

Education Support Professionals for a Day 2026 Toolkit

November 16-20 marks the **National Education Association's (NEA) 104th annual celebration of American Education Week (AEW)**. This year, **Education Support Professionals Day (ESP)** will be celebrated on **Wednesday, November 18**.

AEW celebrates and honors the team of people who work in our nation's public schools, everyone from the bus driver and classroom teacher to the cafeteria worker and administrative staff, plus countless others.

To mark this year's ESP Day, NEA is encouraging communities across the country to organize and participate in "Education Support Professionals for a Day" events at local public schools. This toolkit provides resources and guidance to help you plan and host a successful event in your community.

If your affiliate decides to host an event, please let us know. We would love to learn more about your plans and help amplify your efforts. If you need planning assistance or have any questions, please contact Christiana Campos at ccampos@nea.org.

What is ESP for a Day?

Imagine members of your local community stepping into the shoes of our hard-working education support professionals for a day. The ESP for a Day program provides a one-of-a-kind, behind the scenes look at the dedication, complexity, and passion that goes into ensuring our students succeed in school, and in life. The program invites community members to perform duties such as assisting bus drivers on bus routes, performing lunch and corridor duty, supervising recess, serving meals, and helping office staff with administrative tasks.

Use this online toolkit to host an unforgettable ESP for a Day event in your school or district. It has everything you need to plan, promote, and launch the program successfully!

What will it accomplish?

ESP for a Day will:

- Enhance communication among education support professionals and community leaders.
- Promote the general public's understanding of who ESPs are, what they do, and what they need to succeed.
- Allow persons "outside" the school situation to better understand the realities and challenges of an ESP.
- Underscore the need for adequate staffing, materials, and facilities for our schools in an era of budget cuts and generally declining resources.

- Help to increase community awareness, through the media, of the needs of today's students and of the challenges school employees face.

Organizing the program

Once you decide to conduct an ESP for a Day program, the first step should be to form a committee, with a chairperson, to develop a specific plan for your program. That proposal should then be reviewed by your local leadership.

Next, arrange to meet with your superintendent or other administrative representative to develop a final plan suitable to everyone. (See sample letter at the end of this packet.) Once your committee has that proposal in hand, they can begin to launch the project.

Specific objectives should include the following:

- Developing a time frame for the project (see sample at the end of packet) to help keep you on schedule.
- Deciding how many ESPs for a Day you need to invite to make the program a success.
- Deciding how many "host ESPs" you will need to accommodate the guests.
- Setting guidelines for guests and cooperating ESPs and communicating them to both.
- Letting the school principal/s know about the program.
- Establishing the media/public relations side of program and making sure that duties are specifically assigned.
- Arranging for adequate evaluation/follow-up for the program, including an end of the school day reception, certificates of appreciation, thank you letters, and follow-up press releases.

Who should be invited?

Some examples of the people you might wish to invite are school committee members, legislators, local officials, business people, celebrities who live in town, and media representatives.

Some general guidelines include the following:

- Seek recognizable names in the community.
- Seek people who are willing to do the mundane, as well as important tasks in school.
- Seek salaried employees who will not lose money by participating.
- If participants wear uniforms in their profession, they should wear their uniforms in class. This will give greater identification when photographs are taken.

Sending invitations

Once you've decided how many people to invite—and who they should be—send an invitation from your local Association president and your school administration (if it is a joint project; see sample at end of packet.)

When you have your list of acceptances and cooperating school employees finalized, you can then pair them, and send each an ESP for a Day note indicating who their host ESP is

and when they will be meeting prior to the actual day of the program (or suggesting they make their own arrangements to do so). At the same time, inform the school/host ESPs of the pairings.

Once your pairings are finalized, fill out a form that lists host ESPs with ESPs for a Day (suggested format example appears at the end of this packet). The form should be kept for your own records, and copies should be sent to host ESPs, guests, and administration.

Tips for host ESPs

The host ESPs are central to the success of this program since they will have the most contact throughout the day with the guests. As such, they will be the key "ambassadors" of your school and should have a common sense of the purpose of the day and some common objectives in meeting that purpose.

Among the things you should convey to your cooperating ESPs are the following:

- ESPs for a Day should become involved in the instructional process and should be actively involved **to the maximum degree possible**.
- Make sure all host ESPs are aware of the publicity details for the day. Reporters may want to talk to ESPs as well as ESPs for a Day. There should be specific times during which photographers and reporters are allowed into the school to minimize disruptions. Make sure all host ESPs are aware of the times during which media coverage will be permitted.

Brief your guests

The ESP for a Day and the ESP/s should be thoroughly briefed concerning what the day will look like and how the duties will be performed. Cooperating school employees should reassure all ESPs for a Day that they will be present at all times to step in and assist them.

Promoting ESP for a Day

Your first communication should be internal. Once you have set the guidelines for ESP for a Day in your community and finalized the program with school administration, those details should be communicated to all school employees. Be sure to email your internal audiences as well.

Next, your PR team should perform the following functions:

- Send out an initial news release, either directly from your Association or in conjunction with the school administration, announcing the scheduling of ESP for a Day and what it hopes to achieve (see sample below). This release should be sent out about 10 days prior to the day of the program.
- Try to make sure that one of your ESPs for a Day is an online influencer or journalist who can "double" his or her experience by writing about it or reporting it on the air. The entire ESP for a Day concept is a natural media event; whether a reporter participates or simply covers it, there are numerous story angles. Try to get the newspaper to send a photographer as well as a reporter.
- Once all host ESPs have been paired with their ESPs for a Day, develop a directory or fact sheet on participants and send copies to all media (see sample below) Be sure

this sheet details the specific times during which reporters and photographers will be permitted to enter the school. Disruption of the educational process must be held to a minimum.

- Designate a media contact to which any questions can be directed.
- If necessary, provide everyone with a map showing how to get to your school and where to meet.
- Shortly before the actual day of the event, send a follow-up release to all media and provide the necessary details regarding time and place.
- Develop a "tip sheet" for media, as a separate element or part of one of the above elements, indicating potential news/photo opportunities, as well as re-emphasizing specific items for entering classrooms and other school facilities.
- If your ESPs for a Day are on social media, encourage them to share their experiences via Facebook and Twitter and to follow NEA Today on [Facebook](#) and [Bluesky](#). Provide them with a list of sample posts to help promote the event.
- Plan a reception in a central location immediately after school and/or a news conference or a series of interviews with ESPs for a Day to allow reporters to speak with participants to gain their impressions of the day's events. Consider inviting students to give the press another angle on the day's events. Ask the PTA/PTO to contribute refreshments to involve them as well.
- Be sure to gather media coverage, send a copy to NEA Public Relations, and keep a copy for your Association's records.

Don't forget the follow-up

There are a number of important things to do after you hold your ESP for a Day event. If for some reason there is a lack of media coverage during the actual day, you should approach participants, gather a few comments, and put out an appropriate news release/story detailing their reactions.

In addition to certificates of appreciation for guests, send thank you emails to all the people who contributed to the success of ESP for a Day, including your school superintendent, school committee members, media people, host ESPs, and school employees.

SAMPLE ADMINISTRATION LETTER

(Insert Date)

(Insert name and title)

(Insert name of organization)

(Insert address)

Dear (Insert name):

I am pleased to share that **American Education Week** will be celebrated nationwide from **November 16-20, 2026**. This annual observance honors the dedicated individuals who are making a difference in ensuring every child receives a quality public education.

As part of this celebration, **[Insert School Name]** will host an **ESP for a Day** event on **[Insert Date]**. This initiative invites community leaders to step into the role of an ESP for a day, offering a firsthand look at the rewards and challenges of the profession.

Each guest ESP will be paired with a host ESP and will participate in a half day or full day of activities. Members of the press will be invited to attend and interview our guest ESPs, helping to highlight the importance of public education and the need for adequate resources, staffing, and facilities.

We will be implementing the program using guidelines developed by the Massachusetts Teachers Association and the National Education Association. Your suggestions and involvement are welcome and appreciated. For your reference, I've enclosed a copy of the invitation letter.

We believe this event will strengthen community relationships and build public support for our education support professionals. If you have any questions or would like to participate, please feel free to contact me at **[Insert Contact Information]**.

Thank you for your continued support of public education.

Sincerely,
(Insert name/title)

SAMPLE CHECKLIST: EDUCATOR FOR A DAY

- ___ Review plans with administration
- ___ Select Association coordinator(s) for program
- ___ Plan out public relations strategy
- ___ Recruit cooperating schools and ESPs
- ___ Send invites to potential participants
- ___ Call invitees to follow up on receipt of letter
- ___ Send out initial news release
- ___ Pair ESPs for a Day with cooperating ESPs
- ___ Schedule "get acquainted phone call/virtual meeting" for the ESPs for a Day and cooperating ESP
- ___ Make sure all internal PR is in order and that all personnel are notified
- ___ Inform NEA/PR of the event by e-mailing Christiana Campos at ccampos@nea.org
- ___ Make sure school principals are aware of the event and schedule
- ___ Determine if release time is needed for building contacts
- ___ Obtain comments from participants for use by the Association or by media (after the event)
- ___ Arrange for certificates of appreciation, small gifts, and thank you notes for all participants and contributors
- ___ Secure a location for the reception/news conference and arrange for refreshments
- ___ Arrange internal and external publicity follow-up

SAMPLE INVITATION COPY

Subject: Invitation to Serve as an ESP for a Day

Dear [NAME],

Every school day, someone is there before the first bell and after the last, driving the bus, serving breakfast, keeping the students safe, preparing and serving nutritious meals and more. These are our nation's Education Support Professionals (ESPs), and schools simply don't work without them.

Yet ESPs are often paid too little to support their own families. The national average is just \$38,494 a year, nearly 1 in 3 earns under \$25,000, and pay has actually *fallen* almost 9% over the past decade after inflation. Many are raising families on wages that don't cover basic living costs.

This November, during American Education Week (Nov 16–20, 2026), NEA wants to change how the country sees these professionals — and we'd love for you to help.

We're inviting you to be an "Education Support Professional for a Day" on [INSERT DATE AND TIME] at [INSERT SCHOOL NAME]. You'll spend part of a day shadowing an ESP in a public school in your community. You'll experience an ESP's day-to-day routine, and meet the students and staff who depend on them. You'll help share that story through photos, video, and social media reaching a national audience, and put a human face on the fight for fair pay and real respect.

Your voice carries weight that ours alone can't. When someone people already admire stands beside an ESP and says *this work matters, and these workers deserve better*, it reaches people who might otherwise never think twice about the person driving the bus or serving lunch. You have a real chance to move public opinion for millions of ESPs who rarely get to tell their own story on this kind of stage.

Please let me know if this opportunity interests you and if you have any questions.

Best,

[NAME]

[TITLE]

[STATE AFFILIATE]

SAMPLE FOLLOW-UP EMAIL

Thank you for accepting our invitation to participate in ESP for a Day at [Insert School Name] on [Insert Date].

As a guest ESP, you'll be joining a nationwide celebration of American Education Week, observed from November 16-20, 2026. We are thrilled that you've chosen to spend your time experiencing a day in the life of a dedicated [Insert School Name] staff member. Your involvement helps shine a light on the vital work ESPs do every day.

Your host ESP for the day will be [Insert Name]. Please let me know when would be a good time to schedule a briefing call to walk you through your role and answer any questions you may have. I will also be sending you an agenda/run of show for the event.

We invite you to join us for a reception immediately after school on [Insert Date], from [Insert Time] to [Insert Time], at [Insert Location]. This will be a wonderful opportunity to connect with fellow guest ESPs and allow us to express our appreciation for your participation.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact [Insert Contact Name and Phone Number]. We look forward to welcoming you to ESP for a Day. We're confident it will be a meaningful and memorable experience for you, your host ESP, and the students you'll meet.

Warm regards,
[Insert Name and Title]

**SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Contact: (Insert Contact Name)
Phone: (Insert Phone Number)
Date: (Insert Date)

**Local Leaders Step into the Classroom for "ESP for a Day" During
American Education Week**

(Insert City, State) — On [Insert Date], prominent local leaders—including (insert names and titles)—will take on the role of Education Support Professionals (ESPs) at (insert school name) as part of the National Education Association's American Education Week, celebrated November 16-20, 2026.

As part of the "ESP for a Day" initiative, guest ESPs will spend the day immersed in the daily life of an ESP. The goal is to provide community leaders with a firsthand look at the challenges and triumphs of today's education support professionals and their students.

“We’re honored to welcome our community leaders into our classrooms,” said (insert name/title). “This experience offers a unique opportunity to witness the dedication of our ESPs and the dynamic learning environments shaping our students’ futures. Education has evolved significantly, and it’s vital for decision-makers to see these changes up close.”

(Insert paragraph with additional details and highlights of your activity, such as guest names, and/or special events planned for the day.)

This initiative is part of a nationwide celebration led by the National Education Association (NEA), the country’s largest professional organization representing more than 3 million education support professionals, including teachers, faculty, support professionals, administrators, and aspiring education support professionals.

For more information about American Education Week and ESP for a Day, visit www.nea.org/aew.

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SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

Prior to the Event

- American Education Week is coming! www.nea.org/aew Get ready to celebrate our public schools and honor our Education Support Professionals. #aew2026
- Can't wait to visit <insert school name> and put on my Education Support Professionals hat for American Education Week on [Insert Date and details of what you'll be doing] #aew2026

During

- I'm walking a mile in an Education Support Professional's shoes today at <insert school name and details of your role> as part of #aew2026 <attach photo at the school>
- The students at <insert school name> are thanking their Education Support Professionals during #aew2025 <attach photo with students waving>
- It's American Education Week. Time to thank the Education Support Professionals who work hard every day to ensure students are safe, ready to learn #aew2026
- It's American Education Week and I'm headed back to school to learn firsthand how Education Support Professionals help our students succeed #aew2026

After

- I'm inspired! Ending #aew2026 full of ideas for how to support our Education Support Professionals. Learn more at nea.org/aew
- Had a great visit shadowing an amazing Education Support Professional at <insert school name and more details> for #aew2026

