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May 2026

# neaToday

for **NEA-RETIRED**  
An edition of *NEA Today*

NEA  
Members  
Insurance  
Trust  
Annual Report  
PAGE 47



# THE POWER OF PENSIONS

*5 Ways*

**PENSIONS  
SUPPORT YOU  
AND THE  
ECONOMY**

PAGE 26

*inside*

Retired Educators Say 'ICE Out'  
PAGE 23

Try Backyard Birding  
PAGE 30

Great Summer Reads!  
PAGE 38



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# CONTENTS

For NEA-Retired Members

# May 2026

Volume 44, number 4

# Choose the NEA Retiree Health Program

To Help Protect Yourself and Your Savings



## COVER

### How Your Pension Powers the Economy

26 Pensions aren't just good for your pocketbook, they are also good for your community and the nation. Get the facts on why all lawmakers should support and protect strong pensions.



## FEATURES

### What's Flying Around Your Backyard?

30 Birding is *wildly* popular with older adults. These tips can help you join the flock!



### Do School Cellphone Bans Work?

34 The verdict is in. And the answer is a resounding yes.

### Educator Picks for Your Summer Reading List

38 Dive into these great reads, recommended by educators!

### How to Support Students With ADHD

40 These classroom management strategies will help your students with ADHD—and your whole class.



### How to Expand Students' Worldview

44 Learn why teaching about different cultures is invaluable—especially in schools where most students are white.

## IN EVERY ISSUE

### 7 NEA-RETIRED PRESIDENT'S VIEWPOINT

NEA-Retired President Anita Gibson shares how she finds hope, even in trying times.

### 8 BECKY'S JOURNAL

NEA President Becky Pringle celebrates historic wins and calls on members to organize for power.

### 10 WE ARE NEA!

NEA members safeguard school funding and protect students from immigration raids.

### 12 NEWS YOU CAN USE

Cursive returns, school shootings decrease, and more.

### 16 ISSUES AND ACTION

The NEA family is growing, as more educators unionize!

### 18 EDUCATION SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS

Academic staff are demanding a living wage.

## OUR VOICES

20 **Member Spotlight:** A teacher's collaboration with NASA encourages students to shoot for the moon!

### 22 BULLETIN BOARD

Retirees protest immigration raids, feed people in need, and invest in future educators.

### 24 TRY THIS

10 ways technology can help you stay healthy.

### 48 Union Member Rights and Officer Responsibilities

### 49 NEA Standards of Conducts

### 50 Campaign Expenses

### 52 Candidates for NEA Office

### 54 NEA Financial Statement

### 56 LAST LOOK

Check out the retro style of seventh-grade teacher and burgeoning fashion icon Tom Ward.

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

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

#### A JUST SOCIETY.

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

#### DEMOCRACY.

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

#### PROFESSIONALISM.

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

#### PARTNERSHIP.

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

#### COLLECTIVE ACTION.

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

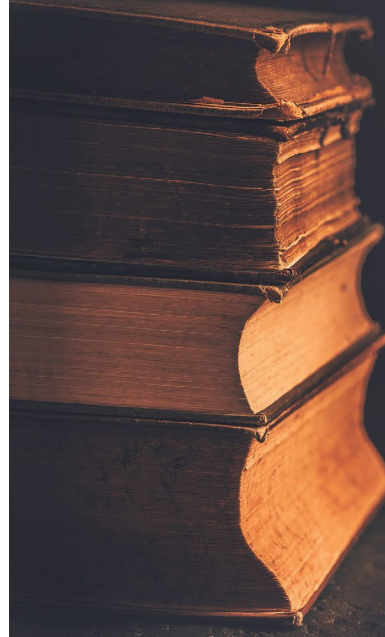
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## PRESIDENT'S *viewpoint*

NEA-Retired President Anita Gibson  
anitagretired@gmail.com



### Why Hope Matters

I recently had a friend ask me what keeps me energized. After giving it some thought, I realized that hope—my belief that the new day will be better than the one before—is what propels me forward.

After a little research, I determined the best definition of hope for me is “a desire for a positive outcome, accompanied by a belief or expectation that it’s possible, making it more than just a wish.”

Hope is frequently misunderstood as a passive, optimistic wish—a mere comfort in times of trouble. Yet true hope is far more dynamic. As marine biologist and policy expert Ayana Elizabeth Johnson writes in her book *What If We Get It Right? Visions of Climate Futures*, “Hope is not a lottery ticket. ... It is an axe used to break down doors in an emergency.” It is a vital force that fuels human resilience, driving us to act when situations seem bleakest.

In psychology, hope is understood as a blend of goal-oriented thinking, the ability to find paths toward those goals, and the motivation to take action. It is the unwavering belief that a better future is possible, even when current evidence suggests otherwise. This perspective allows individuals to move from despair to empowerment, changing their perception of hardship from a permanent state to a temporary, manageable challenge.

Hope is a communal asset. It acts as a beacon during societal, personal, or environmental crises. While despair shuts down possibility, hope whispers that recovery is attainable. This forward-looking mindset makes the present bearable and provides the fuel to fight for a better tomorrow.

Ultimately, embracing hope is not about ignoring the darkness, but trusting in the ability to find the light. It is a conscious choice to keep moving, building, and believing. By fostering hope, we don’t just endure, we thrive. I trust you to never lose sight of your hope for a better tomorrow.

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# Joy, Justice, and Excellence

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

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



Becky Pringle  
NEA President



“

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](https://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](https://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](https://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

**N**evada 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](https://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.

## Educators Making a Difference

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In our ongoing commitment to educators, we also now offer additional programs and opportunities, including free seminars through the **Teachers Institute**, **scholarships reserved for educators and those in the education field**, and **professional development partnerships**.

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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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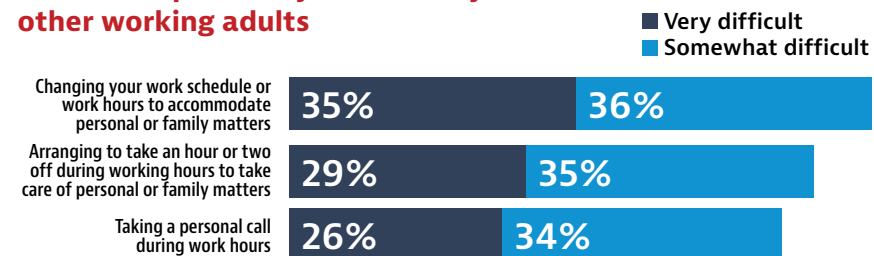
# TEACHERS NEED MORE WORK-LIFE BALANCE

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

*"Teachers may find fitting the curriculum into four days is a challenge."*

—Aaron Ainsworth, University of California, Irvine researcher who studied four-day work weeks

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.

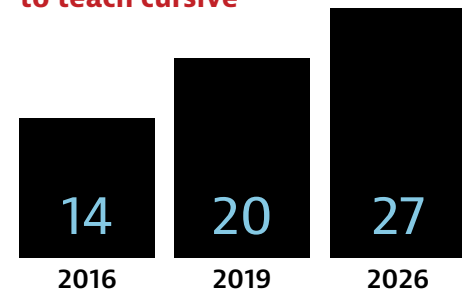
The advancement of classroom technology wasn't the only driver behind the sidelining of cursive. The Common Core State Standards, released in 2010, didn't mention cursive writing, but did call for the teaching of "keyboard skills."

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.

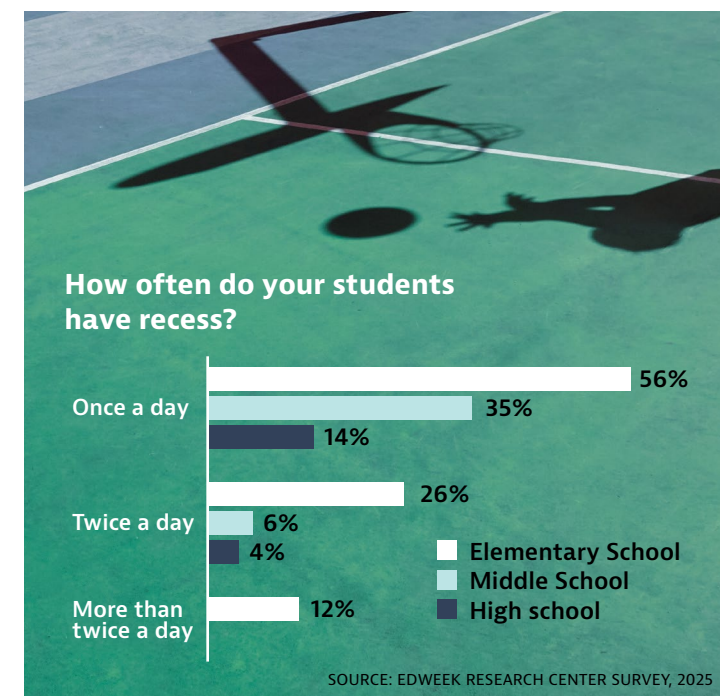
Still, these numbers remain staggeringly high. Experts say lawmakers are not doing enough to prevent shootings, such as enacting commonsense gun laws and providing mental health supports for students.



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](https://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.

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

## A RETIREE FINDS PURPOSE IN POUNDS OF PEPPERS

By Ali Schalop

What is Maine retiree Steve Knight's favorite food to "glean"? Peppers! "You can freeze them and use them in soups and on pizza!" he says.

Gleaning, Knight explains, is redirecting quality produce, compost, and medical supplies that are headed for landfills, so these resources go to people in need instead. That's especially important in his state, where 1 in 7 people and 1 in 5 children live in food insecure households, according to Feeding America.

"In 2025, we gleaned a little over 16,000 pounds of food!" he says.

It all started when Knight realized he could gather used medical equipment, such as crutches and wheelchairs, from his local dump and deliver them to hospice organizations and churches. The supplies are then sanitized and given to people in need.

"It just expanded from there," recalls Knight. His efforts soon grew to include food rescue.



(Above, left) Steve Knight and fellow volunteers gleaned 25 pounds of cabbage and 100 pounds of peppers from a seed company in Winslow, Maine. (Above, right) Knight's granddaughters help him deliver over 300 pounds of tomatoes to a community center in Waterville, Maine.

With seed money from his church, Knight bought a van, gathered a few volunteers, and built a network of farmers, soup kitchens, local colleges, and community centers to create the Central Maine Gleaners Group.

Their tagline? "Good Food—Community—Reciprocity."

Giving back to the community brings the former high school science teacher a sense of fulfillment. "It's just enough to keep me busy, and I still have time for my morning coffee," he says.

## Retired Educators Invest in the Next Generation of Educators

By Colin Davan

For many NEA Aspiring Educators (AE), association dues may be outside of their budget. To help support future educators, 14 NEA-Retired affiliates have sponsored memberships for AE members in their states.

Among them is the Michigan Education Association-Retired (MEA-Retired), which began covering dues for their state's AE members in 2024.

"These students are the future of public education, and it's important to support them in any way we can to preserve teachers in the classrooms and strong public education," says MEA-Retired President Barbara Schram.

MEA-Retired currently sponsors dues for more than 400 students, which led to a 39 percent increase in the state's Aspiring Ed membership!



Michigan Education Association (MEA)-Retired president Barbara Schram (far right) with students and NEA-Retired members at the 2025 MEA Aspiring Educators Conference.

## NEA-RETIRED NEWS

### MASSACHUSETTS RETIREES SAY 'ICE OUT!'

By Rick Last and Mary MacDonald

The "Wisdom Warriors" of the Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA) Retired Members Committee took to the streets to protest ICE immigration raids plaguing their communities. Like many NEA-Retired members nationwide, they proudly stood and marched with hundreds of community members at "ICE Out" rallies that spread across their state in the fall and winter.

Former social studies educator Jim Murphy attended protests against aggressive ICE immigration enforcement in his hometown of

Newton and other nearby communities.

The immigration tactics are frightening students and families, Murphy explains. "Kids are scared they might not come home to parents, and that has an impact on them," Murphy says. "Their anxiety, their absences have an impact on their classmates. That becomes an educational issue very specifically."

Rallies make a difference, he adds. "It may not be obvious at first, but this is exactly how change happens."

The Wisdom Warriors assemble as needed to support active members in contract fights, protests, and to show support for important community



Massachusetts Retired educators Jim Murphy (left) and Andrei Joseph (right) protest ICE raids alongside other Wisdom Warriors.

issues. "We've retired from the classroom, but we

haven't retired from caring about public education or caring about our students," says former teacher Andrei Joseph. "We haven't retired from the mission of the MTA. We haven't retired from the idea of building a better world. That includes a better world for our children and grandchildren."

*A version of this story originally ran in the MTA Reporter.*

## Transforming teaching and learning about Native Americans

Access our newest interactive resource, *American Revolution: Haudenosaunee Perseverance*, and register for upcoming workshops at [AmericanIndian.si.edu/nk360](https://AmericanIndian.si.edu/nk360)

2026 NK360° Summer Webinar Series  
*American Revolution: Haudenosaunee Perseverance*  
July 21–22, 2026 | 1 PM ET | Online | Free  
Register now using the QR code.

*Lead funding for the Native Knowledge 360° education initiative provided by the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies and Bonnie and Jere Broh-Kahn.*

[AmericanIndian.si.edu](https://AmericanIndian.si.edu)

Photo by Norwood Photography



NATIONAL MUSEUM of the AMERICAN INDIAN

Smithsonian

# 10 WAYS TECHNOLOGY CAN SUPPORT YOUR HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

By James Paterson

"Does technology make you want to be like an ostrich and stick your head in a hole in the ground? I get it," wrote Karen Askerooth to her fellow members of North Dakota United-Retired (NDU-Retired) on the group's Facebook page.

"It is sometimes very hard to get retirees to buy into new technology, but we are seeing more and more of our members learning to tackle that scary unknown," she says. "We'll keep working at it."

Why is this important? Askerooth notes that many older adults are missing out on technology that can improve their health and quality of life.

Laurie Orlov, a writer, speaker, and founder of Aging and Health Technology, authored a recent report showing that some 80 percent of seniors use tech for shopping, directions, and other conveniences, but only about 35 percent use it for medical purposes.

"Older adults know they need to adopt newer tech," she says. "As they use it, they find it easier than they thought."

Still skeptical? Here are 10 ways tech can actually support your well-being.

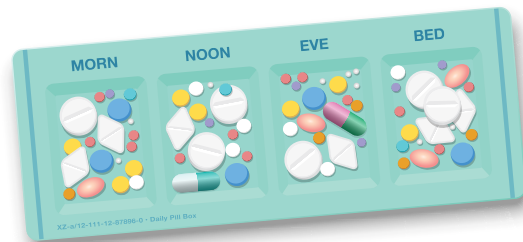
## 1. Monitor your health at home

Melondia Franklin Corpus, a retired teacher from Fleming Island, Fla., handles much of her hospital communications online, where she can see test results and doctor's notes as well as make appointments and

request prescriptions. "I also use the GoodRx app for discounts on prescription drugs, and I'm looking into moving to an app for monitoring Type 2 diabetes," she says.

Glucose Buddy or Diabetes:M also monitor blood sugar. And she uses a myAir platform to evaluate her CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) online, which treats her sleep apnea.

Checkme Suite is a popular portable vital signs device with an insertable monitor that can track your heart rate and check for atrial fibrillation. Oura Ring can track sleep stages, heart rate, body temperature, and respiratory rate, as well as steps, calories, and workouts.



## 2. Manage your medications

Automated pill dispensers, such as e-pill Medication Reminders or MedMinder, can help you take medications on time. In fact, a Hero Smart Dispenser can hold a month's supply of 10 different medications, dispense them accurately, and remind you to take them.

## 3. Track your fitness

"Wearable health trackers have important benefits for health because they monitor heart rate, steps, and sleep," says Harvard researcher Ana-Maria Vranceanu. "They're also great for meeting health goals and increasing safety with fall detection and emergency alerts."

A Fitbit or an Apple Watch can track workouts and sleep as well as monitor oxygen saturation and stress levels. To follow your exercise trends or do a deep dive into your diet and water intake, you can sync your Fitbit with fitness apps on your smartphone. (Some apps require a subscription.)



## 4. Walk, walk, and walk some more

The Map My Walk app allows you to set goals, log walks, save routes, and find good walking trails. This app, as well as the fitness app on the Apple Watch and iPhone, also track a wide range of activities, including cycling, hiking, and swimming.

## 5. Boost your hearing

If you have mild hearing loss that doesn't require prescription hearing aids, Apple AirPods Pro 2 now offer basic amplification, and *The New York Times* recommends Tweak Enhance hearing aids as a good, low-cost, over-the-counter brand. Most options now offer Bluetooth connection, so you can improve hearing while connected to your smartphone.

## 6. Stay independent at home

The old "I've fallen and I can't get up" commercial isn't as relevant anymore, Askerooth says. A wide range of fall detection devices and platforms can make emergency calls, including Apple Watches.

"Homes with sensors can now detect unusual behavior, such as a lack of movement or falls, and directly communicate with hospitals, caregivers, and doctors," Orlov advises.

GPS SmartSole Tracking Solutions is designed to be placed in the insole of a shoe to track the location of the wearer, as is the Theora Connect Wearable, which comes with a fall detection option.

"I use GPS tracking for my husband who has Alzheimer's, combined with an Apple AirTag locator on our service dog," Askerooth notes. "It has come in handy the few times he has wandered off."

Digital assistants can improve safety, too. You can "ask Alexa" or Siri to call 911, even if you can't get to the phone. You can also use them to set reminders, voice dial, set timers, and listen to your favorite music!

## 7. Get 'smart' about home safety

Devices such as a Ring Doorbell Camera or Google Nest front door cameras allow you to see who's at your front door, even if you're in another part of the house or away on vacation. The devices send an alert to your smartphone any time there is



motion at your front door, and you can see the live video feed on your phone at any time of day or night.

More complete home security systems—without traditional contracts or expense—allow you to see who is outside (or inside, when you are gone), some with cameras that cost less than \$50. With SimpliSafe, Ring, and Abode or other similar products, you can lock doors remotely and select to set off alarms when doors or windows are open. Others will contact emergency services for a fee.

## 8. Connect with others

Former English and drama teacher Karen Solheim, who lives in Athens, Ga., meets with friends on Zoom each week to share a themed meal. You can also schedule weekly virtual visits with grandchildren, or join online classes, book clubs, or other hobby groups.

## 9. Give your brain a workout

Like most retired educators, Solheim still loves to learn and keep her mind active. She stays sharp by playing online games like Wordle and taking classes on educational platforms, such as Coursera, edX, and Khan Academy, which provides access to free courses from universities worldwide.



## 10. Get started

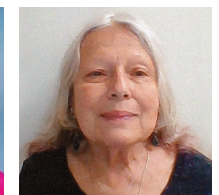
If this all sounds intriguing, but you're not sure how to get started? Ask tech savvy friends and family for coaching, or reach out to Cyber-Seniors, a nonprofit organization that provides free tech support and training for older adults. Visit [cyberseniors.org](https://www.cyberseniors.org) or call 1-844-217-3057. 📞



Karen Askerooth



Melondia Franklin Corpus



Karen Solheim

# How Your Pension Powers the Economy



**R**etired special education teacher KC Walsh started thinking about her pension a few years into her teaching career. “I might have been one of the few who did,” recalls Walsh, who lives in Oak Grove, Calif. “Teaching is an extremely hard job. You have other things on your mind, especially when you are young. But knowing that there was some security at the end of my career helped keep me in the profession.”

Walsh has been a longtime advocate for the California State Teachers’ Retirement System (CalSTRS)—a defined benefit pension plan and the second-largest pension system in the United States. She and other California public school educators, current and retired, know their pension benefits are superior in value and security to what they would receive under a defined contribution plan, such as a 401(k) or 403(b), which fluctuates with the stock market.

Want to speak out to protect or strengthen your pension? These five facts can change the conversation.

By Tim Walker

But if some politicians and private interests have their way, these plans could be diluted, if not altogether abolished.

“Those attacks will continue,” Walsh says. “But the data about what defined benefits provide doesn’t lie.”

The pension money that you and other retirees spend generated \$1.5 trillion in total economic activity, in 2022, and supported 7.1 million jobs across the nation, according to the *Pensionomics 2025* report from the National Institute on Retirement Security (NIRS).

“Pensions are important to the financial security of retirees, but it doesn’t stop there,” says Dan Doonan, NIRS executive director and co-author of the report. “Spending of pension income by retirees has a giant-size economic

footprint that benefits virtually every community across the country.”

## 1. Pensions provide retirement security

In a defined benefit pension plan, employers and employees contribute to a pool of funds that are invested on behalf of employees. Today, they provide a critical source of secure, reliable income for 26.3 million retired Americans, and they are available to public school educators in all 49 states, save for Alaska.

Danielle Specht taught in Kodiak, Alaska, for almost 20 years until she moved to Kentucky this year. “I loved teaching in Kodiak, but my family didn’t have a secure retirement,” she says.

Specht and NEA-Alaska have been strong advocates for returning to a defined benefits system, which the

“Spending of pension income by retirees has a giant-size economic footprint that benefits virtually every community across the country.”

—Dan Doonan, executive director of the National Institute on Retirement Security

state abandoned in favor of a defined contribution plan more than 20 years ago. “But nothing has changed,” Specht says. “So we really had no choice but to move.” Specht hopes to remain in education in some capacity in Kentucky.

West Virginia made the same switch away from a defined benefit plan. But evidence mounted that many school workers faced an impoverished retirement. In a huge victory for educators, the state switched back to defined benefits in 2007.

## 2. Pensions boost tax revenue

Retirees with a pension can count on steady income every month, even in volatile economic times. “The spending of their pension income is critical for sustaining and stabilizing consumer spending,” Doonan says. And that boosts tax revenue.

According to the *Pensionomics* report, pension spending added \$125.5 billion in federal tax revenue and \$98.8 billion

in state and local tax revenue.

According to the National Conference on Public Employee Retirement Systems (NCPERS), public pensions are far from a burden for taxpayers. In fact, they are a strong revenue generator. A 2025 report by NCPERS found that, in 2023, 43 states saw a revenue gain from public pensions, a trend that has grown steadily since 2016.

“Dismantling public pensions would not reduce costs; it would impose new ones,” the report authors write. “The cost of delivering the same level of public services could rise, shifting a greater burden onto taxpayers.”

## 3. Pensions create jobs

When you make a purchase, the money spent translates into business revenues, and that creates jobs in communities and across the state and nation.

Pensions support **\$7.1 million** American jobs; **\$224.3 billion** in federal, state, and local tax revenue; and contribute **\$871 billion** to the gross domestic product.

The largest impacts are in:

-  food services
-  healthcare
-  retail trade

More than half of these jobs—nearly 3.9 million—were supported by state and local pension benefit expenditures. One million of these jobs were generated by federal pension expenditures.

In the private sector, single-employer plans—maintained by one

company or affiliated companies, and usually negotiated with a union—supported 1.7 million jobs. Together, jobs supported by private and public sector pensions paid out an estimated \$466.2 billion in labor income (wages, salaries, and employee benefits).

For example, in California, where KC Walsh lives, state and local pension expenditures supported 397,000 jobs that paid out \$28 billion in income. The positive impact on job creation is also evident in smaller states. In Virginia, pensions supported 46,000 jobs with \$2.6 billion in income.

## 4. Pensions keep educators in the classrooms

Some lawmakers and politicians argue that many teachers—younger ones especially—would prefer putting their money in a

NEA-  
RETIRED

*feature*



**"Defined benefit pensions are significant and successful tools for teacher recruitment and retention."**

—Sue Lemmo, retired educator and a member of Pennsylvania's Public School Employees' Retirement System Board

401(k)-style program. But many states that experimented with shifting workers into these defined contribution plans found it harder to attract and retain qualified educators.

Sue Lemmo, a retired art teacher in Clearfield, Pa., says that after her state cut pensions for newly hired teachers and introduced 401(k)-style offerings, the state saw a drop-off in the number of applicants for teaching certificates and teaching positions.

"As soon as they started moving newer teachers toward a more hybrid plan, we saw that decline," says Lemmo, who also serves on Pennsylvania's Public School Employees' Retirement System Board. "Defined benefit pensions are significant and successful tools for teacher recruitment and retention."

And this helps school districts, which are saddled with the costs of high turnover. And it especially helps students, who benefit from more experienced, effective teachers.

### 5. Voters support pensions!

The American people overwhelmingly favor the secure retirement provided by pensions—especially as

**Defined benefit pensions support \$98.8 billion in state and local tax revenue:**

**\$9.1 billion**  
(in taxes paid by beneficiaries on benefits)

**+** **\$89.7 billion**  
(tax revenue resulting from retiree expenditures)

**=** **\$98.8 billion**  
(total state and local tax revenue)

"affordability" has become a top concern among voters.

According to a 2024 NIRS survey, 86 percent of Americans ages 25 and older believe all workers should have access to a defined benefit pension. The results were the same across political party lines—more than 80 percent of Democrats, Republicans, and independents voiced their support.

A separate NIRS survey, also conducted in 2024, found that 79 percent of adults agree that there is a "retirement crisis," and 77 percent agree that the disappearance of pensions

makes it harder to achieve the American dream.

Despite this popularity and the proven positive impact that pensions have on the economy and communities, threats to defined benefit plans persist.

"Every state is different," Lemmo says. "Some are battling bad legislation or interference in the autonomy of pension boards, telling them they can't invest in any companies with DEI [diversity, equity, and inclusion] principles."

In her state, the focus is on getting a cost-of-living increase—the first one since 2001. In Alaska, members are advocating to return to defined benefits.

The common thread is that advocacy by current and retired educators is critical to protecting pensions.

"The first step ... is to get in touch with your local and state organization," Lemmo suggests. "Work with their political advocacy teams and find out what the issues are and what the threats are to your pension and retirement security." 🗣️

**LEARN MORE**

See the full report and find out the impact of pensions in your state. Go to [bit.ly/Pensionomics2025](https://bit.ly/Pensionomics2025).

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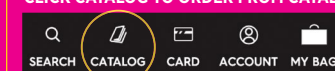
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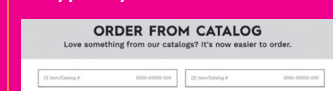
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# What's Flying Around Your Backyard?

Birding is part hobby, part meditation, and it's taking flight like never before.

By Janet Rivera Mednik

Yellow-bellied sapsucker, blue-footed booby, bufflehead, and butterbutt may sound more like schoolyard taunts than beautiful creatures, but these are just a few of the colorfully named birds bringing joy to a growing flock of birding aficionados.

Some 96 million Americans are birders, and 44 percent of them are over age 55.

The birders among us are easy to spot: Bird feeders sprinkled around the backyard, field binoculars and cameras at the ready, bird-call apps downloaded, and field guides in hand.

But what if you don't have all the gear yet and are just "bird curious"? These retired educators share how their passion for our feathered friends took wing.

"It centers me and ... keeps me in the moment," says Joy Kirk, a retired middle school gifted resource teacher from Winchester, Va.

For Kirk, that feeling of peace brings back memories of her childhood, in Mars,

Pa. She recalls falling asleep to the mournful song of the whip-poor-will and to the reassuring rhythm of a hooting owl.

She held on to this love of birds even when she began a busy career as an educator. Kirk notes that birding

offered a stark contrast to her time in the

classroom. Unlike teaching, which requires meticulous planning and constant assessments, watching birds

rewards spontaneity, and rigorous rules or expectations are nonexistent.

"I do not have to plan to bird, and there is no stress of 'doing it right,'" she says. "You are just watching birds. It's that simple, but oh-so rewarding and fun."

Last year, Kirk retired after 30 years in the classroom, but her backyard birding

hobby is still going strong, even as she and her husband travel around the country.

"I can do it anywhere, any season. In these times, it is easy to get lost in a doom scroll or negative thought cycle, and I find it a wonderful way to escape that and be present," she shares.

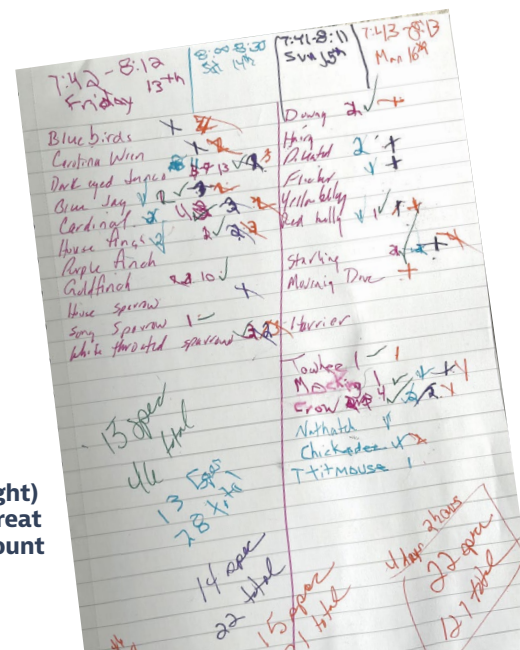
## A hobby with wings

Kirk and her husband have nine bird feeders placed strategically throughout their 2-acre property, and their birding book holds a special place in their home. Handwritten scrawls fill the margins, noting the species and dates of the bird varieties identified. She recently discovered that she had recorded their 101st variety earlier this year.

"As I watched TV one afternoon, I saw movement on our platform feeder outside the family-room window. At first I thought it was a tufted

*"I do not have to plan to bird, and there is no stress of 'doing it right.' You are just watching birds. It's that simple, but oh-so rewarding and fun."*

—Joy Kirk, retired educator, Winchester, Va.



Joy Kirk's log (right) from the 2026 Great Backyard Bird Count

(Clockwise from top, left) The indigo bunting and Baltimore oriole are just two of 101 birds that retiree Joy Kirk has recorded; Kirk's backyard attracts birds all year long.

"Whether I'm sitting out on my front porch, in Traverse City, Mich., ... watching our native birds—robins, cardinals, goldfinches, and Canada geese—or out of town on union business, I just love looking at birds," she says. "I'm in awe of their beauty, listening to their songs and noises they make, and watching them come to the feeder. I think I forget all else while observing their habits and how they play."

Boylan estimates that she has identified more than 100 varieties of birds with the help of her birding app and her field guide. Not bad for a self-described birding "dabbler."

Her love of birds also goes back to her early years. The melancholy coos of a mourning dove or the clear whistle of a red cardinal—her favorite bird—evokes vivid memories of sitting with her mother at the crack of dawn on their back porch, in Brice, Ohio.

But it was a snowy owl spotted years ago that truly hooked her on the hobby. Birding enthusiasts call these "spark birds"—creatures that ignite, or in Boylan's case, renew a love of birding.

"I was lucky I was able to walk from my home to

titmouse, a favorite and frequent visitor. However, as the bird continued to eat our mealworms and seeds, I noted it was too small and had the wrong coloring. I got out my trusty bird book and then called my husband to the room as I identified the blue-gray gnatcatcher. It's not a bird typical to the area and was really exciting to see," Kirk says.

When the couple travels, they keep a watchful eye for birds they aren't likely to see at home. They crossed paths

with a roadrunner in Joshua Tree National Park, spied mergansers in a Maryland lake, encountered snail kites in Florida, and caught sight of a majestic bald eagle while kayaking in the Potomac River in West Virginia.

## Frequent fliers flock together

Another devoted birder, NEA-Retired Board member Connie Boylan, is always in flight, much like the birds she loves to watch and feed.



"I gradually spent more and more time watching birds and other critters in my yard. ... It cheered me up [and] brought me peace."

—Connie Boylan, former educator

my school, and one winter morning I spotted him. He was perched proudly on a fence post," she recalls. "He was gorgeous and a rare sight to see."

The children and staff loved watching him from their classroom windows. The students were careful not to go near the owl, so the bird would feel safe and continue to grace us with his presence, she remembers. "He returned to us for four or five winters, and then one year he didn't return, to our great disappointment."

### Nature's healing power

Boylan's passion for nature played a healing role in her recovery from a car accident, in 2016, that took a significant physical and mental toll. Her mobility was drastically compromised, and her independent spirit suffered. Birding proved to be a powerful salve.

"I gradually spent more and more time watching birds and other critters in my yard—reading about what feed, fruit, and flowers would attract different birds," she shares. "It cheered me up, brought me peace, and helped me feel less trapped."

Boylan cultivates her yard with vegetation like red geraniums and butterfly bushes, and maintains oak and pine trees that house a variety of birds. And she is now passing on the family tradition to her 8-year-old grandson.

### One feeder is all it takes

When retiree Kathy Torres moved into her home in Santa Rosa, Calif., in 2013, she loved the house, but the long-neglected backyard needed help. It wasn't long, however, before a single, plastic hummingbird feeder, homemade nectar (4 cups sterilized water to 1 cup sugar, according to the National Audubon Society), and a growing curiosity transitioned the patch of land into



(Left and below) California retiree Kathy Torres' backyard bird feeders and brightly colored garden attract a menagerie of birds, like this house finch, which is a "frequent flier."



## How to Become a 'Bird Nerd'



- **Put out only as many bird feeders as you can maintain.** The National Audubon Society recommends placing them either next to a window or 30 feet away. Anything in the middle can create confusion and cause a bird to collide with the window. Clean feeders every other week, and more frequently in hot weather. Empty and clean hummingbird feeders every few days, since sugar can breed bacteria.
- **Consider investing in a basic pair of binoculars,** especially if you are interested in expanding your hobby beyond your backyard.
- **Purchase a bird field guide** packed with illustrations (such as *Sibley's Birding Basics* and the *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of the United States and Canada*). Secondhand bookstores are great places to find inexpensive guides.

- **Download free apps** such as Merlin Bird ID and eBird, for identifying birds by sight and sound and for tracking your sightings.
- **Mark your calendar to participate in the next Great Backyard Bird Count, in February 2027.** Spend a minimum of 15 minutes identifying and counting birds in your area, and then submit your findings. For updates and exact dates, check [birdcount.org](http://birdcount.org).
- **Find your flock!** Contact your local Audubon Society chapter or nature center to find free lectures, meet birding experts, and learn about local bird hikes.
- **Join a birding club** on your favorite social media platform or share bird photos with like-minded friends.

an oasis for hummingbirds, finches, and a host of other bird species.

"I didn't really know a lot about birds when I first moved into my neighborhood, but as my homemade nectar grew in popularity, so did my interest in attracting other birds," says the former elementary school teacher.

She now stocks up on suet, birdseed, and bird feeders throughout the year, and spends considerable time meticulously scrubbing her feeders—a labor of love.

"I get so much out of my birds, especially the hummingbirds. They are just so friendly and give me so much joy," she shares. "The

old-timers sit on the perch as though they are belling up to the bar, while the ones new to my backyard act a little more timid. It's not long before they act like regulars."

In spring, her yard is a kaleidoscope of color, with vegetation including hot lips and butterfly bushes, zinnias, lemon trees, and Monterey pine. It serves as a delicious buffet for the birds who visit, including Anna's hummingbirds, oak titmice, woodpeckers, and house finches.

### Technology and nature

Torres embraces technology, such as an artificial

intelligence camera mounted to a bird feeder, which offers a close-up view of feathered visitors 24 hours a day.

"The detail is just amazing, and it's comforting to know that I'm not missing anything when I'm away," Torres says.

"I'm also a big fan of the Merlin app, because it makes it easy to identify a species by the way it looks or even by its sound," she adds. "Just last month, I recorded a great horned owl. If it weren't for the app, I would not have known that I had an owl in my area."

As her knowledge grows, so does her fondness for birds of all feathers.

"I love them all," she says. "They all have unique personalities, and by observing them, you can't help but appreciate them. 🐦"

**TIP**  
Red, orange, and yellow plants, flowers, and berries attract birds. Be sure to plant native species and avoid pesticides, which are harmful to birds.

SOURCE: MERLIN BIRD ID APP

# Do School Cellphone Bans Work?

By Tim Walker

YES! EDUCATORS SAY THEY HAVE BEEN WELL WORTH THE WAIT

**A**labama 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

"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."

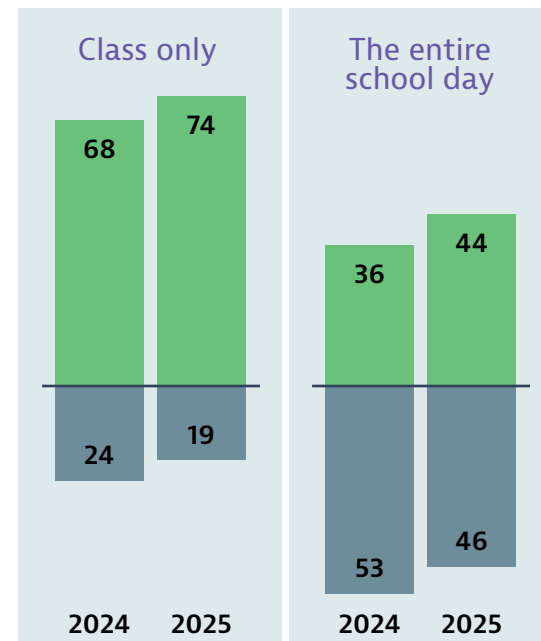
Long-term success in any district, Buchwalter says, depends largely on school leaders supporting school staff and assuring enforcement is consistent.

"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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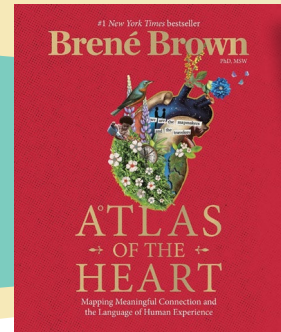
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# Educator picks for your summer reading list



## 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

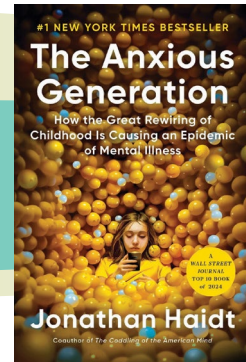


## Summer Solstice

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."

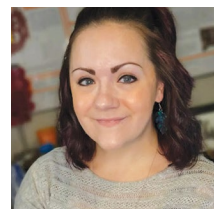


Fahey

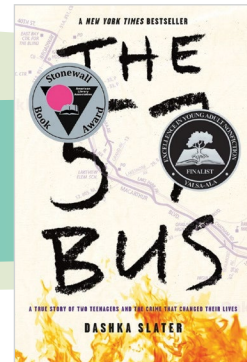


## The Anxious Generation

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

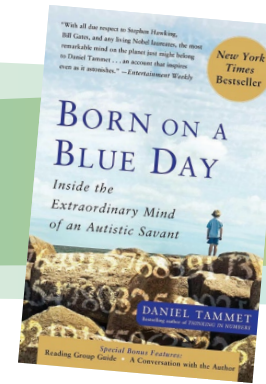


## The 57 Bus

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

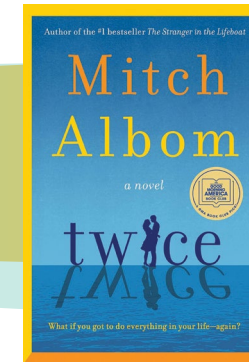


## Empire of Silence

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

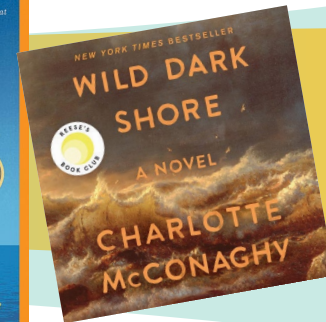


## Twice

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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In search of great reads for your students? Explore NEA's Read Across America at [nea.org/ReadAcross](https://nea.org/ReadAcross).

# 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).**



Idaho State University



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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." 🌸



You can advocate for safe and inclusive schools. Find out how at [nea.org/EdJustice](https://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 Life<sup>SM</sup>, 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](#), 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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