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May 2026

neaToday

for **NEA HIGHER ED**
An edition of *NEA Today*

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Annual Report
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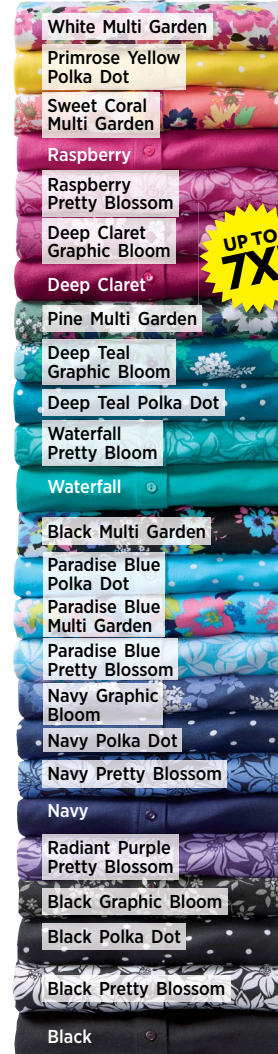
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COVER: MOSES MITCHELL; ABOVE FROM LEFT: MOSES MITCHELL; JUSTINE GREEN

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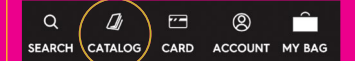
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We believe public education is the gateway to opportunity. All students have the human and civil right to a quality public education that develops their potential, independence, and character.

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

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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.

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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*

National Council for Higher Education
President Alec Thomson



Springing Into Action

As a Michigan resident, I am excited by this time of year because the arrival of spring brings with it signs of renewal and positive energy. After days of limited sunshine, it is wonderful to feel the environment physically transforming itself. Similarly, I find myself energized by the changes being brought forth within higher education by organizing efforts.

A steady flow of negative news and destructive policy developments tends to obscure the fact that higher education faculty, staff, and students are currently engaged in meaningful collective actions. These remarkable efforts are not only protecting our institutions from regressive attacks, but are promoting and expanding opportunities for teaching, learning, research, and shared governance.

By way of example, I want to highlight two outstanding organizing success stories. First, in October, the Union of Tenure System Faculty (UTSF) at Michigan State University received formal recognition as a collective bargaining group. This agreement is a critical step forward to empower faculty and its impact will be felt across the campus.

Second, a campus organizing drive at New Mexico State University brought together NEA Higher Ed leaders from across the U.S. to work in teams on that campus, building support to secure a first contract. This campaign resulted in the recruitment of new members and the emergence of new campus leaders. It is worth noting that both of these universities had previously rejected faculty unionization efforts.

These efforts are critical to protect workers' rights. They serve not only to secure financial security for members but also respect and dignity for their work.

Look for more of these stories and campaigns to unfold in 2026.

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



Becky Pringle
NEA President



“

For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. We are the reaction to this administration's action of terrorizing our communities with ICE raids; stripping away resources from our public schools, demoralizing working families; taking food out of the mouths of our babies and healthcare away from our seniors. Silence is the lifeblood of authoritarianism. So we will *not* be silent. We will fight back and we will fight forward for a world where our schools are sacred spaces, where every child feels safe and welcome at school, and where every educator is respected. We will create a world that is worthy of our students.

—Becky, speaking at the Los Angeles “No Kings” Rally, March 28, 2026

Face to Face With NEA members

Meeting educators has always been the very best part of my job! This spring, I visited members in Delaware, “The First State,” where educators are making union activism their top priority. The Delaware State Education Association (DSEA) delivered historic raises for teachers and education support professionals and are now working toward a \$60,000 starting teacher salary. They protected educator time, secured paid leave, won more personal and sick days, and fewer mandatory trainings. They also prioritized student wellness, with more play-based learning environments, and won more than \$100 million for school-based mental health professionals. And they preserved healthcare benefits and protected school funding! Way to go DSEA!



(Top) In Delaware, I joined students at a Unified Sports bowling outing, along with DSEA President Stephanie Ingram (third from left) as well as Middletown High School teacher Sarah Hall and Appoquinimink Education Association (AEA) President Steve Byers (both far right). (Bottom, left to right) I met with Appoquinimink Education Support Professionals president Sharon Livingstone and AEA member Abby Hartranft, a teacher at Spring Meadow Early Childhood Center.

JOIN ME 3 Things To Do For Yourself and Your Union

- 1. Organize with your local union.**
In light of the current political crisis facing our members, our schools, and our very democracy, the 2026 NEA Representative Assembly, in July, will build on the momentum of No Kings and May Day. Delegates will train and plan to expand our organizing efforts when they get back home to their affiliates. Follow along at nea.org/RA and look for important messages from your states in July and August.
- 2. Get ready for the November elections!**
Now is the time to start planning for the critical midterm elections. Bookmark nea.org/Vote to prepare. Our students' future, public school jobs, and our democracy depend on our informed participation.
- 3. Give some gratitude for yourself!**
It's the end of another school year—congratulations! Please take some time to appreciate what you accomplished. Breathe. Reflect. And then give yourself credit for the difference you made in your students' and colleagues' lives this year.

Find out how NEA is working every day for and with educators, students, and public schools. Read “We Are NEA!” (Page 10).

In the News:

“All students, regardless of race, place of birth, or language they speak, deserve schools that are safe, welcoming and free from fear—no exceptions.”

—Becky, on *The 19th*, February 26, 2026

What I'm Talking About: Organizing for Power

This moment requires all of us working in solidarity. We must organize for power to create safe, just, and equitable schools for our students and educators; an economy where one job is enough and all workers are treated with dignity; and a democracy that delivers for everyone, not just the privileged few. I have challenged our members to act—every day.

Learn how at nea.org/Protect.

Take an action every day, because we will not allow the Trump administration to privatize our schools, restrict our voting rights, erode civil rights, attack our unions, or silence our voices so that they can march unchallenged toward unfettered power. We can't just be outraged by what's happening, we have to use that anger to courageously stand in this season of suffering, to not turn away from our understanding that we are the ancestors of future generations. The struggle of this lifetime is our responsibility. I know you will never give up on our kids, our communities, and this country.



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Nevada Union Safeguards School Funding

Nevada educators succeeded in keeping public money in public schools—one of

NEA's top priorities. The state's educators stopped a \$1.6 billion payout to the entertainment industry with tax dollars siphoned from schools.

The credit, dubbed the "Hollywood tax credit," was earmarked for

construction of a film studio in Las Vegas.

Thanks to strong organizing efforts by the Nevada State Education Association, Reno's Washoe Education Association, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees and other allies, the state legislature rejected the unsound proposal and protected funding for students, educators, and long-term stability in Nevada.

NEA Joins Lawsuit to Stop Immigration Raids at Schools

NEA joined a federal lawsuit to restore protections for sensitive locations that, for decades, kept U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents away from schools, churches, and

hospitals. Last year, the Trump administration rescinded these protections.

This lawsuit puts students' well-being first, pushes back against fear and disruption in schools, and reaffirms educators' commitment to defending students' right to learn—no matter their immigration status. The lawsuit was still pending at press time.

Educators Shield Schools from ICE

After the Trump administration removed protections from immigration raids on school grounds, locals of the Washington Education Association stepped up!

Local unions, like Mount Vernon, Sedro-Woolley, and Highline, won clear contract language and protocols that protect educators and families from interference by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). New protections include the right to refuse interaction with ICE while on school grounds and the right to withhold student, family, or employee personal information from ICE.

Minnesota educators modeled similar solidarity during ICE operations this winter. In Minneapolis and St. Paul, union members organized safety patrols, trained volunteers, and delivered groceries to families who were too afraid to leave home.

NEA's sample contract language can help you protect immigrant students in your school. Go to nea.org/SupportImmigrants.



Educators joined 50,000 protestors at anti-ICE rallies in Minneapolis.

NEA Higher Ed Is Surging!

The newly formed **New Mexico State University (NMSU)-NEA** union has been recognized by the state labor board as the official bargaining representative for

hundreds of faculty across the NMSU system! The university's faculty are part of a nationwide surge in higher education employees joining unions.

Before NMSU unionized, 63 percent of faculty across New Mexico were unionized. Now, it's up to 85 percent!

Pennsylvania student teachers will now get paid, thanks to the advocacy efforts of the Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA), which includes Student PSEA members. More than 3,000 future teachers will now earn up to \$15,000 during their student teaching semester.

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About the author:

Dr. Tasia Fields

She is an educator, district leader, consultant, podcast host, and founder of Great Minds TEACH Alike, a lifestyle brand for educators that centers on educator wellness.

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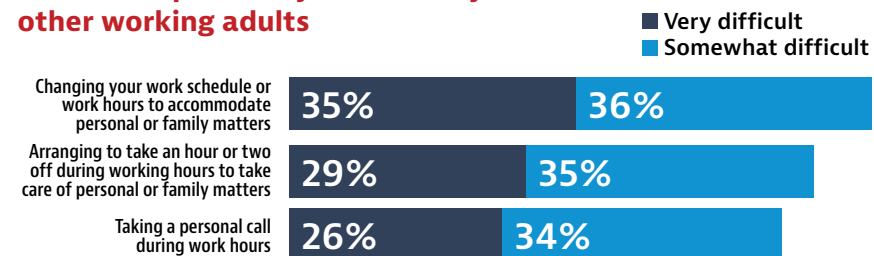
TEACHERS NEED MORE WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Teachers experience poor work-life balance compared to similar working adults, according to a RAND survey of teachers, released in October and funded in part by NEA. Three times as many teachers as similar working adults said it was difficult to change their work schedule or attend to personal or family matters while on the job.

In addition, 46 percent said work made them too tired for activities in private life, compared with 13 percent of similar working adults. And less than half of teachers nationally said their school or district was making efforts to help teachers balance work and life.



Teachers report less job flexibility than other working adults



SOURCE: RAND, STATE OF THE AMERICAN TEACHER SURVEY, 2025

Naloxone Stocked in More Schools

The number of opioid overdose deaths—including fatalities from fentanyl—among adolescents in the U.S. has risen in recent years. According to experts and a growing body of research, most of these overdoses could be avoided by the timely administration of naloxone—an opioid reversal medication. Currently, 13 states have laws that mandate naloxone to be stocked in public schools. And 35 states have laws that expressly allow schools or school employees to carry, store, or administer naloxone.

In 2023, lawmakers in Congress introduced the bipartisan School Access to Naloxone Act, which would ensure school personnel have the training and education to administer the medication to prevent opioid overdose. The bill was reintroduced in January 2026.



PHOTO AND ILLUSTRATION: ADOBE STOCK

DO FOUR-DAY SCHOOL WEEKS HELP REDUCE STAFF TURNOVER?

The number of school districts with four-day school weeks has grown significantly over the past decade. Ten years ago, the main justification for the switch was to reduce costs. But more districts—especially in rural areas—are turning to a four-day week to help address educator shortages. Research indicates, however, that these new schedules are not moving the needle on retention—and they could have drawbacks for students. Accordingly, many experts urge school leaders to proceed with caution when considering the change.

A four-day week could improve teacher working conditions, which many surveys suggest is the top factor in educators' decision to stay or leave. But the change may not be enough to make a difference, says Aaron Ainsworth, a researcher at University of California, Irvine and co-author of a recent study that examines the impact of a four-day week in Oregon. Ainsworth and his colleagues found that teacher turnover actually increased in districts with a four-day schedule. The turnover was highest in years 5–9 of adoption.

"Teachers may find fitting the curriculum into four days is a challenge, and maybe they don't have the necessary support from administrators," Ainsworth explains. "Many teachers also end up working longer days—and

sometimes on that fifth day when students aren't in school."

And in the places that have adopted the new schedule, pay tends not to keep pace with other districts. Given how important salary and working conditions are to teacher retention, Ainsworth and his colleagues conclude, "boosting one and not the other may not move the needle in the long term."



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

CURSIVE MAKES A COMEBACK

In 2016, 14 states required schools to teach cursive writing. By 2019, 20 states had enacted legislation requiring it. Now, there are 27 states with cursive instruction requirements. Pennsylvania became the latest, in February, when the legislature passed a law requiring the state's public elementary schools to teach cursive writing in grades 3–5.

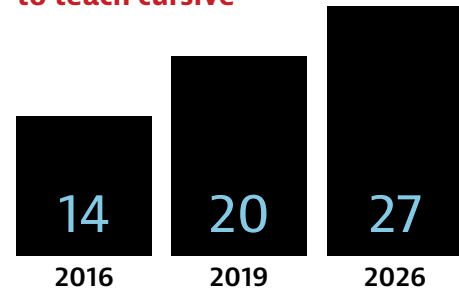
The advancement of classroom technology wasn't the only driver behind the sidelining of cursive. The Common Core State Standards, released in 2010, didn't mention cursive writing, but did call for the teaching of "keyboard skills."

Cursive proponents point to the many studies showing that learning cursive not only improves retention and comprehension, it engages the brain on a deep level as students learn to join letters in a continuous flow. It also enhances fine motor dexterity and gives children a better idea of how words work in combination.

Despite acknowledging the benefits of cursive, many educators may be wary of yet another state mandate and whether, with only limited instruction hours available, there are more urgent priorities in the classroom.



Number of U.S. states that require schools to teach cursive



“When our communities walk into our school, they feel seen. They know they are safe, and that is power. And you are the ones making it happen.”

—Education Minnesota President Monica Byron, in January, during the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement surge in Minneapolis and St. Paul



PHOTOS FROM TOP: ADOBE STOCK; JENN ACKERMAN

Fewer School Shootings, but Still too Many

There should never be another school shooting, but the number of these incidents in the U.S. seems to be declining. According to the K–12 School Shooting Database, there were 233 recorded incidents at elementary and secondary private and public schools in 2025—the lowest number since 2020, when 116 school shootings took place. The highest number of school shootings occurred in 2023, with 352 incidents. Additionally, the number of shooting victims injured or fatally wounded on K–12 campuses last year was 148, down from an all-time high of 276 in 2024.

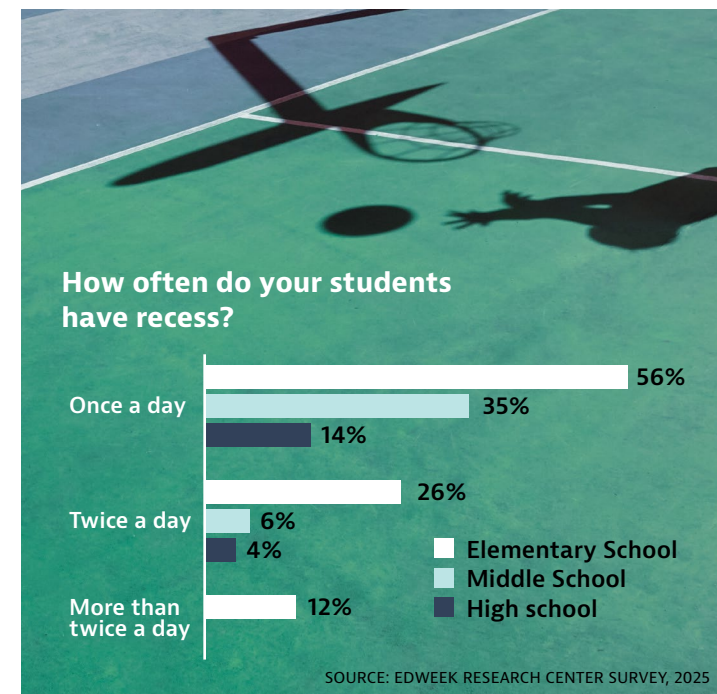
Still, these numbers remain staggeringly high. Experts say lawmakers are not doing enough to prevent shootings, such as enacting commonsense gun laws and providing mental health supports for students.



Number of school shooting incidents in the U.S.



SOURCE: K–12 SCHOOL SHOOTING DATABASE



HOW MUCH RECESS IS ENOUGH?

Recess improves academic outcomes as well as social and emotional learning. It also boosts overall well-being, especially for elementary students. But over the past decade, time devoted to recess has declined for a host of reasons. Before then, elementary students spent an average of 30–40 minutes per day on playgrounds versus 20–30 minutes today. In high school, there are few if any scheduled recess breaks. A recent *EdWeek* survey found that 80 percent of high school teachers and 49 percent of middle school teachers reported no recess at their schools. Fifty-six percent of elementary teachers said recess was offered once a day. Most experts believe that is not enough, recommending two 20-minute breaks for elementary students. Teachers reported that the potential loss of instructional time and other priorities are behind the drop in time for recess.

PHOTOS FROM TOP: ADOBE STOCK; SHUTTERSTOCK

When a new faculty union at Michigan State University (MSU) finally won recognition, in 2025, it was like seeing a plant emerge from the soil—50 years after the seed was sowed.

After failed unionization efforts in the 1970s and 1990s, and years of organizing and hard-fought legal battles since 2020, MSU faculty have established the Union of Tenure System Faculty (UTSF).

"This is a historic victory for tenure-system faculty at MSU," the UTSF Organizing Committee said in a joint statement. "For years, we have organized to secure a voice in decisions shaping the future of our institution. ... We can negotiate and advocate for the ideals that make our work possible."

The new unit at MSU is just one of the new additions to the NEA family tree in the past year. For the first time since the pandemic, NEA ended the 2024 – 2025 membership year up nearly 12,000 members over the previous year's totals. That means the number of new members far exceeded the number of memberships dropped in that same time period.



Tenured faculty at Michigan State University spearhead a campus organizing event in 2025.

"Every worker deserves a union, and educators who work in America's colleges and universities are no exception. Faculty nationwide are facing unprecedented challenges, from the elimination of federal funding to political attacks on research and teaching."

—NEA President Becky Pringle

What made the difference at MSU?

"It wasn't one thing, it was a pileup of things," says Evan Eslinger, who, alongside NEA colleagues, spent five years organizing the roughly 1,900 tenured faculty. "It was the MSU administration's actions that gave us a tipping point in this campaign," he notes.

For one thing, the administration had slashed the salaries and retirement benefits of non-union employees during the pandemic.

They had also canceled long-standing campus diversity initiatives, such as the cherished Chinese New Year celebration. And they signaled that they weren't going to stand up for academic freedom on campus.

Another key factor in the MSU campaign—and every organizing campaign—was the hard work that educators put into one-on-one conversations with their peers.

"When educators do the organizing, they are really building a community," Eslinger says. "That's how we grow our union and sustain that growth." ✨

Welcome to the Family!

New NEA affiliates and growing locals around the country—including those featured here—are strengthening our union voice.

KANSAS

The 599 education support professionals of Lawrence Public Schools voted by a 95 percent margin to unionize under the **Lawrence Education Association**.

After this victory, the local grew to

1,471 members.

SOUTH CAROLINA

The **South Carolina Education Association** established two new NEA Aspiring Educator chapters at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs)—Allen University, in Columbia, and Claflin University, in Orangeburg.

These future educators join more than

40,000 student NEA members.

SUMMARIES PROVIDED BY NEA'S CENTER FOR ORGANIZING.

VIRGINIA

The **Harrisonburg Education Association** held a representation election in 2025—and won by a landslide! More than 86 percent of eligible staff voted.

98% of certified personnel

and

92% of ESPs said "yes" to representation.

NEW MEXICO

The **Western New Mexico University (WNMU)** faculty unionized with lightning speed after the school's president and entire board resigned amid a financial scandal. Union membership at WNMU now spans all departments, schools, and colleges.

Faculty organizers collected signatures from more than

2/3 of college faculty.

LEARN MORE

You can help grow the union!

Start having effective conversations with potential members. Check out NEA's toolkit at nea.org/Organize.





THIS UNIVERSITY STAFFER HAS \$8.42 IN HER BANK ACCOUNT

By Mary Ellen Flannery

“I’ve gotten really good with lentils,” says University of Massachusetts (UMass) Boston staffer Alison White. It’s a culinary skill born of necessity. As a research data coordinator, her 2025 – 2026 salary—about \$37,200 a year—isn’t enough to afford more typical sources of protein.

She gets free food from a community pantry each Thursday, lives with a roommate that she found on Facebook, and budgets every single penny. Her monthly allocation for “fun”? It’s \$0. Recently, she ended the month \$8.42 in the black.

White loves her job, but she is growing more and more demoralized—and poor—as her employer, the University of Massachusetts system, refuses to provide a living wage to all employees. For White, a single person in Boston, a living wage would be \$63,939, or nearly double what she’s paid.

And, unfortunately, UMass isn’t the only college or university with employees living in poverty. Even as staff do necessary work—advising students, managing dorms and dining services, running academic departments and research labs, providing critical health

services, and much more—many are denied a living wage.

Indeed, nearly half of higher ed staff members report “moderate to severe problems” making a living wage, according to a 2024 NEA survey. A quarter of respondents said they struggle to pay for medical bills and groceries, and 1 in 5 say they have trouble paying their utility bills.

This work matters

White is a member of the Professional Staff Union (PSU), which represents about 2,400 members across UMass’ Boston and Amherst campuses. In June 2024, their contract expired—and for nearly two years, union members were at the bargaining table, demanding pay that acknowledges their contributions. It was a frustrating—and galvanizing—experience that involved thousands of union members in 50-plus bargaining sessions and dozens of union actions. Finally, in February 2026, their union power led to a new contract.

Starting in 2027, under the overhauled contract, no PSU member at UMass Boston—including White—will earn less than \$60,000.

(Left) Alison White, a UMass Boston staffer, gets paid so little that she relies on food from community pantries to avoid hunger. (Below) Union member Hannah Bernhard calls on UMass Amherst Chancellor Javier Reyes to bargain in good faith.

These are transformative, life-changing raises for the most underpaid employees, but still not what they deserve. Consider that the UMass Amherst football coach makes between \$1.3 and \$1.4 million a year, the most of any employee. In fifth place, Amherst Chancellor Javier Reyes will be paid at least \$743,357 this year, or about 18 times as much as the lowest paid PSU employee.

By comparison, UMass Boston program coordinator Chanel Fields makes so little money that she must work nights and weekends as a security guard. As staff for the department of exercise and health sciences, Fields supports its directors and faculty; runs its internal and external events; helps her graduate students put their dissertations together; and connects undergrads with internships, research opportunities, and graduate programs.

Like many PSU members, she has an advanced degree—a master’s in

public administration, earned at the same university she now works for. Her work is critical to students, but her pay doesn’t show it.

“The message is that staff is expendable,” says A.J. LeBlanc, an education abroad advisor and administrator on the Amherst campus. “[But] we’re the ones spending time with kids. We’re the ones seeing them, helping them, getting them resources—everything from, ‘Things are going great, do you know about this national scholarship?’ to, ‘Hmm, something is not right, we’re going to stop this conversation and I’m going to walk with you to health services,’ which I have actually done.”

The system has money

While wages for workers languish, many universities are spending lavish amounts on executive pay. According to a recent *Chronicle of Higher Education* analysis, the median base salary for college presidents jumped 53 percent between 2012 and 2022.

At UMass Boston specifically, the *Chronicle* found that presidents’ pay grew by 90 percent between 2012 and 2022; at UMass Amherst, it grew by 37 percent.

“People with titles like provost or dean, those structures are growing ever larger,” notes Hannah Bernhard, a UMass Amherst program manager. And they’re giving themselves the raises that they’re denying poorer employees, she says. For example, between 2020 and 2025, base pay for the Amherst chancellor’s chief of staff increased from \$86,192.33 to \$175,869.39, or 104 percent.

Last fall, Amherst administrators heralded a new, on-campus food pantry, open to hungry students and staff. Bernhard visited at least



The High Cost of Low Pay

A 2024 NEA member survey found that higher-ed staff routinely struggled with basic bills for food, shelter, and medicine.

39%
skipped routine or preventive health appointments.

29%
did without acute or emergency health care.

28%
did not fill prescriptions.

26%
struggled to pay their rent or mortgage.

24%
struggled to buy food.

four times in its first two months. “I think they want us to be grateful that we have this resource without examining how f***ed up it is that I, a full-time state employee, need to use that resource at all.”

“I’m exhausted,” said Bernhard, as PSU battled for fairness last year. But she added, “I’m also empowered.” And that empowerment led to big wins! 🎉

OUR VOICES

member spotlight



Elementary school teacher Laurie Sullivan brings space down to earth at K.W. Barrett Elementary, in Virginia, where her students explore STEM through hands-on learning.

THIS TEACHER'S LESSONS ARE 'OUT OF THIS WORLD'

By Colin Davan

"The effort I put into my lessons, I really feel the benefit and impact on the kids."

—Laurie Sullivan, a Project Discovery elementary school teacher, in Virginia

"Mom, I got a message from space!" shouted Laurie Sullivan into the phone. Sullivan had been following astronaut Anne McClain's 2019 flight to the International Space Station and, through social media, had asked McClain a question from her elementary school students.

"How has teamwork made us successful this week?" the class wanted to know. McClain's answer arrived in a video message from space.

Moments like this capture the heart of her work as a Project Discovery teacher at K.W. Barrett Elementary School, in Arlington, Va., where space travel is a core topic in many of her lessons.

Helping future explorers take off

In Sullivan's classroom, bright orange and white student-size space suits line the back wall. Signed pictures of astronauts, solar system models, NASA posters, and former students' space projects are on display around the room.

Above her desk lies a handwritten note she reads every morning: "My purpose is to inspire students to love learning, equip them with the skills for life, and to make them feel safe with a trusted adult."

She works toward this goal each day, aiming to ignite her students' curiosity about science and engineering.

Shooting for the moon

Project Discovery grew out of a partnership with the NASA Explorer School program, which began in 2005, bringing STEM-based mission, research, and expertise into classrooms for grades 4-9. "The goal of the NASA Explorer school was to engage and inspire future generations of explorers, scientists, and engineers," Sullivan says.

The NASA program no longer exists, but the school is considered an Explorer School alum, allowing cooperation between NASA and Project Discovery to continue.

Project Discovery began as a co-teaching model with classroom teachers but evolved into a special

class five years ago, much like art or music. Lessons include hands-on activities and projects focused on natural science, engineering, the environment, space, and many other STEM related subjects.

"STEM is important, but I believe the whole collaboration, communication, and critical thinking show the teamwork going on with NASA," Sullivan notes.

Class projects have included everything from designing a zero-gravity indicator to planting a "moon tree"—using a seed that orbited the moon aboard NASA's 2022 Artemis I mission.

Sullivan attends space education trainings, NASA workshops, and conferences, where she meets people who are active in the field—including scientists who work on space missions.

These connections have allowed her to bring actual rocket scientists into her classroom and forge partnerships with organizations such as Lockheed Martin, which has provided guest speakers and "spacy" school supplies for her students.

Full-circle moments

Since Project Discovery began, Sullivan's students have gone on to advanced study and work in STEM fields—like former student Michaela Donovan, who is now an astronomer. Last June, Donovan co-taught a class with Sullivan.

For Sullivan, this is what it's all about. She says, "The effort I put into my lessons, I really feel the benefit and impact on the kids." 🚀



Who is Laurie Sullivan?

Laurie Sullivan's 33 years at K.W. Barrett Elementary School are nothing short of inspiring. Growing up, she was deeply impacted by her mother, who was also a teacher. "She didn't retire until she was 77!" Sullivan says.

As a teacher, Sullivan has earned recognition at the highest levels. She was named the 2004 Virginia Teacher of the Year and the 2015 Arlington Public Schools Air Force Association's Aerospace Education Teacher of the Year. In 2024, she was a finalist for the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching.

A New Union Voice in Maine

Among the latest to join our growing NEA Higher Ed family are the faculty of Thomas College, in Waterville, Maine—the first Maine Education Association members from a private college.

Their goal? To strengthen their voice in decisions impacting faculty and students.

The faculty's unionization efforts kicked off in 2025, after college administrators began making unilateral changes to academic offerings—including changing what programs are offered to students and whether courses

should be online or in-person—without consulting faculty, the people who know students best.

"We thought the faculty senate would be at least co-creating these programs," says Jono Anzalone, a member of the faculty organizing committee. "It was like, 'Wait a second, this doesn't feel like a partnership!'"

Like a lot of non-unionized campuses, Thomas operated with a faculty handbook, but there was no penalty when the administration disregarded it—which they did, repeatedly, Anzalone adds.



(Left to right) Leaders of the new Thomas College faculty union include: Rick Saucier, Josh Havelin, Tracey Horton, and Kshanti Greene.

After a vote of no-confidence in the college president, faculty moved decisively to unionize. Now their goal is to bargain a legally binding contract that protects their voices.

The latest news on NEA Higher Ed members around the country

Harrisburg's Union Lands the Plane

It's been a long, hard trip, but faculty at Pennsylvania's Harrisburg Area Community College (HACC) finally have a contract!

After unionizing in 2022, HACC faculty worked for more than three years to get a contract. Over those years, union members learned some hard truths, says union president Christine Nowik. The chief lesson? Higher education is part of the corporate landscape, Nowik says, "and we [faculty] are the Starbucks baristas."

For too long, HACC administrators have ignored the principles of shared governance, refusing to collaborate with faculty, union leaders said.

Why unionize?

The final straw that pushed HACC faculty to unionize occurred in 2019, when HACC administrators suddenly terminated 20 mental health counselors without clear reasons.

"Even though we had a shared governance policy at that time, the policy was a little too vague," says Amy Withrow, the union's chief negotiator. "We could point to the policy, and [administration] was like, 'Okay, thanks for pointing that out—now, we'll do what we want to do.'" Without a legally binding contract, faculty had no means to protect their colleagues.

At the bargaining table, the union's priority was to secure a clear, fair process for faculty retrenchment. While administrators pushed for language that would



After a two-day strike in late 2025 (left and below), the Harrisburg Area Community College Education Association won a contract that was three years in the making.

have enabled them to fire union members for vague "good-faith reasons," the union held firm. "What exactly are 'good faith reasons?'" Withrow questions.

Negotiations dragged. Nowik recalls: "I told Amy, 'We're going to land this plane someday. There might be vomit on the seats, but we're going to land it!'"

In the end, the union won "very clear language and nine months' notice,"

Withrow says. "We just wanted fairness—and it's fair for management, too," she adds.

Additionally, the union secured a salary schedule and course caps, making them predictable..

HACC faculty and staff went from having a "foundation of sand," Withrow says, "to a firm foundation that we can use to build the next phase of HACC." ✨

How We Fight Back

For NEA Higher Ed members who experience adversarial negotiations, Christine Nowik, union president at Pennsylvania's Harrisburg Area Community College (HACC), offers this advice:

- 1) Understand your unique strength.** If you're an educator, be an educator and explain your issues to constituents, including students. HACC's union made use of informational, online videos.
- 2) Recognize that all workers,** including faculty, are up against the same ubiquitous forces. "Understand that we're fighting corporate power, and we need to understand corporate logic and mindset," Nowik says.
- 3) In the current political climate,** Nowik adds, "organizing is the only power we have right now to preserve our public entities. Collective power is the only power." Reach out to other unions, including local K-12 unions, she urges.

NEW NEA RESEARCH:

How Does Your Salary Stack Up?

Do unionized faculty get paid more than non-union faculty? Of course! And NEA's newly released salary report proves it.

Learn what the "HBCU pay penalty" is—for working at historically Black colleges and universities—and if it's growing. Find out which public university pays the most (hint: it's in California) and

how your salary stacks up against average salaries at every public institution in the U.S. Check it out at nea.org/HEpay2026.

75 cents

—the amount HBCU faculty make on the dollar paid to other faculty.

Standing Together: A 30% pay increase at FAMU

Grad assistants are among the worst paid employees on any campus—and the fiercest fighters for better workplace conditions. Recently, Florida A&M University-Graduate Assistants United (FAMU-GAU), a chapter of the United Faculty of Florida, bargained a new contract with a 30 percent increase to their minimum annual pay. The raise



boosted their wages from \$12,480 to \$16,380, or from \$16 to \$21 per hour. They also secured \$2,000 bonuses.

"It's still not really a livable wage, but I'm happy about the changes we were able to make," says FAMU-GAU President Sarah Reed (left). "We're going to keep growing and getting stronger—and fighting for better pay and better rights."



‘We Deserve to Be Paid’

Contingent faculty want equal pay for equal work. Why not now?

By Mary Ellen Flannery

Anthropology lab starts at 6:40 p.m., but Crystal Huckabee arrives on campus more than an hour earlier to prep, meet with students, and toss back a 12-ounce Celsius with 200 milligrams of caffeine. For part-time faculty members like Huckabee, energy drinks are survival gear.

Most semesters, Huckabee teaches anthropology at six different community colleges around Los Angeles. Each week she drives about 600 miles and spends at least 12 hours behind the steering wheel, listening to audiobooks and stealing naps in campus parking lots. Her commute is like a spider’s web, spinning across Southern California’s freeways—and Huckabee is far from the only one caught in it.

Nearly 50 percent of all U.S. faculty—and up to 80 percent at community colleges—are contingent,

sometimes called “adjunct,” faculty members, according to the University of Southern California’s Pullias Center for Higher Education. They teach the same classes on the same campuses as full-time faculty, but can be paid up to 70 percent less.

“We are expected to do the same work and provide the same level [of support] to our students—and we want to provide the same level to our students—but that comes at a cost. And it’s our cost,” says Huckabee, who is president of the part-time faculty union at Long Beach City College.

Today, part-time faculty like Huckabee are pushing

all the levers they can for pay equity. They’re winning in district courts, fighting in statehouses, and working through their unions to strengthen their voices.

“The only way to make change is through your union,” Huckabee says. “There is strength in numbers.”

Is this really part-time work?

It’s Monday, which means a 15.5-hour, 120-mile workday for Huckabee. Her breakfast? An iced coffee, spiked with a vanilla protein shake. “Nothing glamorous but it’ll keep me full all day,” she says. Her dinner? A chocolate protein bar, unwrapped at about 7:30 p.m., during a break in this evening’s lab.

She’ll get home just as *Kimmel* airs. And then,

“We are expected to do the same work and provide the same level [of support] to our students ... but that comes at a cost. And it’s our cost.”

—Crystal Huckabee, part-time faculty and union president at Long Beach City College, in California

tomorrow morning, it will take her 2 hours and 15 minutes to drive to her 9:55 a.m. class, thanks to LA’s infamous freeway traffic.

This is what it takes for Huckabee to pay her mortgage in the booming Los Angeles exurbs and keep up with her pair of sweet, snorting French bulldogs. This is what it takes because pay for part-time faculty in the U.S. is fundamentally unfair.

“People think we should be happy. We’re doing what we love, we’re doing something we’re passionate about,” Huckabee explains. “But it’s wrong.”

Almost every college pays contingent faculty for the hours they spend in their classrooms. But for every hour inside a classroom, Huckabee works at least two hours

outside of it—and that time goes unpaid.

In her home office, under the gaze of her prized Jane Goodall doll, Huckabee preps and plans for class. She meets with students during online office hours; responds to their emails about class assignments and career opportunities; grades papers and exams; and keeps up with archeological discoveries that inform her curriculum.

“Working part-time doesn’t mean I’m giving part-time work to the students,” she says.

California court says pay them!

In 2022, two of Huckabee’s part-time colleagues, art history professors Karen Roberts and Seija Rohkea, got tired of hearing administrators say things

like, “You can do your syllabus during class.” They filed a class-action lawsuit against the Long Beach City College District, alleging it had been violating the state’s wage laws.

In February 2025, Roberts and Rohkea won, opening the door for California’s 40,000 part-time faculty to demand more. Their employer—the community college district—is not exempt from minimum wage laws, the court found. Hence, it must pay faculty for all of the hours they work, including the work done outside the classroom to fulfill their teaching assignments.

“The judge affirmed we are being exploited,” Rohkea told *California Educator*, the magazine of the California Teachers Association.

The verdict has served as a warning beacon to colleges

across the state: Get serious about pay, or else. In Long Beach, pay for part-timers increased this year from 42 percent to 51 percent of full-time faculty. It’s still too low, Huckabee notes.

Meanwhile, the Long Beach board also voted this winter to approve an \$18 million settlement to the class-action suit. If approved by the judge, as anticipated, it would mean more than \$11,000 for each of the college’s 1,450 part-time faculty members.

It’s a huge victory, but the case has always been about more than the money. Yes, part-time faculty deserve fair pay. They also deserve acknowledgment that their work matters, Huckabee says.

“I think we’re often thought of as ‘less than,’”



Crystal Huckabee lectures on anthropology at a California community college. A few hours later, she run a hands-on, lab-based lesson on a different campus.

she says. “I’ve been lucky enough to see the changing of that, finally.”

Pay parity is up next

More and more, NEA-affiliated unions are forcing lawmakers and administrators to do the right thing for part-time faculty.

Thanks to effective advocacy by their statewide union, the Community College Association, part-time faculty in California have greater access to employer-provided healthcare benefits. Since 2022, the state has set aside \$200 million annually to reimburse community colleges for the costs of insuring part-time faculty. Across the U.S., about

half of part-time faculty have healthcare benefits, according to a 2022 survey, the most recent year for which data exists.

The real prize would be pay parity, says Huckabee, or legally binding systems that link contingent faculty’s pay to tenured faculty’s pay. And while this hasn’t happened yet for Huckabee and her colleagues, other NEA Higher Ed unions have bargained contracts with those connections. (See Page 27 for examples.)

Union members are also seeking legislative solutions. In 2024, the average part-time faculty member in Oregon was paid 58 percent of what a full-time faculty member

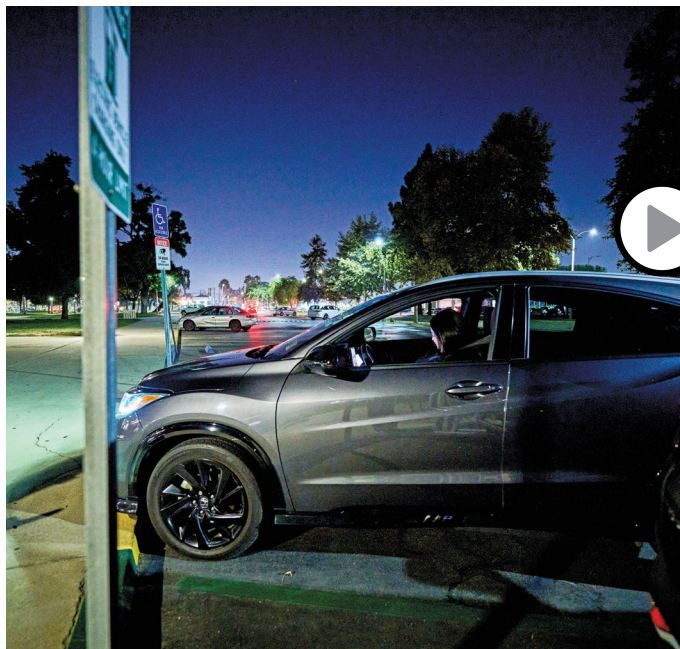
earned, even with the same course load. Last year, the Oregon Education Association proposed legislation to require the state’s community colleges to pay part-time faculty at the same rate, on a per-hour basis, as full-time faculty. NEA affiliates in Massachusetts, Washington, and California have supported similar bills over recent years—and Washington has another on tap in 2026.

The result for Huckabee would be spending less time in her car and more with students, developing meaningful relationships and helping them succeed, she says.

“We love our students, but we still deserve to be paid.” 🚗

“The only way to make change is through your union. There is strength in numbers.”

—Crystal Huckabee



Come Ride Along on This 15.5-Hour Day

Crystal Huckabee drives more than 600 miles a week to make a living wage. Find out what keeps her going in this NEA Today video.



PHOTO: MOSES MITCHELL

BARGAIN THIS

Pay Equity Is on the Table

When Jodi Ritter first started teaching at Highline College, south of Seattle, she didn’t join the union. Ritter had taken a roughly \$30,000 pay cut to leave her K-12 classroom and was making around \$40,000 annually—and that’s only when she could get a full load and summer work.

Money was scarce.

That was 14 years ago, and contingent faculty voices in their union were in short supply. Today, things have changed. Ritter and her contingent colleagues still don’t get paid what they deserve, but their union is making substantive progress at the bargaining table.

“I feel very seen!” she says.



Jodi Ritter

The magic number is 85

Faculty unions in the Pacific Northwest have taken a specific approach to pay equity over the past two decades, bargaining contracts that explicitly tie part-timers’ pay to full-timers’ pay. Typically, the way it works is part-timers’ pay is set to a specific percentage of the lowest-paid full-time faculty member’s wage. The goal? To reach 85 percent, a figure that part-time faculty think is a fair representation of the work they do in and outside of classrooms, compared to full-time faculty.

It’s not a perfect system. Years of experience often are overlooked. However, these linkages do have a practical, positive effect. When one goes up, the other goes up, and everybody gets

paid more. They also send the message that part-time faculty deserve equal pay for equal work.

Through these efforts, Highline’s contingent faculty will reach 72 percent in their current contract, up from 64 percent in 2022, reports Kristyn Joy, the part-time faculty rep on the union’s executive board. “It’s still not parity,” she notes, “but I’ve heard from some colleagues that it is transforming their family budgets.”

Highline also bargained to end previously required office hours for contingents. “Until [the college] pays them 75 percent, it’s just a meet-as-needed basis,” says union president James Peyton.

“We’re trying to make clear to the college, you have to pay people to make it possible for them to do the work you want.”



Kristyn Joy

Steady progress

In 2020, it took 15 months at the bargaining table—plus a 2-day strike involving 500 faculty members and countless supportive students—for Washington state’s Clark College faculty union to win a contract tying part-time pay to full-time pay.

“Of course, [the administration] could have just given it to us,” recalls local union president Suzanne Southerland. “But maybe I’m glad they didn’t. ... That was some strong solidarity!”

Today, Clark’s part-time faculty are getting 72 percent of full-timers’ pay. Two hours north, at Olympic College, contingents will soon reach 74 percent.

Meanwhile, at Chemeteka Community College, in Salem, Ore., where part-timers were paid 67 cents on the dollar compared with full-timers a few years ago, the bargaining team reached 73.5 percent.

Last year, Michelle Kennedy, a part-time faculty member who is vice president of Chemeteka’s union, testified to Oregon lawmakers about the consequences of paying part-timers so little. State lawmakers know it’s unfair, she says, and so do students. “Some of them got involved in bargaining last [time] because they were horrified that their part-time instructors were getting paid so much less than their full-time instructors,” Kennedy says. With their support, plus growing awareness across the state, progress is being made, she adds.



Suzanne Southerland during the 2020 strike at Clark College, in Washington.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF MEMBERS

AI: A New Frontier at the Bargaining Table

Higher ed unions are protecting the human heart of education.

By Mary Ellen Flannery

In recent months, several NEA Higher Ed unions have negotiated contracts that reflect the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) to upend their work. More will certainly follow, predicts Deborah Williams, lead negotiator for the Johnson County Community College faculty union, in Kansas.

“We’re at a new frontier in technology, which invites conversations of a variety of kinds, including bargaining,” Williams says. Whether the goal is to get a contract that addresses the use of AI by faculty or management, these emerging topics can and should be addressed in collective bargaining agreements, she adds.

“The more we can anticipate and develop language around these things, the better,” Williams notes.

Protecting human work

As faculty and staff unions begin to tackle AI at the bargaining

table, their goals often include the following:

- Ensuring the human connection remains at the heart of teaching.
- Preventing management from using AI to do the job of union members.
- Ensuring employee evaluations are done by human managers (not by AI).
- Protecting union members’ intellectual property.

Fueled by a fear that AI could be used to replace union members’ jobs, the bargaining team representing City University of New York (CUNY) faculty and staff had two goals. The first? “To say AI won’t replace faculty,” says James Davis, Professional Staff

Congress (PSC) president. “We wanted the university to make a commitment to human instruction for every single class ... regardless of modality.”

The human connection between teacher and student is “central to everything we should be doing,” Davis says, especially as many CUNY



James Davis

students come from underserved communities. The PSC bargaining team achieved their first goal-winning contract language that clearly says all course instructors will be human.

The second goal? PSC hopes to protect members who work outside of classrooms. “Do [administrators]

“We wanted the university to make a commitment to human instruction for every single class that’s on the schedule.”

—James Davis, Professional Staff Congress president, at City University of New York

want to put our professional staff out of work? I think so!” Davis says. This turned out to be a margin that PSC couldn’t cross in 2025, but, Davis promises, “It is an area we will return to.”

At New Jersey’s Rowan College at Burlington County, protecting union members is also the priority, says union president William Whitfield. Faculty and counselors can imagine a day when chatbots advise students, or large language models compare student papers to rubrics “and spit out grades,” Whitfield says. But would this be good for students? Or educators?

“We don’t want to eliminate [AI] entirely because we know it’s fundamental to

workplaces,” he notes. “The question is: How do we maintain our academic integrity while preparing our students to use these tools?”

The union and college settled on language that protects “individual duties and whole positions,” Whitfield notes. Specifically, it says: “The College agrees that AI in all forms shall not cause the replacement, displacement, or reduction of any Unit Member’s base workload. Unit member preference for teaching, course design/deployment, and directed study opportunities will continue to receive priority consideration. There will be no reduction in the number of unit members based solely upon the College’s use of AI.”

Strengthening union voices

As AI develops, it’s important to get a foothold in your contract now, advises Jason Eggerman, president of the faculty union at the Community Colleges of Spokane, in Washington.

“The college had this idea that we should wait until [the landscape] is no longer changing so rapidly,” but that will be never, he says.

In Spokane, both sides agreed to a contract noting, “AI is rapidly evolving,” and that it is the intention of the college and union that

“future use of AI be done in a thoughtful and measured way, with due concern for student welfare and success.”

Eggerman points to a line requiring both sides to “engage in discussions surrounding AI going forward,” and says it has already paid off.

Recently, Spokane staff opted not to turn on new AI features in their online learning management system, saying it hadn’t been “discussed,” as required. “[The contract] is already protecting us from administrators unilaterally turning stuff on,” Eggerman explains. ✨



Get access to NEA Higher Ed’s exclusive, online database of current collective bargaining agreements from across the U.S. at hecas.neacollectivebargaining.org.

Looking Outside Academia

As bargaining teams navigate this new territory, many are looking off-campus for inspiration. One Florida faculty member points to the Writers Guild of America, which went on strike for five months in 2023 to get a contract ensuring AI will be a tool for members and not a means to replace them.

Similarly, more than three dozen NewsGuild contracts include AI-related provisions. At *The New Republic*, the contract states that generative AI may be used by union members “as a complementary tool, ... but it may not be used as a primary tool for the creation of [work].”

It also states AI shall not result in layoffs or reduced pay for union workers or be used to fill vacant positions.

Among K–12 educator unions, the St. Paul Federation of Educators (SPFE) led the way in 2025 with a contract that says school officials “shall not eliminate bargaining unit members as an immediate and foreseeable result of adopting or implementing generative AI technologies.”

It also states: “In no event shall an educator be disciplined, involuntarily transferred, or receive an adverse employment action or evaluation solely on the basis of AI-generated data, metrics, or analytics.”

“Our district didn’t want to talk about this at all. They were like, ‘Let’s look at this in five years,’” says SPFE President Leah VanDassor. “Five years? No. You have to get them to look at it now.”



Writers Guild of America member Bart Gold on a post-apocalyptic-themed picket line outside Netflix Studios, in Los Angeles, during a 2023 strike.

We Must Become a Vanguard

In this essay, Florida professor Amanda Wilkerson asks NEA Higher Ed members to focus more on the apathy inside our unions.

Transparent moment: In spring 2025, after earning tenure, I found myself wearing mouse ears instead of academic regalia. My university offered a small summer stipend. Helpful, but hardly enough to live on. Disney filled the gap.

In the middle of a shift at “the most magical place on Earth,” where I had been helping guests on and off water rides, my phone rang. It was my faculty union president, asking me to serve as membership chair. I said yes, but reluctantly. After all, I had finally arrived! As a National Science Foundation grant awardee with more than 30 publications and tenure secured, I’d earned the right to rest from politics. Or so I thought.

My plan was to focus on my scholarship, not service. I believed the union was a necessary defense against the escalating political attacks on education in Florida and across the nation. But I saw organizing to strengthen our

union as someone else’s fight. I had my career to protect.

It was this instinct for self-preservation that revealed a darker truth: Higher education’s biggest threat isn’t coming from outside, it’s the disengagement we’ve allowed to fester within.

My first semester as chair confirmed that truth. The magic was gone.

I realized union work wasn’t about negotiating contracts; it was about defending the foundational principles of academic inquiry and the field of education itself.

Unknowingly, we have become gladiators in a modern Colosseum, as the entire system of American higher education is thrown to the lions. Our predators are

funding cuts and ideological surveillance by the emperors—political power brokers who use political systems to enrich themselves and defund education—all while the academy is left to tear itself apart for survival.

Faculty enter the arena alone, fighting isolated battles for our academic lives, parrying blows against our programs, our tenure, and our very freedom to think.

I was no longer a spectator in the stands; I was in the arena, realizing we are all thrown into the fight with a wooden sword, pretending the blade we hold is steel.

This is a fatal error.

We saw what happened at Harvard and stood on the sidelines, as if the

“The time for fighting alone has passed. The vanguard is calling. Our collective courage will decide whether higher education survives.”

—Amanda Wilkerson



Amanda Wilkerson, on the campus of the University of Central Florida.

delegitimization of one of the nation’s most preeminent institutions wouldn’t become a blueprint for attacking all. We watch colleagues subjected to vicious, bad-faith scrutiny by bad-faith boards of trustees at the behest of gubernatorial power. We whisper support, but wait for our names to be called before we truly mobilize. We treat these crises as singular events, not the coordinated siege they really are.

This hit me with profound force as I began organizing. The pandemic fractured in-person faculty connectivity. Knocking on a colleague’s office door is often futile. They aren’t there. A cold call is unthinkable. The challenge is not selling membership, but

facilitating a frank discussion about becoming partners in preserving our very profession.

I’ve tried to lure faculty with topical forums; but too often, the room is filled with the already-converted.

Here is the truth: My individual gladiator’s credentials—the grants, the publications, the hard-won tenure—are not enough. Fighting alone, I may win a battle, but I will surely lose the war for the soul of higher education. The arena is designed to break us one by one.

We must evolve from a collection of gladiators into a community of vanguards. A gladiator fights for personal survival. A vanguard, as historian Martha S. Jones

powerfully articulates in her book, *Vanguard: How Black Women Broke Barriers, Won the Vote, and Insisted on Equality for All*, is an organized effort that moves forward together to protect the whole community and secure its future. A vanguard does not wait for the threat to arrive at its own gate; it fortifies every gate. It understands that an attack on one is an attack on all.

This is the urgent work of faculty unions today. It is no longer about salary steps and benefits alone. It is about building the collective power to defend academic freedom, shared governance, and the pursuit of knowledge itself.

We must organize not out of fear for our individual

jobs, but out of a collective determination to protect the educational system that upholds our democracy.

My gladiator’s spirit is not gone. I am, and will always be, a fighter. However, that spirit is now channeled into the vanguard. I fought too hard to earn this seat in the academy to watch the table collapse. So did you. The time for fighting alone has passed. The vanguard is calling. Our collective courage will decide whether higher education survives. Our shared future depends on it. ✊

Amanda Wilkerson is an associate professor of higher education in the University of Central Florida’s College of Community Innovation and Education and a proud graduate of Florida A&M University.

PROTECT AND DEFEND HIGHER EDUCATION!



The ongoing attacks on American higher education—against academic freedom, tenure, diversity and inclusion, against scientific research, humanities courses, and our students themselves—are dizzying.

Know this: Unions are made for moments like these.

NEA Higher Ed members and staff, including our team of attorneys, have developed resources that can help you and your campuses, including:

- Guidance and toolkits around immigration, specifically for higher ed
- An “open letter” template on academic freedom
- “Know your rights” resources on what you can say and where you can say it
- Opportunities to contribute to ongoing, effective litigation

Find these resources at [NEA.org/ProtectHE](https://www.nea.org/ProtectHE)



SCAN ME!



WHAT IS ANTI-BLACKNESS?

By Brenda Álvarez

IN CLASSROOMS, ANTI-BLACKNESS OFTEN SHOWS UP IN HARSH DISCIPLINE AND FEWER OPPORTUNITIES FOR BLACK STUDENTS



“If we know Black children are being harmed by racism, and we choose not to do anything, that to me is a moral failure.”

—Kerri Ullucci (above), professor at Roger Williams University, in Rhode Island

Professor Kerri Ullucci describes anti-Blackness as a “devaluing of Black people, of Black culture, and of Black history.” It’s embedded in both the school structure and the daily decisions educators make about students.

It’s this idea that there aren’t a lot of benefits in studying Black culture and history, and that “there’s something suspect about Black intelligence,” says Ullucci, who teaches diversity and equity at Roger Williams University, in Rhode Island.

Anti-Blackness also refers to the specific ways Black people are excluded and harmed in society and institutions, including schools.

More severe discipline

One of the clearest examples of anti-Blackness is disproportionate discipline: Black students receive harsher and more frequent punishments than their peers for similar behaviors.

Ullucci notes that educators often justify these decisions with race-neutral language, such as, “I called him out because he was being disrespectful,” she explains. National research, however, consistently shows

racial bias in discipline outcomes.

Adultification and surveillance

Another common bias is adultification—the tendency to view Black children as older or less innocent than non-Black peers. This bias affects how mistakes are interpreted and how quickly situations escalate.

Black students often face heightened surveillance in schools, with their hair, clothing, bodies, and cultural expression closely policed. What is labeled as “dress code” often becomes racialized control.

In 2019, a Black high school wrestler in New Jersey was forced to cut his locs before competing, sparking public outrage and scrutiny of hair policies for students of color.

Less opportunity

Black students are frequently viewed as less capable, limiting their academic opportunities. They’re underrepresented in gifted, honors,

and Advanced Placement programs and overrepresented in special education.

An argument of morality

For Monique Cottman, a curriculum coordinator in Iowa City public schools, anti-Blackness predates current political debates.

“This isn’t a recent phenomenon. It is the pervasiveness of anti-Blackness that started with school desegregation in the 50s, and this is just a different iteration of that,” Cottman says.

She describes how legislation and policies have shaped educators’ behavior. Cottman points to the Trump administration’s February 2025



Monique Cottman

“Dear Colleague” letter, which threatened funding cuts for educational institutions that engaged in diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. A year later, the Trump administration withdrew that guidance. But the damage was already done.

“Our equity departments were all gutted,” Cottman explains, adding that even if school affinity groups and similar programs are not explicitly banned, many educators interpret them as prohibited. “It becomes less an argument about legality, and more an argument of morality,” Cottman says.

Ullucci agrees: “If we know Black children are being harmed by racism, and we choose not to do anything, that to me is a moral failure.”

Do School Cellphone Bans Work?

By Tim Walker

YES! EDUCATORS SAY THEY HAVE BEEN WELL WORTH THE WAIT

Alabama educator Jonathan Buchwalter had high hopes when his state passed a law prohibiting students from using cellphones in school.

A Marine veteran and author, Buchwalter teaches high school social studies in Tuscaloosa County. "I've been in the classroom since 2017, and half my energy has been spent on managing phones or dealing with phone-related behavior," he says. "These kids are addicted, and it got worse after COVID. So, I was looking forward to this new law because I knew it would have an impact."

Called the FOCUS Act, the law went into effect for the 2025 – 2026 school year. On the first day of school, the results in Buchwalter's classroom were immediate—fewer behavior issues, greater engagement, stronger academic performance. More importantly, the improvements lasted throughout the year.

Buchwalter recorded his impressions the next day in a TikTok video, which soon went viral, attracting more than 2 million views. "Today, all of my students—100 percent of them—took notes in my class, did their assignments, asked for help when they got stuck, and turned it in," he says in the video. "And then when they were done, they ... talked to each other."

The impact wasn't limited to the classroom. Students were socializing more in the lunchroom. The school library saw more activity.

"Was it this easy of a solution the whole time?" Buchwalter wonders. "I've been pulling my hair out for eight years!"

Momentum behind phone bans

The constant distractions generated by cellphones are not the only drivers of student behavior issues and academic underperformance. But for Buchwalter and educators across the country, the impact of these devices in their classrooms could no longer be ignored. A 2024 NEA survey found that 90 percent of teachers supported banning cellphones during instructional time and 75 percent favored so-called "bell-to-bell" bans that cover the entire school day.

Rachel Robins, a teacher and instructional coach in Washington County, Utah, says, "It was clear, these devices were stopping the learning process. I was in a lot of classrooms, and same thing time and time again. Without a policy in place, I saw teachers who were not comfortable telling students to put their phones away."

Educators and their unions have advocated for tougher restrictions on cellphones and have



Rachel Robins



Jonathan Buchwalter noticed positive changes in his classroom on the first day after Alabama's cellphone ban went into effect.

State laws vary, but most leave it up to districts to decide how to enforce these measures. Schools in Tuscaloosa County, for example, enacted a bell-to-bell "no-show" policy, allowing students to keep their phones in their backpacks or back pockets instead of central storage locations or Yondr pouches.

In Robins' district in Utah, schools adopted a similar no-show policy in 2025, although high school students are permitted to use their cellphones during lunch and breaks. For intermediate and middle schools, cellphones are banned on campus entirely.

Happier educators, more focused students

With most of these new policies not even a year old, tracking their long-term effect will take some time, but recent research suggests educators across the country are giving the new restrictions high marks. A new national survey of more than 20,000 public school

educators—conducted by the nonpartisan research initiative Phones in Focus—found that stricter school cellphone policies are linked to higher teacher satisfaction and fewer violations of these rules by students.

"So far, two patterns stand out," says lead researcher and psychologist Angela Duckworth. "The stricter the policy, the happier the teacher and the less likely students are to be using their phones when they aren't supposed to."

The survey also found that "strict storage rules," such as a requirement that students leave phones in hallway lockers or Yondr pouches, led to better academic and behavioral outcomes. Still, nearly half of schools use a no-show policy. This type of policy does not perform as well as more restrictive policies, according to the survey. A recent working paper by the National Bureau of Economic Research found modest but real test score improvements in a large Florida school district in the second year after a

emphasized the need for strong and consistent enforcement mechanisms. Classroom disruptions and distractions are not the only concern. Many educators believe public schools should not feed phone addiction, which harms students' mental health. "Our country has a youth mental health crisis," Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA) President Aaron Chapin told a state legislative committee in October. "Smartphones are, of course, not the only factor driving this crisis, but the precipitous rise in mental health issues—like depression, anxiety, and a lack of emotional regulation—corresponds with young people's access to mobile devices and social media."

Earlier this year, Pennsylvania joined 37 states and the District of Columbia in passing laws limiting phones and other electronic devices in schools. Twenty-five of these statewide bans were passed in 2025 alone.

"I was in a lot of classrooms, and, ... without a policy in place, I saw teachers who were not comfortable telling students to put their phones away."

—Rachel Robins, Washington County, Utah

Do School Cellphone Bans Work?

"Today, all of my students—100 percent of them—took notes in my class, did their assignments, asked for help when they got stuck, and turned it in. And then when they were done, they ... talked to each other."

—Jonathan Buchwalter, teacher in Alabama

cellphone ban went into effect. The researchers, also noted an increase in suspensions in the first year, followed by a decline in the second year.

And a study by Kennesaw State University, in Georgia, revealed that cellphone bans had a positive impact on teacher well-being. The researchers surveyed teachers at two schools in Marietta, Ga., and found that 9 out of 10 teachers said the ban had helped them manage their classrooms and build stronger connections with students. Eighty-five percent reported improved well-being and job satisfaction.

This is about learning

One month after Buchwalter's post about the first day of school, he returned to TikTok with an update. Were the positive results holding up?

Yes, but with a few caveats.

"What we're seeing is a bit more behavior issues emerge, but still well below where they were before," he reports. "I'm still taking up phones in class, so are my colleagues. Kids are kids, and they will try to break new rules. That's expected."

It's the same with academic performance, he says. "But even my students who are struggling

are still taking notes and are less distracted than they were before. So, are we still at a net positive? Absolutely."

And what about parents? Even though their opposition to school bans has been softening lately, less access to their children during the school day continues to fuel concerns.

"We struck up a healthy compromise to help reduce parents' worries," Buchwalter says. Under the county's policy, exceptions can be made for documented medical needs, individualized education programs, and emergency situations.

Robins reports that in her district, parent opposition to the cellphone ban has been minimal. Student opposition, as expected, has been fairly widespread.

"Their opinions are important," Robins says. "So we should help educate students on why schools are taking this step. This is not about punishing or controlling them. This is about learning."

Robins collected feedback about the new restrictions in a voluntary survey of parents, teachers, and students. Their responses to the policy were overwhelmingly positive.

"The policy has been a game changer," one teacher shared. "No longer are students always looking for ways to get on their cellphone. Now that phones are put away, not even visible to students, they are focused more on work in class."

Another commented, "I like what I see academically and socially. ... The students are putting forth more effort towards their assignments as well as a greater engagement in class. I feel their social interactions have greatly increased, and they are having a better perception on how to communicate."

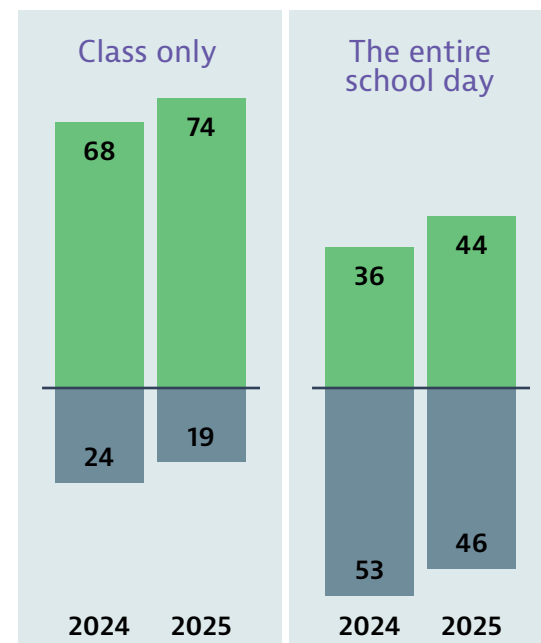
Long-term success in any district, Buchwalter says, depends largely on school leaders supporting school staff and assuring enforcement is consistent.

"Distractions and disruptions ... prevent kids from doing well and graduating. That's what cellphones are," he says. "I wouldn't want to work for a district that doesn't have these measures in place. I don't want to go back." 🚫

Support Grows for School Cellphone Bans

Percentage of adults who favor or oppose classroom and "bell-to-bell" bans in middle and high schools

Support
Oppose



SOURCE: PEW RESEARCH CENTER

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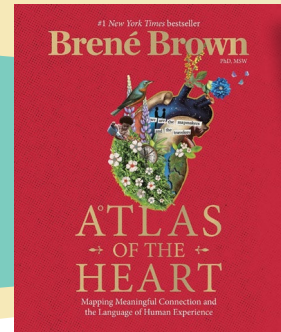
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Educator picks for your summer reading list



Atlas of the Heart

BY BRENÉ BROWN
"Inspiring and insightful," this book can help educators learn how to build stronger connections, says Topher Tackman, a classroom aide in Bartonville, Illinois. "I would encourage educators to read any book by Brené Brown!"



Tackman

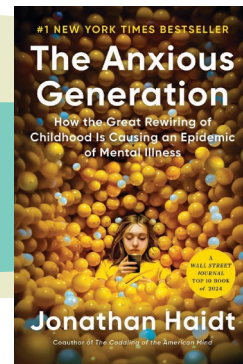


Summer Solstice

BY NINA MACLAUGHLIN
"MacLaughlin's languid essay is a memoir of New England summers and a meditation on savoring fleeting moments," reflects college librarian Cathy Fahey, from Salem, Mass. "It's perfect for reading in a hammock while enjoying the sun and shade. I reread this book every June, to remind myself to enjoy the season."

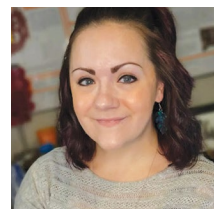


Fahey

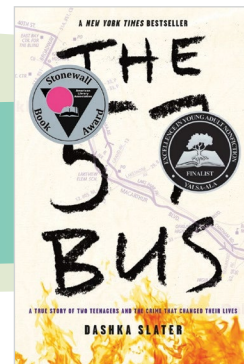


The Anxious Generation

BY JONATHAN HAIDT
"As a teacher who is not a parent, it was eye-opening to see how my students' phone experiences were wildly different from my own as a teenager," shares Ally Bowers, a high school science teacher from Chamberlain, S.D. "The Anxious Generation also offers concrete actions for how we can move toward a brighter tech future for our students."

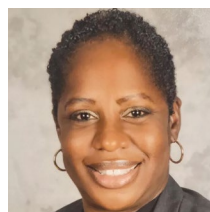


Bowers

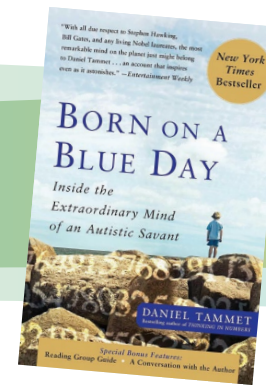


The 57 Bus

BY DASHKA SLATER
"By examining a real act of violence and its profound consequences, this book explores empathy, restorative justice, gender identity, race, and the complexity of youth within the justice system," says counseling professor Kashara Moore, from Long Beach, Calif. "Reading *The 57 Bus* becomes an act of civic engagement, as it can strengthen one's capacity for compassion, critical thinking, and meaningful dialogue."



Moore



Born on a Blue Day

BY DANIEL TAMMET
"As someone who works with students who have autism, [this book] was fascinating to me," says Becky Marszalek, a special education paraeducator in Pittsburgh, Pa. "This memoir is written by a person with autism who sees numbers as shapes, colors, and textures. He has savant syndrome, an extremely rare condition that gives him extraordinary mental powers. He can learn to speak new languages fluently, from scratch, in a week. In 2004, he memorized and recited more than 22,000 digits of pi, setting a record."



Marszalek

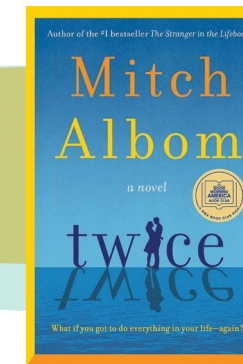


Empire of Silence

BY CHRISTOPHER RUOCCHIO
The first title in the sci-fi/fantasy *Sun Eater* series, this book is set in the distant future, when humans have colonized the galaxy. "There is something darkly comforting about seeing human beings throughout time—even if it is a fictional future time—dealing with and overcoming the same oppression and injustice we find ourselves fighting today," notes high school English teacher Sean Olorundami, who lives in Sioux City, Iowa.



Olorundami

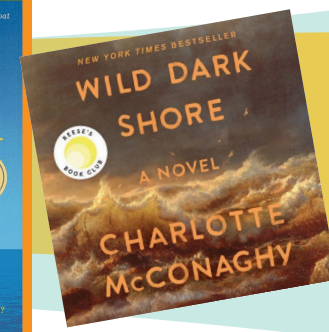


Twice

BY MITCH ALBOM
"The story is about a character with the magical ability to get a second chance at everything. He can undo any moment and live it again. The one catch: He must accept the consequences of his second try—for better or worse," recounts Beryl Torrence, a bus driver from Kannapolis, N.C. "I found the premise of a 'do-over' intriguing. However, as we know, all of our choices have consequences. I loved this book and have recommended it to friends."



Torrence



Wild Dark Shore

BY CHARLOTTE MCCONAGHY
"This is a beautiful story about nature, love, grief, and isolation," says Nicole Tejada, who teaches family consumer science in Southold, N.Y. "Set on a remote island between Australia and Antarctica, it follows the story of five characters navigating individual struggles. With its focus on global warming, this book will linger in your mind for days!"



Tejada

LOOKING FOR A GOOD BOOK TO DIG INTO? THESE EDUCATORS HAVE IDEAS!

If you need inspo for a great beach read or for books that expand your mind and support professional growth, check out these recommendations from your NEA colleagues around the country.

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HOW TO SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH ADHD

By Cindy Long

THESE SOLUTIONS WILL BENEFIT YOUR STUDENTS WITH ADHD AND YOUR WHOLE CLASS

Special education teacher Yesenia Guerrero buys one new wiggle stool a year for her students with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

"I'm trying to build up my supply," says Guerrero, who spends her own money on the chairs. "They're very expensive, but they work!"

An educator in California's Lennox School District, Guerrero has experience with students who have ADHD in elementary through high school, including some who have IEPs or 504s, and some who don't. The most common trait she sees is their need to move.

That's where the wiggle stools come in. The idea is to offer movement as a sensory break.

"Don't get stuck on having everything always quiet, with everyone sitting still. A little noise, and a little movement is OK," Guerrero says. "Offer different kinds of seats. Let them work standing up. If they want to sit lotus style or on their knees, let them. They need the release."

ADHD looks different in every student

While many students who have ADHD have traits that are easy to recognize—such as attention-seeking, disrupting class, fidgeting, or talking to classmates—others are quiet and may seem engaged, but their minds are elsewhere. "They may have their eyes on you, ... but their brain is wandering," Guerrero

explains. "They aren't as impulsive in body movements, but they're not paying attention even if they're looking at you. When you call on them, they'll snap out of a daydream."

There are also a lot of common misconceptions about ADHD. One of the most common, Guerrero says, is that people assume these kids can control their ADHD and that they are being willfully disobedient or inattentive.

"These are very, very bright kids—they just have a difficult time containing themselves," Guerrero explains. "They may appear to be lazy or unmotivated, but that is a total misconception. Their brains just work differently."



"Offer different kinds of seats. Let them work standing up. If they want to sit lotus style or on their knees, let them. They need the release."

—Yesenia Guerrero, special education teacher in California (above)



Yesenia Guerrero provides wiggle chairs (purchased with her own money!) for students with ADHD, offering them a way to move quietly during lessons.

What is ADHD?

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder and a lifelong condition affecting the brain and its executive functioning. It affects about 11 percent of school-age children, according to the nonprofit Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD).

ADHD can present in three ways: predominantly inattentive, hyperactive impulsive, and combined. CHADD lists these symptoms for each presentation:

ADHD predominantly inattentive presentation

- Fails to give close attention to details or makes careless mistakes
- Has difficulty sustaining attention
- Does not appear to listen
- Struggles to follow through with instructions
- Has difficulty with organization
- Avoids or dislikes tasks requiring sustained mental effort
- Loses things
- Is easily distracted
- Is forgetful in daily activities

ADHD predominantly hyperactive-impulsive presentation

- Fidgets with hands or feet, or squirms in chair
- Has difficulty remaining seated
- Runs around or climbs excessively (in children); extreme restlessness (in adults)
- Difficulty engaging in activities quietly
- Acts as if driven by a motor; adults will often feel inside as if they are driven by a motor
- Talks excessively
- Blurts out answers before questions have been completed
- Difficulty waiting or taking turns
- Interrupts or intrudes upon others

ADHD combined presentation

The individual meets the criteria for both inattention and hyperactive-impulsive ADHD presentations.

Martha Patterson, who currently teaches middle school social studies but spent many years as a special education teacher for Central Kitsap schools, in Washington, agrees.

"They can certainly manage their ADHD with therapies, accommodations, and medications, but their behaviors are symptoms, not choices."

Patterson has several students with ADHD, and her largest class has 31 students.

"I'm a veteran in my 40th year, and there are days that are very frustrating, when a student is asking the same question for the 10th time, or I have to repeatedly ask another to turn around and stop talking," she admits.

"In the early part of my career, when this kind of thing happened, I thought those students were just being naughty. Looking back, I realize, that kid probably had ADHD! Now I understand their brains are wired differently."

HOW TO SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH ADHD

Tips for managing ADHD in class

It's likely educators will have at least one student who has ADHD in their class. Fortunately, there are strategies that will work not only for that one student, but for everyone in the room.

Arrange seating strategically

"I would give students who have ADHD seating near the teacher and away from distractions like windows or hallways, but it's important to look at the class as a whole," Patterson says. "Don't seat them next to a student who also has distractibility, but do try to find a place next to a good role model who can model appropriate actions and focus, and who [the student] can ask for help."

Give students breaks

At Guerrero's school, kids get a variety of "break cards." "A student will say, hey, I need to play a break card, and they have cards for coloring breaks, quiet corner breaks, water breaks, and bathroom breaks," Guerrero explains. "It helps prevent meltdowns and allows them to better focus after the break."

Maintain routines and repeat reminders

Create consistent routines so everyone knows what to expect each day or each class period and can focus



Martha Patterson posts the class schedule each day on the whiteboard to help students stay on task.

their attention and memory on curriculum, not figuring out what to take out of their desk or backpack or when to pack up, Patterson suggests.

"When students come into my class, they always see on the screen the plan of the day, the materials they need, and what they will be working on," she says. "If a student needs a reminder, I'm happy to provide it."

Sometimes a student will ask to take out their Chromebook before it's time, Patterson notes. When she says no, there might be an outburst, an inappropriate word, or total shutdown and withdrawal.

When that happens, she's careful not to escalate. "I speak to them in a calm voice," Patterson says. "Then I remind the class what we're working on and when Chromebooks come out."

Other times, a student is just sitting and staring into space, she adds. "They don't

know where to start and seem lost from the beginning. These students need multiple reminders, even with a set routine."

Guerrero agrees that repeating instructions helps when a student can't focus on one thing.

Auditory signals also work—shake maracas when it's time to take out new material, ring a small bell to indicate a new lesson is starting, she advises.

"I'll have a student who can tell me what color my outfit is, what the neighbor said, and everything going on around the room,"

she says. "But they can't focus on the task at hand because their brain is so busy taking everything else in. They can get sensory and stimulation overload."

Guerrero takes time to notice all the behaviors of her students. "Are they completing assignments? Can they answer a question based on the classroom discussion? Sometimes their work is half done, and it's all correct, but incomplete," she says. "They have great plans but then don't follow through to the end. Their ability to attend to it [and] plan it out isn't there without guidance and support."

Once they have support and accommodations, students with ADHD can become hyperfocused, one task at a time.

ADHD is a difference not a deficit

Above all, Guerrero and Patterson recommend that educators and parents—and the students themselves—are reminded that ADHD is not a deficit, just a difference.

"I do a unit about famous people who were diagnosed with ADHD and made it work for them in their careers,"

Patterson says. "Let them know that there are lots of brilliant and successful people who have ADHD. 🦋"

TAKE ACTION

Roughly 7.5 million students receive special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The Trump administration has threatened to transfer this program from the U.S. Department of Education (ED) to another agency, making it less likely that students with disabilities will receive services.

Contact your members of Congress and tell them not to move ED functions to other agencies. Go to [nea.org/Defend](https://www.nea.org/Defend).



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How to Expand Students' WORLDVIEW



Seventh-grade teacher Brittany Ahnrud engages students in a lesson that incorporates diverse stories and perspectives.

By Brenda Álvarez

IN CLASSROOMS WITH MOSTLY WHITE STUDENTS, TEACHING ABOUT DIFFERENT CULTURES HELPS PREPARE YOUNG PEOPLE FOR LIFE

More than one-third of U.S. public school students attend schools where at least 75 percent of their peers are of the same race or ethnicity, according to the U.S. Government Accountability Office.

Even as the nation's overall student population becomes more racially and ethnically diverse, schools often remain segregated.

But in schools with homogeneous student bodies, especially in mostly white schools, fostering belonging and studying different cultures is invaluable.

This early exposure can ensure that when students finally encounter difference—whether that's in a college classroom, a workplace, or a grocery

store—they do so with curiosity instead of fear.

Researchers have found that meaningful exposure to diversity, through curriculum, connections, and discussion, can reduce stereotypes and better prepare all students for civic life and the workforce.

For many educators, the motivation to expand students' worldview is simple: Students won't stay in these bubbles forever.

Beyond the bubble

On a small island off the coast of Rhode Island, seventh graders at Lawn Avenue School, in Jamestown, performed a puppet show about children fleeing war in Sudan. The students—most of them white kids who have been classmates since kindergarten—spent 10 weeks reading *The Lost Boys of Sudan*, grappling with

what it means to retell a story rooted in displacement and survival.

"Text is one of the best ways to get at someone else's experience if you can't experience it yourself," says Brittany Ahnrud, a seventh-grade English teacher at the school. "I am a white, upper-middle-class woman, and I wasn't exposed to this kind of [information] until I was in college. ... For me, it's really important to expose students to things beyond the island."

Exposure is key to helping students understand different experiences, explains Amanda Bridges, a math teacher at Lawn.

"There's a very small chance that they're not ever going to leave their immediate environment," she says. "They need to be able to work with people and see different perspectives."



"Text is one of the best ways to get at someone else's experience, if you can't experience it yourself."

—Brittany Ahnrud, English teacher in Rhode Island

Why it matters for white students

The absence of diversity can lead to ignorance, often masked as humor, the Rhode Island educators say.

"That's what we struggle with the most, especially in the seventh-grade level," Ahnrud says. "Making jokes about each other's race or gender or sexual identity and not realizing the context and the history."

Some students repeat what they see online or hear at home without understanding the weight of those words. Ignoring those moments sends the wrong message, Bridges says. "It's important to show kids how to be an *up-stander* rather than a bystander, when [they] hear a group targeted with a hateful comment."

For students who already feel different, even small

gestures can matter. Bridges recalls a Jewish student's reaction after participating in a Passover activity during an advisory period—a time for a small group of students to discuss school and personal concerns with a teacher.

"I got a message from her mom about an hour after school, saying that the student came home and was just overjoyed that we had taken the time to celebrate," Bridges says. "Even if it's only one kid, she heard us."

Windows in a world of mirrors

For some teachers in majority white communities, the challenge is how to introduce difference without turning it into a show.

"We want the kids to have exposure, but not for it to be forced or performative," Bridges explains.

She and Ahnrud rely heavily on curriculum approved by their district, both for quality and protection. The district's state-approved English language arts curriculum, for example, opens the school year with lessons on Sudan. This builds on a unit in the sixth-grade English curriculum in which students read a book centered on a protagonist from Malawi.

"I love to teach the first unit, because it opens the door to talk about people from Africa," Ahnrud says.

Historically, when we did a "What do you think of ... Africa?" activity, kids' impressions were mostly negative, Ahnrud recalls.

"This year, for the first time, the kids were more positive," she says, noting that earlier lessons about Africa helped broaden students' perspectives and foster a more informed, open mindset by the time they reached seventh grade.

Exposure fosters understanding

In Fergus Falls, Minn.—a rural town of about 14,000 people that is more than 90 percent white—Melinda "Mindy" Christianson, decided that her lessons couldn't stay confined to the classroom.

How to Expand Students' **WORLDVIEW**

Christianson teaches college-level English and communication courses at Kennedy Secondary School. With support from her principal, she added an intercultural communication course, modeled after one she took in college.

Christianson grew up in Fergus and always wished she'd had a class like this one before leaving her hometown.

As part of the course, students travel an hour north to Fargo, N.D., where they engage with adult multilingual learners, speak directly with new Americans, and visit international markets.

"They lose some of those stereotypes and assumptions they had," Christianson says.

Belonging for all

While homogeneous schools may appear uniform, differences still exist.

In Boise, Idaho, junior high music teacher Cassie McBean works in a district with a mostly white, Mormon population.

"Because we have such low populations of students of color and LGBTQ+ students," McBean says, "I see those students getting targeted more."

For her, inclusion starts with visible signals: "Everyone is Welcome Here" posters, a safe-space sticker on her classroom door, and music choices that



In math teacher Amanda Bridges' classroom, students learn about mathematicians from a variety of backgrounds and cultures.

go beyond what students already know.

"If students aren't feeling safe or comfortable or connecting to teachers, they won't feel safe at school," she says. McBean is deliberate about representation, especially when teaching music from other cultures. "There's a fine line," she says, "between honoring it right and making a joke out of it."

Teaching through tension

Across the country, educators describe navigating political and cultural restraints about what can be taught in the classroom related to race and identity, while also trying to center students' well-being.

In Idaho, where lawmakers have passed restrictions on classroom

discussion of identity, McBean says politics have definitely taken a toll. "It's just being afraid to do what I want ... for my students," she reflects.

In Rhode Island, Ahnrud works closely with colleagues and administrators to select the appropriate text and lessons from the approved curriculum, which helps shield Ahnrud and her peers from political attacks.

Rather than stepping away from the work, educators say these challenges reinforce the need to continue it with care and intention.

"You have to make yourself OK with having uncomfortable conversations ... about something that's highly charged and emotional," Bridges says. "And you also have to examine your own biases."

What these educators hope students carry forward is openness. "Different isn't bad," Bridges says. "Different is just different."

As McBean says, "Be open and listen to your students. [They'll] say a lot without saying anything at all." 🌸

TAKE ACTION

You can advocate for safe and inclusive schools. Find out how at nea.org/EdJustice.

NEA MEMBERS INSURANCE TRUST® AND PLAN - 2024 SUMMARY ANNUAL REPORT

(Plan Year Beginning September 1, 2024)

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, 2024, and ending August 31, 2025. 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 **\$168,158,235** as of August 31, 2025, compared to **\$173,136,125** as of August 31, 2024. During the Trust year, the Trust experienced a decrease in its net assets of **\$4,977,890**. 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 **\$115,702,330** including participant contributions of **\$105,000,185**, a net appreciation in the market value of investments of **\$6,083,940**, and earnings from investments of **\$4,618,205**. Trust expenses were **\$120,320,220**. 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, 2024, and ending August 31, 2025, made under such "experienced-rated" contracts were **\$53,691,418** and the total of all benefit claims paid under the contracts during the Trust year was **\$55,316,215**. The total number of participants was **372,299**.

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, 2024, and ending August 31, 2025, made under such "experienced-rated" contract were **\$4,475,348** and the total of all benefit claims paid under the contract during the Trust year was **\$4,760,479**. 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, 2024, and ending August 31, 2025, was **\$1,036,762**. The total number of participants was **168,800** 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, 2024, and ending August 31, 2025, were **\$1,652,012** and the total of all benefit claims paid under the contract during the Trust year was **\$1,348,960**. The total number of participants was **3,093,414**.

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, 2024, and ending August 31, 2025, were **\$21,043,394** for NEA RHP. The total number of participants was **6,713** 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.

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Mr. Ward STRIKES A POSE



"I like your fit, Mr. Ward!" That's how many of Tom Ward's seventh-graders greet him as they spill into his classroom at Live Oak Middle School, in California.

But Ward's students aren't the only fans of his retro threads. This history teacher moonlights as a social media sensation, with millions following him on Instagram [@mrwardstyle](https://www.instagram.com/mrwardstyle), where he shows off his daily classroom looks.

Ward sports groovy duds from across the decades, but his favorite era is the late 1950s to early 1960s. "I love the classic Sinatra, Rat Pack look, with its smaller lapels, thinner ties, and high-waisted pants. The style from this period is stunning and timeless," he says.

Ward doesn't take those compliments from his students for granted. "I know that's an opportunity to make a connection with that student. I know how important that is," he adds. "I always try to create a culture of positivity, looking your best, acting your best, and being your best. I'm trying to give them a recipe for success."



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