



NOMINATIONS FOR 2027 NEA ESP OF THE YEAR AWARD OVERVIEW, AWARD CRITERIA, AND NOMINATION REQUIREMENTS

NOMINATION DEADLINE: Midnight ET on Monday, September 28, 2026

All award materials can be downloaded from www.nea.org/espoty-nomination.

OVERVIEW

Purpose

The National Education Association (NEA) Education Support Professional (ESP) of the Year Award recognizes the contributions that education support professionals make toward their worksites, communities, and professions. The award is presented annually to an NEA member who demonstrates outstanding actions and impact and reflects the contributions of ESPs to public education and student success. The award is presented by the NEA and NEA Member Benefits.

Award

Each spring, one nominee is presented with the NEA ESP of the Year Award at the annual [NEA ESP National Conference](#). The 2027 NEA ESP of the Year will receive a \$10,000 personal cash prize courtesy of NEA Member Benefits and will be funded by NEA to attend the following year's NEA ESP National Conference. The winner may also be invited to address the NEA Representative Assembly and will serve as an ambassador for ESPs across the country, elevating the voice of ESPs at local, state, and national events.

Eligibility

All active ESP members of an NEA local affiliate who have been NEA members for at least three years as of December 31, 2026, are eligible. Retired members are not eligible for the award. Individuals must be nominated by their state affiliate through a state ESP award program or their local affiliate if a state program or nominee does not exist.

Nomination Types

State Affiliate Nomination: Each state affiliate may submit only one nominee through its state ESP award program. A state ESP award program solicits nominations from local affiliates and then selects one statewide award nominee. Criteria for the state award can mirror the NEA award criteria or be designed by the state affiliate, so long as it does not conflict with the NEA award's criteria and purpose. A submission by a state affiliate requires the acknowledgment of the state president.

Local Affiliate Nomination: If a state affiliate does not have an ESP award program or nominee, it may ask local affiliates to submit nominations (one per local) directly to NEA. Criteria for the local award can mirror the NEA award criteria or be designed by the affiliate, so long as it does not conflict with the NEA award's criteria and purpose. A submission by a local affiliate requires the acknowledgment of the state and local president. Local affiliate nominations are only permissible if the state affiliate does not have an ESP award program or nominee.

Nomination Requirements

A complete nomination package includes the following:

- Affiliate Point of Contact (POC) Information
- Nomination Type

- Nominee Personal Information
- Nominee Worksite/Career Information
- Nominee Personal Statement
- Nominee Resume Questionnaire
- Three (3) Letters of Recommendation
- State President Acknowledgment

Deadline

Nominations must be submitted online **by midnight ET on Monday, September 28, 2026.** Nominations submitted after this date will not be considered for the award.

Affiliate Points of Contact (POCs)

POCs are state affiliate staff appointed by the state affiliate executive director to liaise with NEA staff and coordinate the compilation and submission of their state's ESP of the Year nomination to NEA. POCs work directly with nominees to collect the award requirements and then enter them into the online nomination form on their behalf. Nominees cannot submit their nominations.

The state affiliate executive director should identify a POC unless the nomination is a local affiliate nomination, at which time the local affiliate would do so.

AWARD CRITERIA AND PROCESS

The NEA ESP of the Year selection committee will review and score each nomination using the ESP of the Year award criteria outlined below.

- **Impact on students.** Describe specific actions you have taken and how those actions positively impacted student learning, social-emotional well-being, health and/or safety.
- **Impact on families and the community.** Describe specific actions you have taken and how those actions have positively impacted families and/or the local community.
- **Union engagement and activism, with a focus on ESP workforce issues.** Describe how your engagement and activism with the local or state union/association have positively impacted ESPs' professional stature (e.g., importance and reputation), stability (e.g., wages, benefits, and job security), and/or effectiveness (e.g., professional practice).
- **Impact on colleagues.** Describe specific actions you have taken and how those actions have positively impacted colleagues at your school campus, school district, or worksite.

To help the nominee better tell their story and focus on their impact (instead of simply submitting a list of accomplishments), each criterion response should follow the same cadence: "What action was taken, and what impact did that action have?"

The following three questions will be applied to each of the criteria during scoring:

1. What is the **degree of impact?** (Was the impact transactional or transformational? Were systems changed? What was the breadth and/or depth of impact?)
2. How did the actions advance **racial and social justice** in education? (Did the actions address issues of inequity? If yes, how? How were the actions inclusive and/or responsive to marginalized communities?)
3. To what degree did the nominee **collaborate or partner** with others? (e.g., individuals, organizations, etc.?)

A **strong nomination package** will demonstrate how the nominee meets and/or exceeds each criterion. It will demonstrate the nominee’s impact in each criterion area by describing what action was taken and what impact the action had. Strong nominations tell how the nominee has effected change using specific examples. Nominees should ask themselves, “What is the story I want to tell about my work, actions, and impact in each of the criterion areas?” A strong nomination is more than simply a list of accomplishments. It is the story of how the nominee’s actions impacted students, families/community, colleagues, and the union.

The selection committee will review and score nominations using the above award criteria. The committee will review and score the nominee’s Personal Statement, Resume Questionnaire, and Letters of Recommendation.

The selection committee does not score the Affiliate POC Information, Nomination Type, Nominee Personal Information, Nominee Worksite/Career Information, and State President Acknowledgment sections. They review segments of the Nomination Information (e.g., type of nomination, state affiliate), Nominee Personal Information (e.g., name), and Nominee Worksite/Career Information (e.g., local affiliate, job title, NEA career family, career experience, worksite level, school/worksite, school district/university, school community type, Title I status) sections to gather additional context for each nomination.

When the scoring and selection process is complete, the committee will forward its recommendation to the NEA president, who will present it to the NEA Executive Committee for consideration and action.

Announcement of Semi-finalists and Top Recipient

Semi-finalists will be announced before the [2027 NEA ESP National Conference](#) (date TBD). The NEA ESP of the Year top recipient will remain confidential until announced at the [2027 NEA ESP National Conference](#).

NOMINATION REQUIREMENT DETAILS

The Affiliate Point of Contact (POC) will submit their own contact information, identify the nomination type, provide required nomination components completed by and collected from the nominee, and confirm acknowledgment by the state president. The nominee’s components include:

- **Personal Information**
- **Worksite/Career Information**
- **Personal Statement***

Nominees will demonstrate how they have met or exceeded the four criterion areas in the Personal Statement by providing specific examples of action and impact. *This section cannot be written by anyone except the nominee; nominations submitted with sections written by someone other than the nominee (i.e., from a third-person point of view) will not be accepted.*

- **Resume Questionnaire***

Nominees will outline current and past worksite positions; their typical day at work; education/training/certifications completed; honors/awards received; and positions/appointments held in their school/district, local/state affiliate, and in external organizations/stakeholder groups. *This section cannot be written by anyone except the*

nominee; nominations submitted with sections written by someone other than the nominee (i.e., from a third-person point of view) will not be accepted.

- **Three (3) Letters of Recommendation** (Exactly three letters of recommendation are required – no more and no less.)
 - **Who should write letters of recommendation?** These letters should be written by people from the nominee’s school/worksite (e.g., fellow ESPs, teachers, or other colleagues, principals, superintendents), their state/local affiliate (e.g., elected leaders, fellow members, staff), and/or their community (e.g., current or former students, families of students, representatives from community-based organizations). Letters should include the writer’s signature (typed or handwritten), first and last name, title/position, and phone number or email address.
 - **What should they include?** These letters should note how long the writer has known the nominee and in what capacity. Importantly, the writer should cite specific examples of how the nominee has impacted one or more of the four criterion areas.
 - **Is specific formatting required?** Letters must be typed, one page maximum, with 1-inch margins and a minimum 10-point font. Letters can be uploaded as PDF or Word document files. Pictures of letters will not be accepted. The file name of each letter should include the nominee’s name and state.

***IMPORTANT!** There is a **4,000-character limit (including spaces)** built into the nomination form for questions in the Personal Statement and Resume Questionnaire. The nomination form **WILL NOT alert the POC if a response exceeds the 4,000-character (including spaces) limit**. Any text over the character count limit will be cut off. If the copy and paste function is used to enter the nominee’s responses into the form, please verify that the entire response was captured before submitting.

Helpful resources!

Character Count Tools: In Microsoft Word, you can use the built-in word count feature. Word's status bar displays the word count by default, but you can click it to reveal character counts (with and without spaces). Online tools like WordCounter.net, CharacterCounter.com, and QuillBot offer real-time character counting and can be helpful for specific character limit requirements.

2027 ESPOY Nominee Template: An optional template to help POCs collect the nominee’s information and responses is available. The template is a Microsoft Word fillable form that reflects what is requested in the nomination. The nominee can complete this template and send it to the POC for transfer to the online nomination form. Download the ESPOY Nominee Template [here](#).

2027 ESPOY Letter Writing Requirements: This document summarizes the requirements for letters of recommendation. POCs or nominees should share this with letter writers to help ensure all requirements are met. Download the ESPOY Letter of Recommendation Requirements [here](#).

One Final Requirement! State President Acknowledgment

The final section of the nomination requires acknowledgment of submission by the state president. POCs must complete this section on behalf of the state president. If the nomination is from a local affiliate, then the local and state presidents must both approve and acknowledge the nomination. Note: If the nominee is the local president, the vice-president must acknowledge and approve the nomination.

Before completing this section, the POC should share the following language with the state president (and local president, if it is a local nomination), obtain the appropriate approvals, and then complete it on their behalf.

“NEA’s nomination form for ESP of the Year asks the POC to attest to the following:

- They have permission from the State President to electronically sign and submit this nomination on their behalf, and
- The State President recognizes the individual outlined in this nomination as their affiliate's nominee.”

If the nomination is a local nomination, the POC will attest to the same and enter the state and local president’s name (or vice president’s if the nominee is the local president) on their behalf.

ACCESSING THE 2027 NOMINATION FORM

Nominations must be submitted through an online Smartsheet form that is distributed to all POCs. To view a PDF of the nomination form, click [here](#).

IMPORTANT! BEFORE SUBMITTING A NOMINATION

- Be sure you have all of the requested information from your nominee BEFORE completing the form. You **cannot** start, save, and return later to finish a nomination.
- The nomination form **does not** have automatic **spell checking**. Please check for spelling BEFORE completing the form.
- Be sure to check “**send me a copy of my responses**” before you check “**submit**” to receive a copy of the nomination. **We strongly encourage you to do this, so you can review the nomination and promptly flag any errors.** If errors are found, please email jyoung@nea.org as soon as possible.
- Use the **2027 ESPOY Nomination Submission Checklist** to ensure all award requirements have been met. The checklist can be printed or used as a Microsoft Word fillable form. Click [here](#) to download the checklist.

AFTER SUBMITTING A NOMINATION

ESP Quality staff will send the POC an email confirming receipt of the nomination and will review it to ensure all eligibility and submission requirements are met. If anything needs attention, the POC will be notified. If nothing needs attention, a copy of the nomination will be sent to the nominee, who will be asked to review it and respond with any final changes.

Questions? Contact Jennie Young at jyoung@nea.org.

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