nea.org/BeforeIDEA).

—KALIE WALKER

**TAKE
ACTION**

Join the movement to stand up to reckless education cuts at [nea.org/PushBack](https://www.nea.org/PushBack).

PARENTS OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:

‘We Need Federal Funding’

By Cindy Long

CUTS TO THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION WILL HARM VULNERABLE STUDENTS AND PUT SPECIAL EDUCATION JOBS AT RISK

Jackson Tuell is an energetic 5-year-old who loves waffles, jumping on the trampoline, and playing with his sister, Charlie. Jackson is also autistic, non-verbal, and struggles in most academic and social environments.

“But don’t let that fool you,” says his father, Nick Tuell. “Jackson shows a desire to learn, play with his peers, and always tries again after failure.”



Nick and Lauren Tuell with their daughter, Charlie, and son, Jackson, who has an IEP to address his needs.

Tuell and his wife have been optimistic about Jackson’s education, thanks to their Lebanon, Ohio, public school and Jackson’s Individualized Education Program (IEP)—the written plan that outlines the special education services, accommodations, and goals tailored to meet the needs of a public school student with a disability.

“He is empowered to grow and is able to communicate his needs to those around him,” Tuell says.

But with the Trump administration’s efforts to gut the federal role in education, their optimism has dimmed.

Nick and Lauren Tuell shared their family’s story in an op-ed for the *Ohio Capital Journal*. They write: “Our story isn’t unique, families across the country depend on these programs to ensure our kids receive the tailored services they need to succeed in school and beyond. Yet today, these programs and Jackson’s future face significant threats.”

What’s at stake?

Like many parents, the Tuells worry about the impact of eliminating or drastically shrinking the U.S. Department of Education (ED). One of ED’s primary roles has been to supplement state resources for the nation’s 7.5 million public school students with disabilities, through the Office of Special Education Programs.



Educators, students, and parents attended a March 19 “walk-in” at Maryland’s Takoma Park Middle School, one of several around the country to protest cuts to federal education funding.

Through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), enforced by ED, parents of public school students with disabilities are guaranteed the right to advocate for and help develop IEPs for their children, which are tailored to each student’s specific needs.

Private schools are not required to offer the same services covered by an

IEP. Many of them can’t accommodate students with significant disabilities or complex support requirements, let alone guarantee that students’ rights are upheld. And in rural communities, private schools are rare or nonexistent. As a result, many parents of children with disabilities rely on their neighborhood public school.

Without ED, however, it’s unclear if their public schools will have enough money to staff special educators and continue providing the supports and services guaranteed under IDEA.

And if states get block funding, who will make sure it goes toward special education?

In a February *New Yorker* article, Dan Stewart, who is the managing attorney at the National Disability Rights Network, writes that with no federal

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‘We Need Federal Funding’

funding or oversight, the likely outcome will be “fewer teachers, fewer funds, delayed funds, and less certainty.”

Students with disabilities could lose access to specialized support services, such as speech and occupational therapy and behavioral interventions. And a lack of oversight for legal protections against discrimination would open the door for schools to segregate or exclude them.

In fact, the majority of discrimination complaints filed with ED are about the denial of special education services. ED works to resolve those complaints through voluntary compliance agreements, not lawsuits. If ED goes away, that expertise and focus on compliance would disappear as well, making it far less likely that parents could secure an effective and timely remedy, according to NEA’s Office of General Counsel.

The loss of federal funding could force districts to lay off teachers, particularly special education teachers and paraprofessionals.

‘Our daughter would be lost in the shuffle’

Christine Matthews admits it’s not easy being a parent of a child with a disability. “We worry about how they will do in the classroom, at recess, in the lunchroom, and anywhere they may venture during their school day,” she says.

Matthews’ daughter, Cate, has an intellectual disability, a progressive neurological condition, and sensory impairments, but her public school in the Avonworth School District, outside of Pittsburgh, puts Matthews’ mind at ease.

“She’s integrated into a regular classroom because of the outstanding educational support offerings at our school district,” Matthews says. “She



Instructional paraprofessional Becky Marszalek is a tireless advocate for special education students.

learns alongside her neurotypical peers with the support of amazing special educators and paraprofessionals who make and implement modifications for her that ensure her success in the classroom.”

Matthews knows that the positions of these special education paraeducators are made possible in part by federal funding.

She points to instructional paraprofessional Becky Marszalek, who worked daily with Cate from kindergarten through fourth grade. Marszalek helped Cate communicate with assistive technology and taught her to read and write her name, add and subtract, and interact with peers.

“Becky had endless patience and went above and beyond to care for our daughter, quickly becoming one of the most trusted adults in her life,” Matthews says. “Simply put, our daughter would be lost in the shuffle of the busy school day without the commitment of our dedicated special education and support staff. Losing funding, and the current oversight that

goes with it, would devastate special education services and the families that rely on them.”

Pennsylvania received \$428 million for IDEA programs in the 2022 – 2023 fiscal year, supporting special education services for hundreds of thousands of the state’s students up to age 21.

“Students with disabilities and their families living in rural, suburban, and urban communities count on federal investments to support their public education,” says Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA) President Aaron Chapin.

They deserve more support, not less, he says, cautioning that families will pay a steep price if ED is dismantled.

“If you reassign ED’s responsibilities to oversee services for students with disabilities across different federal agencies with no expertise in this area, it is a recipe for chaos,” Chapin says. “We do not want to see funding or services for students with special needs delayed or impeded.”

NEA, PSEA, and the other NEA state affiliates across the country hear parents’ concerns and will fight for ED and federal funding.

“With legal action, we will protect our students; using legislative action, we will protect our educators,” says NEA President Becky Pringle. “We will rise up in every community across this nation.”



Learn more about how federal funding cuts will hurt students with disabilities and what NEA is doing to fight for them at nea.org/SpecialEdFunding.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF BECKY MARZALEK

NEA MEMBERS INSURANCE TRUST® AND PLAN - 2023 SUMMARY ANNUAL REPORT (Plan Year Beginning September 1, 2023)

The following is the summary annual report for the NEA Members Insurance Trust® and Plan (collectively Trust), Employer Identification Number 53-0115260, providing information on the insurance programs sponsored by the National Education Association (NEA) including the NEA Life Insurance® Program, NEA Accidental Death & Dismemberment Insurance Program, NEA Complimentary LifeSM, and NEA Retiree Health Program for the period beginning September 1, 2023, and ending August 31, 2024. The annual report has been filed with the Employee Benefits Security Administration by the NEA as Plan Administrator, as required under the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA).

BASIC NEA MEMBERS INSURANCE TRUST FINANCIAL INFORMATION

The value of Trust assets, after subtracting liabilities of the Trust, was **\$173,136,125** as of August 31, 2024, compared to **\$183,156,204** as of September 1, 2023. During the Trust year, the Trust experienced a decrease in its net assets of **\$10,020,079**. This decrease includes unrealized depreciation and depreciation in the value of plan assets; that is, the difference between the value of the plan’s assets at the end of the year and the value of the assets at the beginning of the year or the cost of assets acquired during the year. During the Trust year, the Trust had total income of **\$120,305,061** including participant contributions of **\$105,164,765**, a net appreciation in the market value of investments of **\$10,226,361**, and earnings from investments of **\$4,913,935**. Trust expenses were **\$130,325,140**. These expenses included benefits paid to participants and beneficiaries, administrative and other expenses.

INFORMATION FOR NEA LIFE INSURANCE PROGRAM

The Trust has a contract with Minnesota Life Insurance Company to pay all NEA Preferred Term Life Insurance claims and The Prudential Insurance Company of America to pay all other NEA Life Insurance claims incurred under the terms of this program. Because they are so called “experienced rated” contracts, the premium costs are affected by, among other things, the number and size of claims. The total premiums for the Trust plan year beginning September 1, 2023, and ending August 31, 2024, made under such “experienced-rated” contracts were **\$57,874,423** and the total of all benefit claims paid under the contracts during the Trust year was **\$62,541,533**. The total number of participants was **386,045**.

INFORMATION FOR NEA ACCIDENTAL DEATH & DISMEMBERMENT (AD&D) AND ACCIDENTAL INJURY PROGRAMS

The Trust has a contract with The Prudential Insurance Company of America to pay all NEA AD&D and NEA AD&D Plus claims incurred under the terms of the Trust. Because it is a so called “experienced rated” contract, the premium costs are affected by, among other things, the number and size of claims. The total premiums for the Trust plan year beginning September 1, 2023, and ending August 31, 2024, made under such “experienced-rated” contract were **\$4,660,768** and the total of all benefit claims paid under the contract during the Trust year was **\$4,501,666**. The Trust has a contract with The Prudential Insurance Company of America which allocates funds toward group insurance certificates for the NEA AD&D Advantage Program and the NEA Accidental Injury Program. The total premiums for the Trust plan year beginning September 1, 2023, and ending August 31, 2024, was **\$1,220,860**. The total number of participants was **175,727** in all AD&D and Accidental Injury Programs.

INFORMATION FOR NEA COMPLIMENTARY LIFE INSURANCE PROGRAM

The Trust has a contract with The Prudential Insurance Company of America to pay all NEA Complimentary Life Insurance claims incurred under the terms of the Trust. The NEA Complimentary Life Insurance Program is self-supporting and paid by premiums from the NEA Members Insurance Trust funds rather than from Member contributions. Because it is a so called “experienced rated” contract, the premium costs are affected by, among other things, the number and size of claims. The total premiums for the Trust plan year beginning September 1, 2023, and ending August 31, 2024, were **\$1,854,893** and the total of all benefit claims paid under the contract during the Trust year was **\$1,604,929**. The total number of participants was **3,125,376**.

INFORMATION FOR NEA RETIREE HEALTH PROGRAM

The Trust has a contract with United American Insurance Company to pay all NEA Retiree Health Program (“NEA RHP”) claims incurred under the terms of the Program. The total premiums for the Trust plan year beginning September 1, 2023, and ending August 31, 2024, were **\$19,548,687** for NEA RHP. The total number of participants was **6,964** in NEA RHP.

Your Rights to Additional Information

As a participant, you have the legally protected right to receive a copy of the full annual report, or any part thereof for a reasonable charge or you may inspect the Annual Report without charge at the office of NEA Members Insurance Trust, Attn: NEA Member Benefits, 1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036 or at the U.S. Department of Labor in Washington, D.C. upon payment of copying costs. Requests to the Department should be addressed to: Public Disclosure Room, Room N-1513, Employee Benefits Security Administration, U.S. Department of Labor, 200 Constitution Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20210. You also have the right to receive from the Trust Administrator, on request and at no charge, a statement of the assets and liabilities of the Trust and accompanying notes, or a statement of income and expenses of the Trust and accompanying notes, or both. If you request a copy of the full annual report from the plan administrator, these two statements and accompanying notes will be included as part of that report. The charge to cover copying costs given above does not include a charge for the copying of these portions of the report because these portions are furnished without charge.

Send in the HOUNDS!

By Mary Ellen Flannery

THERAPY DOGS CAN BE EDUCATORS' BEST FRIENDS WHEN IT COMES TO CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT. JUST ASK THESE ARIZONA UNION MEMBERS

When Lindsay Dominguez's principal heard about the Paws & Peers therapy dog program, she dashed off an email to Dominguez: "With all the dogs in your house, you must have one that would work for this!"

Everybody knows Dominguez is a dog person. And she had the perfect pupper for the job.

When she first adopted Hotch, he was a wild-haired, all-legs puppy with a sweet disposition. Today, he's one of more than 80 active therapy dogs with Paws & Peers, and a member of the third-grade teaching team at Jefferson Elementary, in the Mesa, Ariz., school district.

Before school starts, he greets every grown-up. After the bell, he walks third graders to specials, stopping for pets from students along the way. (Does Dominguez dip him in oxytocin? No. But research shows that petting dogs boosts feel-good hormones while reducing production of the stress-hormone cortisol.)

After lunch, Hotch "oversees" learning projects like a Zen instructional coach. That is ... he naps under the desk.

"He's maybe shepherd or chocolate lab? Maybe cattle dog? He's a mystery dog, but 100 percent good boy," Dominguez says.

Paws & Peers, the nation's largest school therapy dog program, is full of good boys—and girls! What's more, these bushy-tailed, canine "co-teachers" pack a pedagogical punch. Indeed, Arizona State University associate professor Kathleen Farrand's ongoing research shows a positive impact on students and educators.

'She brings joy!'

Schools swirl with hard-to-manage emotions. There's the stress of teaching in a red-hot political climate. Plus, the increasing, post-pandemic volatility of students. Mental health issues—among both students and staff—are more prevalent. Workloads are soaring. School shootings are a terrifying backdrop.

None of that fazes Gizmo, a possible Chigi (Chihuahua plus corgi). Found abandoned at a park 10 years ago, Gizmo is a 20-pound lovebug with deep brown eyes. "My principal will come in, or teachers will come in, and they'll say, 'I need some Gizmo time,'" says Stephanie Solis, a sixth-grade teacher at Mesa's Salk Elementary School.

Preschool teacher Monica Massey says her chunky rescue pug, Alice, spreads good vibes, too.

"She brings joy!" says Massey, of Adams Elementary. (FYI: Alice's favorite snack is chicken nuggets.)

"My principal will come in, or teachers will come in, and they'll say, 'I need some Gizmo time.'"

—Elementary school teacher Stephanie Solis

In 2020, Mesa piloted Paws & Peers in five schools, with the goal of improving students' mental health. Today, it's in 45 district locations. Each dog-and-educator team goes through six weeks of basic training and eight weeks of specialized training, and must pass an official evaluation. Unlike programs that send in dogs after traumatic events, Mesa's dogs typically go to school two days a week, every week.

And yes, they have helped students' mental health. But that's not all.

Animal intuition

Bear and Olaf motivate students, notes Kino Junior High School STEM teacher Nancy Parra-Quinlan. Recently, her engineering students used 3D-modeling software to design dream houses for their classroom canines. A key incentive? The chance to measure the magnificent tail of Olaf the rescue husky.

They also teach responsibility. Who wants to walk Olaf? Can somebody check on Bear's water?

Olaf is Mr. Personality and flops among students' desks, demanding they step over him. Bear is a mix of herding breeds—what locals call

a "rez dog." He's shyer, but Parra-Quinlan sees him leaning against the students who most need his emotional support.

Dogs often know more about people's needs than we do, notes Tommy Tomlinson, author of the book *Dogland*. For thousands of years, they've been watching and learning about us.

Not long ago, Dominguez noticed how Hotch paused at the same cafeteria table every day to lean against the same second grader.

"I reached out to his teacher and was like, 'I don't know, maybe I'm being weird because I'm a dog person, but what do we know about this kid?'" It turns out his family had recently lost their home. "We may not have known of his need without Hotch," Dominguez says.

Susan Osman

Mesa school psychologist Susan Osman sees how intuition guides labradoodle Mazie. "Even as a puppy, when somebody was upset, she'd go and sit on their lap," she says.

Today, Osman and Mazie meet with students with emotional and behavioral issues, and Osman notes how Mazie attaches to the children who most challenge adults. "She's so unconditional in her love."



During morning classes, Arizona teacher Lindsay Dominguez's canine "co-teacher," Hotch, moseys between students for calming pets. He opts for a nap during afternoon class.



Send in the HOUNDS!

It's like the dogs have a sixth sense for kids on the verge of meltdown, Farrand says. They'll get up, walk over, and lean against their side. Situation defused. Often, students with emotional issues learn to take themselves out of a situation and go to a calming corner.

"A minute later, the student has a hand on the dog," Farrand says. "And a minute later, the student is able to turn around and talk to the teacher."

Thank you, Hotch!

These benefits to students aren't shocking. After all, that was the point. "But I'm noticing the impact is as great—or even more so—for faculty and staff," Farrand says. "So many staff members talk about how [seeing the dogs] motivates them to come to work. Adults have bad days too, right? And the dogs lift them up."

Another unexpected effect: a growing sense of community. Dogs like Olaf say hi to everyone. He is the guy you want at every party, sparking conversations among the unlikeliest friends and building relationships.

All of this is hard work! At the end of the day, Hotch may earn a pup cup. More often, he and Dominguez go straight home where, like a lot of educators, Hotch flops on the couch. "I can hear him snoring!" Dominguez says. 🐾



Nancy Parra-Quinlan with Bear and Olaf

FOR MORE

To watch Paws & Peers teams at work, visit nea.org/TherapyDogs.

Meet the Team!

NAME:
Gizmo

HUMANPARTNER:
Stephanie Solis, sixth-grade teacher

FAVORITE SNACK:
Chicken, beef, and pork kebab



Gizmo

NAME:
Bear

HUMANPARTNER:
Nancy Parra-Quinlan, STEM teacher

FAVORITE PASTIME:
Staring into students' eyes



Bear

NAME:
Olaf

HUMANPARTNER:
Nancy Parra-Quinlan

FAVORITE WORDS:
"Do you want to go to school?"



Olaf

NAME:
Mazie

HUMANPARTNER:
Susan Osman, school psychologist

JOB EXPERIENCE:
Therapy dog in hospitals, before working in schools



Mazie

Your No. 1 Question, Answered

Q: Would my dog be a good school therapy dog?

A: Maybe! "A successful dog is extra-friendly, but remains calm," says Paige Kistner, Paws & Peers support specialist. "They want to be pet by people. ... We test our dogs next to a neutral dog, and a successful therapy dog will typically ignore the other dog and look to the people in the room."

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF PAIGE KISTNER/PAWS & PEERS

Interested in Racial and Social Justice Trainings and Resources?

Ready to make a difference? Scan the QR code to explore NEA's professional trainings and resources on racial and social justice.



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NEA is committed to your growth as a leader. Visit nea.org/leadership-development to learn more about the NEA Leadership Competency Framework and other resources designed to support activists and leaders on their journey.

- Leadership Development 101: A Foundational Course for Activists and Leaders
- Leadership Development 102: A Strategic Approach to Leadership Development nea.org/lep
- NEA Leadership Competency Framework
- Leadership Competency Self-Assessment(s)
- NEA Leadership Development Guide Planning Tool nea.org/leadership-development
- An Introduction to the NEA Representative Assembly—A Course for Delegate Leaders (for members only) nea.org/lep
- NEA National Leadership Summit nea.org/leadershipsummit



THEN AND NOW:

A Pregnant Teacher Changed Family Leave Laws Forever

By Joel Berger

TEACHER JO CAROL LAFLEUR TOOK HER PREGNANCY DISCRIMINATION CASE ALL THE WAY TO THE SUPREME COURT. HER HISTORIC WIN, IN 1974, STILL ECHOES AT THE BARGAINING TABLE TODAY.

THEN

Just over 50 years ago, Jo Carol LaFleur was teaching at Lakewood High School, in the Cleveland suburbs, when she heard the news. “A student came to my class and whispered to me that I had a phone call from a radio station,” she writes in a 2006 article for the *Georgetown Journal of Gender and the Law*.

After hurrying out to call her lawyer, LaFleur said she “leaped back” to her classroom, doing “one grand jeté after another” down the hallway. “We won, we won, we won!” she exclaimed to her students, and the students began cheering.

The win? A 7-2 victory in the 1974 U.S. Supreme Court case *Cleveland Board*

of Education v. LaFleur, which struck down the common requirement at the time that pregnant teachers leave their classrooms.

LaFleur’s victory was a turning point for women’s rights in the workplace.

Half a century later, the ruling still serves as a building block for family leave policies won at the bargaining table and in state legislatures. A common thread throughout the years? The power of NEA’s representation.

‘One teacher’s fight for all’

At the time of LaFleur’s victory, the *NEA Reporter*—the precursor to *NEA Today*—ran a feature story about her entitled, “One Teacher’s Fight For All.” The article begins: “LaFleur discovered before Christmas 1970 that she was

two months pregnant.” Yet, when she shared the exciting news with her principal, he told LaFleur she must abide by policies in the teacher handbook that forced pregnant teachers to take unpaid leave after the fourth month of their pregnancies.

LaFleur told the *NEA Reporter*, “I never saw a copy and was unaware of the forced unpaid leave rule.”

In the law journal article, Jo Carol Nessel-Sale (formerly LaFleur), describes her response to the policy: “Alternately angry and incredulous, I complained that it was not fair or right, that I did not want to leave, and I would not fill out any request for leave papers.”

Today, Nessel-Sale hasn’t lost any righteous outrage. “You just have to stand up to wrong-headedness, or

“These men were making these awful decisions, stereotypical decisions ... that [pregnant teachers] weren’t capable of teaching, and ... we couldn’t stand erect anymore, or our center of gravity would be so off that we would be tilting over.”

—Jo Carol Nessel-Sale



(Left) Jo Carol Nessel-Sale (formerly LaFleur) today. (Below) In 1974, LaFleur was featured in the *NEA Reporter*, for her role in the Supreme Court case that allowed pregnant teachers to stay in the classroom; LaFleur with her son, Michael, the baby at the center of the case.

“I reminded [the principal] that my students had already lost one teacher that school year, and it was not in their best interest to have to lose a second one, especially when there was no reason for it,” Nessel-Sale wrote in the law review article.

The principal responded coldly: “He gave me a copy of the teacher’s manual and a maternity leave form. The meeting ended.”

She appealed to her building representative for the Cleveland Teachers Union. Unfortunately, he wasn’t supportive. Nessel-Sale still remembers what he said: “Just go home, have the baby.”

She reflects, “These men were making these awful decisions, stereotypical decisions ... that [pregnant teachers] weren’t capable of teaching, and ... we couldn’t stand erect anymore, or our center of gravity would be so off that we would be tilting over.”

Undaunted, she called the library of Cleveland’s newspaper, *The Plain Dealer*, and asked for the name of a women’s liberation group. This led her to Jane Picker, a lawyer who took her case pro bono on behalf of the Women’s Law Fund Inc.



wrong-headedness wins,” she explains in a recent interview with *NEA Today*. “I didn’t want to be someone who didn’t try to stand against ignorance and sexism and discrimination,” she says. “I just couldn’t bear it if I didn’t do everything I could.”

Her anger was not only about how she was being treated. She was also deeply concerned about the impact of her midyear departure on her 25 students—a group of seventh-grade girls who had been identified as being at high risk of dropping out of school.

Nessel-Sale recalls that throughout the year, the girls had tested and challenged her, but she had gained their trust. The idea of leaving in the middle of the year? She couldn’t think of anything worse for her students.

THEN AND NOW:

A Pregnant Teacher Changed Family Leave Laws Forever

Initially, they drew a conservative federal district court judge. “To no one’s surprise, but to my great dismay,” Nessel-Sale later wrote, the judge ruled against her in May 1971.

NEA gets involved

Despite the fact that she wasn’t an NEA member (Cleveland’s union was part of the American Federation of Teachers), NEA jumped in to support the appeal.

“Although NEA does not usually support non-members,” explained the *NEA Reporter* back in 1974, the association entered the cases of LaFleur and two other teachers, Susan Cohen and Elizabeth Nelson,

“because of their nationwide implications for teachers.”

NEA invested \$25,000 in these cases (nearly \$170,000 in today’s dollars) and filed an amicus brief on LaFleur’s behalf. While the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in her favor, the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled against Cohen. The U.S. Supreme Court took up the case to resolve the dueling circuit court opinions.

It was at this point, Nessel-Sale says, that she began to understand that her case was “kind of a big deal.” In February 1974, *Time* magazine ran a picture of her. “You don’t get your picture in *Time* magazine if you don’t have a little something going for you,” she laughs.

Ultimately, legal and financial support from organizations including NEA and the ACLU’s Women’s Rights Project (headed by a young Ruth Bader Ginsburg) helped pave the way for the Supreme Court victory—and inspired Nessel-Sale to become a lawyer herself.

She told the *NEA Reporter* that soon after she won the case, she overheard a conversation in an evening art class: “A teacher there expressed delight that teachers no longer have to resign at a specified time early in their pregnancy because ‘some teachers’ won a Supreme Court case. I didn’t tell [the teacher] it was me, but I just beamed on the inside.”



Ohio teacher Annelise Taggart—shown with her daughter, Bea, son, Franklin, and husband, Michael—successfully advocated for paid family leave through her local union.

Educators Unions Are Winning Paid Family Leave Across the Country

These NEA affiliates took a stand for paid family leave—and won!

- In the 2022 contract ratified by the Malden Education Association, in Massachusetts, teachers get six weeks of paid leave after the birth or adoption of a child. They can also use 6 more weeks of accrued sick leave, for a total of 12 weeks.
- In 2023, members of The South Carolina Education Association wrote emails, made phone calls, and met with state legislators, urging them to pass paid family leave legislation for school employees. Their advocacy paid off:

South Carolina passed a law providing every school employee with six weeks of paid leave following the birth or adoption of a child.

- Education Minnesota was a key member of Minnesotans for Paid Family and Medical Leave, a coalition of health, faith, labor, business, and community organizations that fought to establish paid

family leave statewide. The new law, signed by Gov. Tim Walz in 2023, provides up to 12 weeks of paid leave for all Minnesota workers after the birth or adoption of a child, as well as for other qualifying events, such as family caregiving needs or military deployment. Workers who need leave from both categories can take up to 20 weeks. The law takes effect in 2026.

LEARN MORE

Want to learn more about paid family leave benefits in your state? Visit the Bipartisan Policy Center at bit.ly/BPCFamilyLeave.

NOW

Nessel-Sale’s victory was a watershed moment in advancing women’s rights in the workplace. Educators today are building on her success, as they advocate for paid family leave that will give them the adequate time off to care for their new children.

Ohio art teacher Annelise Taggart is among the educators carrying on Nessel-Sale’s fight. Taggart was part of the Columbus Education Association (CEA) bargaining team in 2022, and championed the inclusion of paid family leave in the union’s contract.

“We need this,” she would repeat at CEA town halls and at the bargaining table.

CEA eventually went on strike for three days before agreeing to a new contract that included paid family leave for the first time.

A Columbus teacher can now use her sick bank for the first 10 days after the birth of her child. The district covers 20 additional paid days, for a total of 6 weeks. (Non-birthing parents get three weeks.)

Taggart had a personal reason to be excited about the new contract: She was 10 weeks pregnant. “When we finally came to an agreement, it was 3 a.m.,” she recalls. “One of my teammates turned to

me and said, ‘So now you can start working on having another kid.’”

Taggart responded: “Well, actually, I’m going to be one of the first people to be able to utilize our paid family leave because, *surprise*, I’m pregnant!”

After the birth of her daughter, Taggart was especially grateful for the new contract because she experienced post-partum anxiety.

She says: “Realizing I have this paid family leave that we won in our contract and not having that additional stress, when I was already having all kinds of emotional stuff that I was working through, ... that was really, really wonderful.” 🌸



“We need this.”

—Annelise Taggart’s words to her union and at the bargaining table about the need for paid family leave.

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Game On! Unified Sports Build Fun and Friendship

There's no mistaking game day at Billingsley Elementary, in White Plains, Md. Every Saturday for seven weeks in February and March, the gym fills with the sound of a dribbling basketball, the chirp of sneakers on the court, and the excited cheers of fans. But the best sound of all is the laughter of the players, like Raevyn Mapson. A member of the Mattawoman Middle School Unified Sports team, Mapson is one of six Charles County elementary and middle school teams that play each week.

"I love it," says Mapson, who has an intellectual disability and epilepsy. "Shooting baskets with my team makes me happy."

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the law that requires a free, appropriate education for millions of students with disabilities. Unified sports help achieve the goals of IDEA by fostering inclusion and removing barriers to school activities.

The program brings students with and without disabilities together to play basketball, soccer, track and field, and other sports. The rules and scoring are the same, but it's not about who wins. It's about building community and understanding.

The students with disabilities learn about sports, teamwork, and belonging. The other students, called partners, learn about leadership and empathy. Everyone learns about friendship.

"If you want to put a smile on your face, come to a unified sports game," says Steven Baldo, a Charles County ESOL teacher who volunteers at the games. Learn more at nea.org/UnifiedSports.



(Clockwise from top, right) Maryland educators Steven Baldo and Marissa Murdock volunteer with the Unified Basketball team at Indian Head Elementary; students dribble down the court; an adaptive hoop provides baskets at different heights; student Raevyn Mapson gets a hug from her niece; Jalin Medina celebrates a basket!



“

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