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October 2024

neaToday

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

Adventure Awaits

HOW RETIREES
DISCOVER HIDDEN GEMS
ON A BUDGET

SEE PAGE 24



inside

Stronger together
PAGE 22

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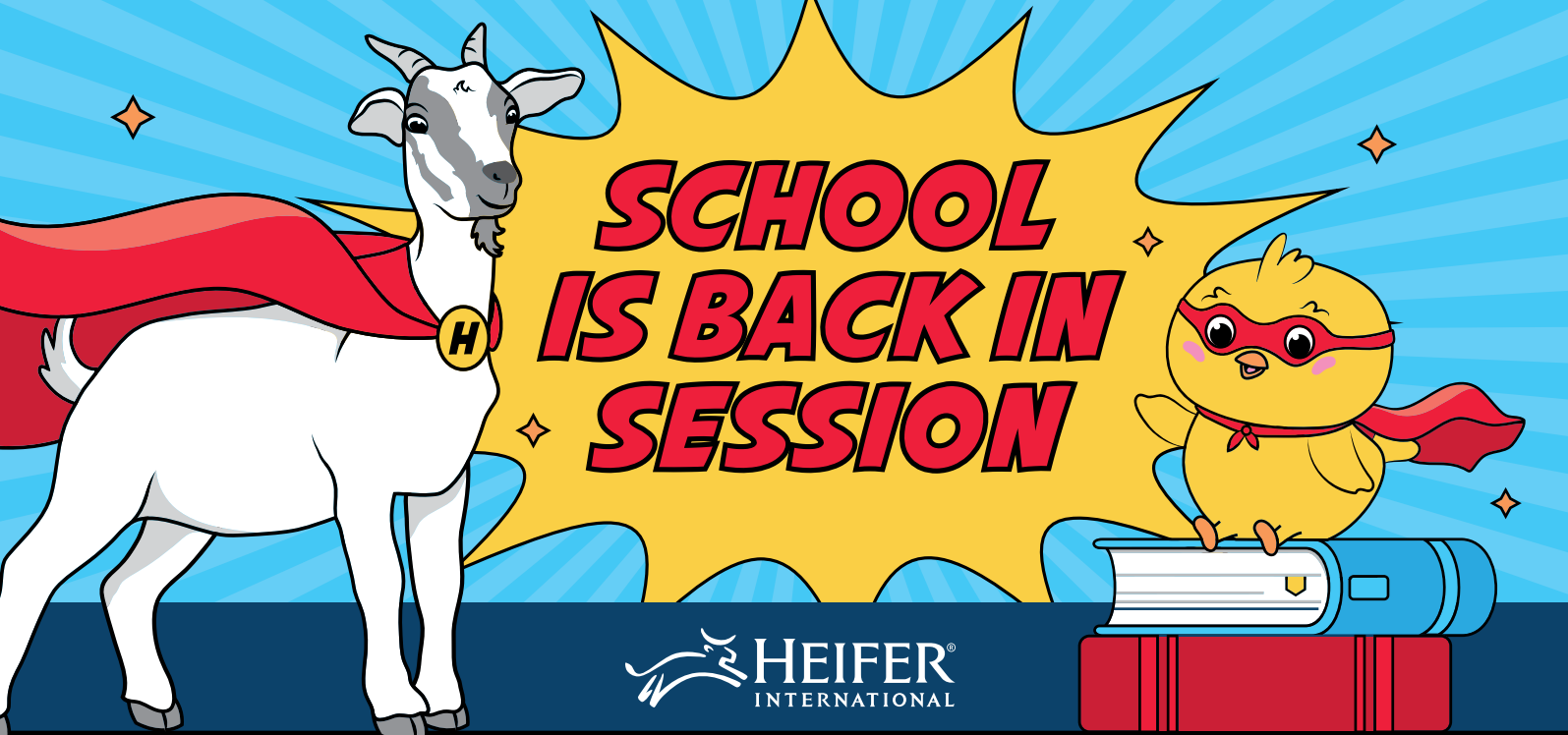
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To advocate for education professionals and to unite our members and the nation to fulfill the promise of public education to prepare every student to succeed in a diverse and interdependent world.

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These principles guide our work and define our mission:

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

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

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

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

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

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PRESIDENT'S *viewpoint*

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



The time to act is now

In just a few short weeks, American citizens across this great nation will have an opportunity to go to the polls and vote for the candidates of their choice from the local level of government to our nation's highest office—the President of the United States.

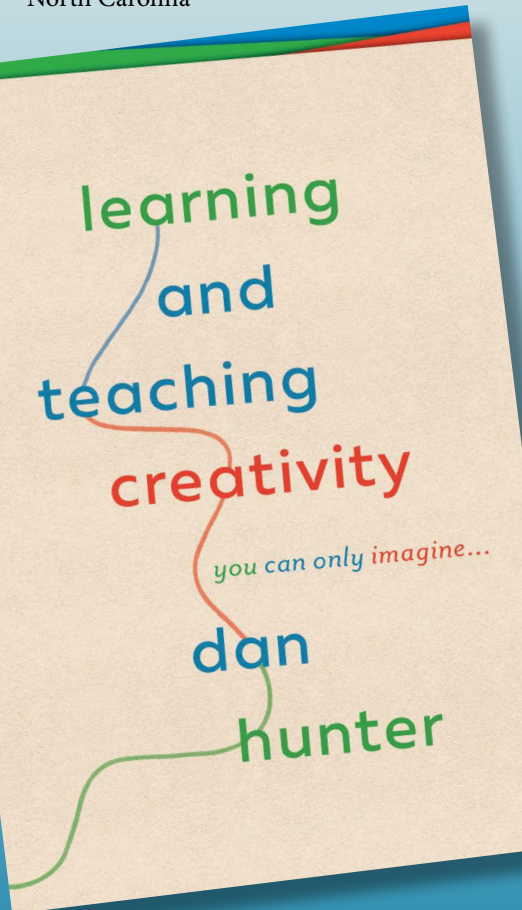
As retired educators, we understand the significance of elections for the future of our country, our profession, our families and our daily lives. By now, we should be exhausted from our work in our communities and states to ensure that everyone eligible to vote is registered, that we have retirees signed up and ready to serve as poll workers, and that rides to the polls have been scheduled for those who need them. By now, we should have made sure that those inside and outside our circles understand the facts about the candidates and where they stand on issues related to education and to our livelihoods as retirees.

But, as much as we have done to get to this point, we can't stop now. We must continue until we cross the finish line on November 5th.

Once we cross that finish line, I am pleading with you to honor the choice of every individual so that when the election is over, we as Americans can come together with respect for one another and find consensus where we can. There is no place for violence before or after this election. Every individual is unique, with the special talents and experiences we need to move our great nation forward.

“my students are thriving because of this book.... worth every minute spent in its pages.”

Les Schofield, Microlit Almanac, teacher, writer & artist, North Carolina



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Giovanna Bechard

MANAGER PRODUCTION AND PUBLICATIONS
Shawn Stabell

DESIGN AND ART DIRECTION
Groff Creative LLC

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

CONTRIBUTORS
James Patterson
Grace Hagerman
Brooklyn Chavers
Tom Zigan
Wess Tessman

WE WANT YOUR FEEDBACK:

MAIL: NEA Today, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036

EMAIL: neatoday@nea.org PHONE: 202-822-7207 FAX: 202-822-7206 FACEBOOK: facebook.com/neatoday

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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



“

Let me be very, very clear about what Project 2025 is designed to do. It is designed to destroy public education. I taught science for 31 years, and I understand the role public education plays not only in the lives of our students, but it is the actual foundation of this or any democracy.”

—Becky, on X

Face to Face With NEA Members

Educators in Virginia's largest school district voted to become one of the biggest bargaining units on the East Coast, enabling the Alliance of Fairfax Education Unions (FEU) to improve wages, benefits, and working conditions for roughly 27,000 Fairfax County Public School (FCPS) workers.

This is a historic moment for educators in Fairfax where 97 percent of teachers voted for representation by Fairfax Education Unions, an alliance of the two major unions in the county. I was honored to celebrate this win with our Virginia educators and can't wait to see all they will accomplish as union members!



I was thrilled to meet with the educators in Fairfax, Va. as they fight for union rights.

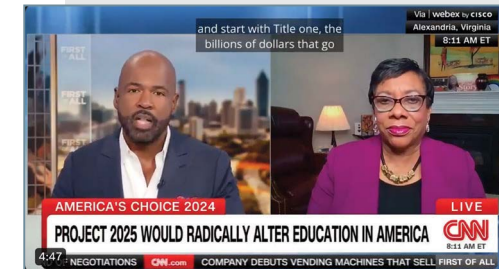
JOIN ME 3 Things To Do For Yourself, Your Students, and Your Union

- 1. Ask a non-member to join.**
Our power is in our voices. When we have more people ready to stand up and work together to create the schools our students deserve, we have a greater chance of success. I call upon you all to ask even one non-member to join the union—share our value with them, and sign someone up today!
- 2. Learn to say no.**
Don't be volun-told to spearhead another committee after school. You can say no. Please learn to say no and reclaim your time for what YOU do need to do, and the things that matter to you most.
- 3. Vote.**
I've said it many times before—but it's worth repeating. Our democracy is at stake this November. All of us deserve a say at the ballot box. This is your chance to vote for candidates who support our students and our public schools. Get out and vote in November!

In the News

I'm proud to announce that NEA endorses @KamalaHarris for President. Kamala has delivered for students & educators. With the future of our students, public schools, and democracy on the ballot, we WILL elect a champion for students, public education, and working families.

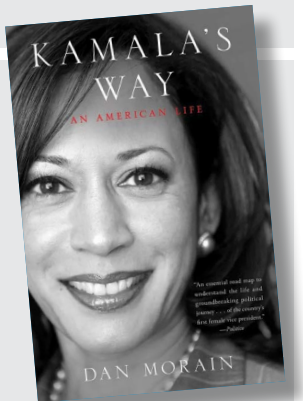
—Becky, on CNN



What I'm Reading

When I began teaching, I didn't realize how much my job would be impacted by politicians who never set foot in a classroom. All these years later, I've seen what happens to our students and our profession when we don't engage in elections. Now, as I read Kamala's Way: An American Life, I am reinvigorated at what is possible for our public schools with if Presidential hopeful Kamala Harris wins in November.

I especially loved reading more about Harris' upbringing and her time as a prosecutor, which truly highlights her determination and resolve to stay true to her ideals and do what's right.



Get involved and pledge your support to Educators for Kamala here: <https://educationvotes.nea.org/>



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

NEA Locals Round Up Wins in Florida

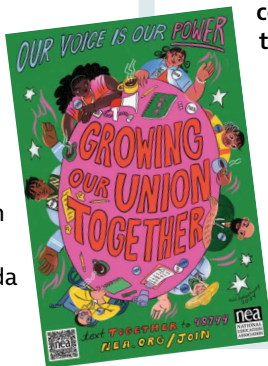
When it comes to union power, educators in Florida know the value of belonging. A new anti-union law took away the union's right to automatically deduct dues and forced locals to recertify-making members vote in an official election to state they wanted the union to represent them for all matters related to bargaining. The elections, run by the Public Employees Relations Commission, began in the spring and will occur for locals that don't meet a 60 percent membership threshold each year.

With the help of NEA, members in Florida are organizing around the issue and informing members about the law, the election, and the importance of mailing in their ballots to keep their union



Shanti Wright

representation. Several locals, including the Putnam Federation of Teachers/United, ran campaigns to ensure members voted to keep union representation. They mailed postcards explaining the ballot, and posted pictures on social media to highlight those who voted while encouraging others to do the same. The efforts paid off and the instructional employees of Putnam County School District overwhelmingly voted to save their contract and keep PFT/U as their bargaining agent. At press time, the Florida locals were 10-0 in wins-with members voting 95 percent and higher to stay members of the Florida Education Association.



Mental Health Support for Students in Connecticut

After a two-year community-wide advocacy effort, NEA members in Killingly, Connecticut received the expanded mental health services they need for their students. The Connecticut State Department of Education announced approval of a mental health center, following an investigation.

In 2022, the Killingly Board of Education rejected a

grant-funded mental health center in the high school, and teachers, parents, and students took their concerns to the State Capitol in Hartford filing an official complaint, citing the denial violated the educational interests of students. The community action paid off and students will now receive the mental health support they need, thanks in part to the Union.



Show Your NEA Union Pride

When more educators join our union, we will have an even stronger voice to improve our daily lives and the lives of our students. Looking for a way to start the conversation around membership? From posters to social media posts, we have tools to help!

Download our posters and post them in your classroom, workplace, or lounge to remind your colleagues why we are stronger together!



Visit nea.org/unionbulletin or click this QR code!

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AP AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES COURSE

Three weeks after a school board in Maryland canceled the AP African American Studies course citing it perpetuated “a narrative of victimhood” and lacked “positive narratives” the course was restored. The Hartford, Maryland County School Board reversed its initial denial of the pilot class in a unanimous vote following two and a half hours of public comment at the local school board meeting, which included support from the Maryland State Education Association Cheryl Bost.

“If our students are trusted to learn and grapple with all the complexities of our history, they can better understand past missteps and injustices and better strive towards a more just and fair future for all of us. ...The first step in doing better in the future is understanding the past—all its layers and contradictions. And while those conversations may not be easy, they are absolutely necessary,” said Bost.

School system officials told the local newspaper 67 students took AP African American Studies last year and about 200 have registered for it this year.

—WILLIAM J. FORD, MARYLAND MATTERS.ORG



A standing-room-only crowd attended the Harford County school board meeting that stretched from Monday into early Tuesday. Most asked the board to reverse its June decision eliminating an Advanced Placement African American studies course.



Aberdeen High School student Hayven Rowson testifies to the Harford County school board on the AP African American studies course.

MOST AND LEAST EXPENSIVE PLACES TO LIVE IN THE UNITED STATES

Inflation reached its lowest level in 2024 this July, hitting 3%. Despite the decrease, many still struggle to deal with the increase in everything from food to fuel. To better understand these impacts on Americans, the publication, Forbes Advisor, researched how states rank in terms of cost of living by analyzing publicly available data. Not surprisingly, the data shows Hawaii is the most expensive across several categories, including median home prices and mortgage payment and transportation costs, but lags in average salary. The top spot in average salary goes to the New England state of Massachusetts.



LEARN MORE

Scan the QR code to find out where your state ranks in terms of pay and living costs.

SOURCE: U.S. INFLATION CALCULATOR
[HTTPS://WWW.USINFLATIONCALCULATOR.COM/INFLATION/CURRENT-INFLATION-RATES/](https://www.usinflationcalculator.com/inflation/current-inflation-rates/)



Median Home Prices and Mortgage Payments by State

RANK	STATE	MEDIAN HOME PRICE	MONTHLY MORTGAGE PAYMENT
1	Hawaii	\$ 837,324	\$5,004
2	California	\$ 743,362	\$4,442
3	Massachusetts	\$ 587,875	\$3,513
4	Washington	\$ 577,353	\$3,450
5	Colorado	\$ 543,143	\$3,245
6	Utah	\$ 510,934	\$3,053
7	Oregon	\$ 498,558	\$2,979
8	New Jersey	\$ 484,467	\$2,895
9	New Hampshire	\$ 446,839	\$2,670
10	Montana	\$ 446,602	\$2,669

Note: Median home prices reflect 2023 data from Zillow. Monthly mortgage payments were calculated assuming an average down payment of 13% and an interest rate of 7.32% on a 30-year mortgage.

SOURCE: ZILLOW & FORBES ADVISOR ANALYSIS



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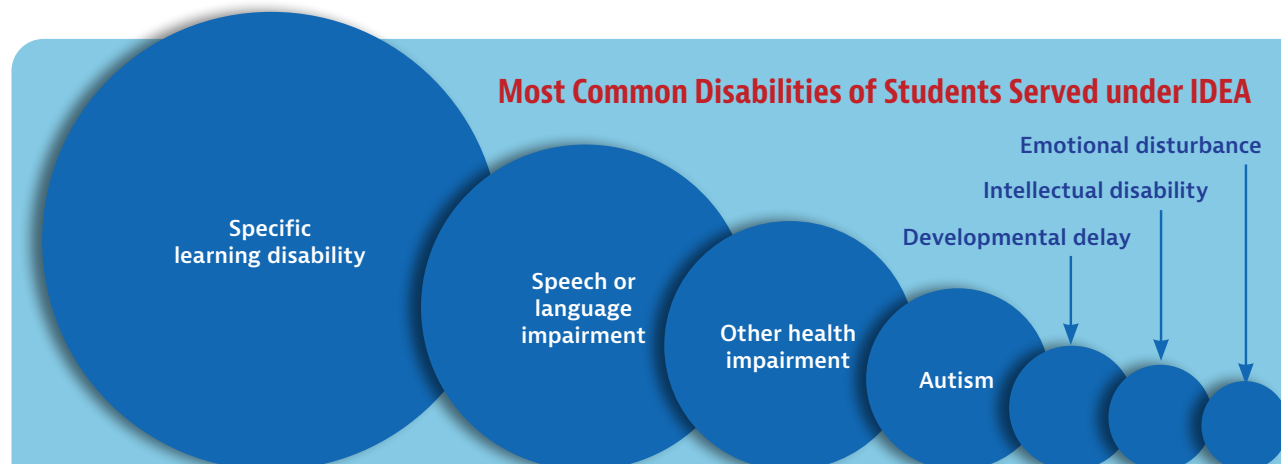


35 grants, ranging from \$500 – \$2,500, awarded across the U.S. this year!



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 on LITERACY and LEARNING



HOW TO BE AN ADVOCATE FOR BULLIED STUDENTS

October is National Bullying Prevention Month. Research shows bullying can be stopped, but continual effort is needed by those who have the power to intervene. Below is information to help you become the advocate students need in their learning environments.

Bullying is a Solvable Problem

Expand your advocacy for bullied students, by ensuring that your school has a comprehensive bullying prevention plan in place. A prevention plan enables educators to have a process

in place for learning how to recognize bullying behaviors, how to intervene appropriately when it's witnessed, and how to prevent it in the first place.

Educate Students

Involve your students as peer advocates. Get student input when developing a bullying prevention plan. Integrate the topic of bullying and how to deal with it into your curriculum.

Role-play with students on diffusing a bullying situation and engaging bystanders. Create opportunities for students to work together, such as assignments that require sharing and collaboration. An anti-bullying curricula should encourage students to report bullying and harassment to an adult.

Zero Out Zero Tolerance

Zero tolerance policies hinder bullying prevention efforts. Such policies generally involve suspension or exclusion from school and are related to increased dropout rates and discriminatory application of school discipline practices.



Also, there is no evidence that removing students from school makes a positive contribution to school safety. We do know that students who bully need pro-social models.

We can advocate for bullied students by working to develop and/or utilize bullying prevention programs that do work, such as:

- Targeted behavioral support programs for at-risk students
- Character education and social-emotional learning programs
- School-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports
- Early intervention strategies

Teacher Well-Being and Intentions to Leave in 2024

To get a better understanding of how to help its members, NEA helped fund a new survey from RAND Corporation that highlights teacher well-being and causes of stress.

Teachers reported well-being in January 2024 was worse than that of similar working adults—a consistent pattern since 2021. Furthermore, when compared with similar working adults, about twice as many teachers reported experiencing frequent job-related stress or burnout, and roughly three times as many teachers reported difficulty coping with their job-related stress.

The top three issues leading to that stress, according to the survey: managing student behavior (biggest issue for teachers in the first five years on the job), low salaries, and administrative work outside of teaching.



Teacher Well-Being, by Race/Ethnicity and Gender

Well-Being Measure	All Teachers (%)	Teacher Race/Ethnicity			Teacher Gender	
		White (Ref.) (%)	Black (%)	Latin(o/a/x) (%)	Male (Ref.) (%)	Female (%)
Frequent job-related stress	59	60	51	59	50	62
Difficulty coping with job-related stress	22	22	15	25	19	22
Symptoms of depression	19	19	18	25	21	19
Burnout	60	59	60	63	49	63

Chronic Absenteeism

AT LEAST 14.7 MILLION STUDENTS NATIONWIDE WERE CHRONICALLY ABSENT, ACCORDING TO THE LATEST FEDERAL DATA. PRIOR TO COVID, THAT NUMBER WAS ALMOST HALF, AT 8 MILLION.



HOURS AND WAGES

Teachers reported working nine hours per week more than similar working adults—nearly two hours more per day in a five-day work week—but reported earning about \$18,000 less in base pay, on average. Teachers said they would need a \$16,000 increase in base pay to consider the pay adequate for the work performed. The disparity in pay is worse for Black teachers, who reported working more hours and receiving a lower base pay. **Of note:** a \$16,000 pay increase would nearly close the wage gap documented by the Education Policy Institute (EPI). According to an EPI analysis of federal data, teachers earn 26.4% less than similarly educated professionals, a massive increase from 6.1% in 1996.

Teachers work 9 hours more, but earn 26.4% less

PUSHING FOR PAY

MEMBERS GO STRAIGHT TO THE TOP TO ASK FOR WHAT THEY DESERVE

John Arthur's mother used to work at the gift shop at the Capitol. She didn't want her son to become a public school teacher and was very clear with him about her feelings. The immigrant from Korea came to the U.S. shortly after marrying Arthur's father, Alan, a West Point graduate who patrolled the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone).

"Like so many immigrant parents, my mom wanted me to grow up to be a doctor or a lawyer," Arthur told the members of the Committee on Education, Health, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) during a recent hearing on teacher pay. "Finally, in my late twenties, I worked up the courage to tell my Omma that I was going to graduate school to become a teacher. After a long pause, she asked, 'Doctor Teacher?' I said, 'No, Omma... elementary school teacher.'"

Arthur's mother isn't the only one who hopes her child chooses another profession. According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2022, there were 567,000 fewer educators in public schools than there were before the pandemic (Jotkoff, 2022). And the figures get even worse when you consider how many educators are planning to leave teaching due to compensation—that's 48%. (Bryant et al., 2023)



John Arthur

Leaders Who Can Create Change

Arthur, the 2021 Utah State Teacher of the Year was clear about these facts when he advocated for increases in pay to a Senate Committee hearing titled, *"The Immediate and Long-Term Challenges Facing Public School Teachers: Low Pay, Teacher Shortages, and Underfunded Public Schools."* To thrive, he said, teachers need four things: increased compensation, supportive communities, greater respect, and room to grow as professionals.

"When we improve teacher pay, strengthen our communities, elevate the professionalism of our incredible educators, and provide greater opportunities for professional growth, then more young Americans will become teachers—not despite their parents' wishes—to make their parents proud."

Sharing members' stories on the national stage creates a place for elected leaders who can create change to truly understand what's at stake for our nation's public schools. Many say we have a "teacher shortage," in this country but if you look more closely and listen to educators like Arthur, a teacher shortage isn't the problem. The root of the issue is a lack of pay leading to a shortage. This is a critical distinction for the Utah elementary school teacher. "The number one solution to addressing the issues we face must be increasing teachers' salaries." ❄️

The right leaders save jobs, increase pay, and support our students

During meetings educators are not part of, people elected to office can have the power to make public schools and the profession better or worse. Those are the facts. Thanks to NEA and the advocacy work done to support public education and our students, the Union has been able to fight back against some of the most draconian proposals in recent years.

Here are just some of the good, the bad, and the ugly ideas from elected leaders, at all levels from Congress to local school boards. Now, it's up to voters to decide which candidates are best for each community, and who will put students first, once in office.



The Good

In **Maryland**, the determination of their educators led to passage of the Freedom to Read Act, critical legislation that prevents state-funded libraries from banning books and protects school and library staff from retaliation.

In **Wisconsin**, Act 10 (that curtailed collective bargaining rights) was declared unconstitutional!

In **Illinois**, the Respect Campaign paved the way for the ESP (education support professional) Bill of Rights. NEA members in Massachusetts, Maryland, Maine, Michigan, Ohio, Vermont, and Washington state created their own ESP Bill of Rights, and now Congress is considering a federal ESP Bill of Rights.



The Bad

Private school vouchers—The Trump Administration proposed funneling more than \$1 billion into private school vouchers and other school choice programs.

Arming Teachers—New laws in **Iowa** and **Tennessee** make it possible for local districts to allow educators to carry concealed weapons. When Trump was president, he proposed arming teachers with guns.

Reducing union power—Betsy DeVos, former Secretary of Education, appointed by Donald Trump, gutted a long-standing labor agreement, referring to unions as "defenders of the status quo."



The Ugly

When lawmakers enter office who don't prioritize our students and schools, legislation proposed often eliminates the resources needed to help provide the necessary support to teach and learn.

All of the items listed below were part of a House GOP Bill proposed and defeated, thanks to NEA advocacy.

- **Eliminating** more than 50,000 Head Start slots, harming our most vulnerable students
- **Slashing** Title I funding by 80%, crippling programs for English Language Learners
- **Cutting** 224,000 education jobs, increasing class sizes



TEAR IT & SHARE IT

Post this in your break room and encourage others to learn about the upcoming election and candidates.



<https://educationvotes.nea.org/>



Vermont bus driver Jimmy Johnson was instrumental in passing an ESP Bill of Rights in his state.

BEYOND THE SCHOOL

THE POLITICAL POWER OF EDUCATION SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS

Education support professionals (ESPs) around the country are building their political muscle through the creation of local, state, and national ESP Bill of Rights campaigns. The Bill of Rights (or rESpect) campaigns reflect the most important needs of ESP members. Those needs vary slightly from state to state and local to local, but a livable wage, fair benefits, safe work environments, relevant paid professional supports, and a voice in decisions impacting educators and students are sure to be included in an ESP Bill of Rights. ESPs are using these member-led campaigns to advocate for their needs with lawmakers and school boards, drive wins at the bargaining table, and influence the policies and practices of their union.

At the national level, NEA recently introduced a National ESP Bill of Rights campaign that outlines the top 10 most pressing concerns of ESPs around the country: Fair Compensation, Recognition and Respect, Affordable Healthcare, Paid Leave, Professional Learning and Career Advancement, Workload

and Staffing, Retirement, Protection from Privatization, and the Right to Bargain. The national ESP Bill of Rights drives NEA's advocacy for policy and professional supports and serves as a model for states and locals that are creating their own ESP Bill of Rights.

Many states—including Illinois, Massachusetts, Maryland, Delaware, Michigan, Vermont, and Washington, have or are creating their own ESP Bill of Rights. Through these campaigns,



Jimmy Johnson

ESPs like Burlington, Vermont bus driver Jimmy Johnson are using their influence and political power to demand change. "If a district can't pass a budget, who is the first to lose their jobs? It isn't teachers. It isn't administrators.

It's education support professionals—that's the low-hanging fruit."

Johnson wasn't shy when he said he's tired of feeling like the "low-hanging fruit" every budget cycle. He wants more for himself and all the other support staff in his state and in the country. With 34 years behind the wheel, he has a lot of institutional knowledge to add to

the conversation about what's needed to ensure students have a well-rounded education.

"My 'classroom' is 40 feet long and holds up to 90 kids," Johnson said referring to the bus he drives to six schools through five towns in the Champlain School District. He admits he has "fingers in a lot of pies," working his day job and then assuming the role of an education advocate.

"It is very difficult for education support professionals—many don't have a strong voice even within the ESP classifications, which is a wide-ranging group of people. Many food service professionals or custodians sometimes feel they don't have as strong of a voice as paraeducators. I felt that way about bus drivers, which is one of the reasons I got involved so many years ago, because there wasn't anybody talking about bus drivers."

Using your voice to create change

Johnson knew he needed to speak up to elevate the status of ESPs. The desire to change his working conditions meant he would need to think big and "get political." For Johnson this meant focusing on a "Bill of Rights" for educators, with carved out items specifically for ESPs—including a minimum starting rate of \$30 per hour.

"We all want a better life and I want the people making the decisions to prioritize where the money needs to be spent; I want education to be the thing people think of first," said Johnson.

Johnson was instrumental in creating Vermont-NEA's Educators' Bill of Rights, which members passed at their recent representative assembly. In addition to pay, Johnson says a lot of other key issues rose to the top, including safety in the workplace, and time to collaborate and plan.

The Educators' Bill of Rights, signed by Vermont Congresswoman Becca Balint and Lt. Governor David Zuckerman, is now the standard for all members in Vermont to use at the bargaining table, and beyond—to ensure they're receiving not only the pay they deserve, but also working conditions conducive to teaching and learning.

Why do politics matter?

Elections have consequences for educators, students, parents, and schools.

Elected officials at all levels make decisions that directly affect school funding, class size, and the length of the school day. Advocating for education doesn't stop when the polls close. This is core to Jimmy Johnson's approach, as he works to include ESP in every conversation he has about public schools.

"It's hard to run a school if it's not clean, if kids aren't fed, if they don't have transportation, if the paraeducator is taken away from their team. It doesn't work unless we are all rowing in the same direction," Johnson added. As an ESP, elevating the work is a critical part of his political engagement strategy.

"There are many politicians from the national level right down to the local school board who want to dictate what is taught and what is paid for, and if you don't use your voice, you don't have a say," added Johnson.

Students may not understand that electing the "wrong" candidate could mean fewer programs, larger classrooms, and less access to technology, but

Vermont NEA Educators' Bill of Rights

Dignified, competitive compensation

All educators should be able to earn a stable, decent, middle-class living in the service of Vermont's students, without having to work multiple jobs.

Safe working environment

All educators and students should be physically safe, emotionally supported, and respected.

Time for planning and collaboration

All educators deserve to have the time to plan, prepare, and consult with their peers so that they can best teach and nurture their students.

educators know this impact and feel it every day. Johnson believes all educators, especially those who are less represented, have a responsibility to their students to keep protecting their interests.

"Your vote is your say. That's the textbook of why you must know what's going on in politics. It impacts all of us, especially our students," said Johnson.

As the election comes and goes, and the future remains unknown, Johnson hopes all support staff realize their voices matter and stand firm to ensure they are seen not as "low-hanging fruit," but as the essential educators students need. 🍎

LEARN
MORE

To read the full Vermont Bill of Rights, and what you can advocate for: <https://vtnea.org/billofrights>



NEA PRESENTS THE 2024 HUMAN AND CIVIL RIGHTS AWARD WINNERS

By Grace Hagerman

EDUCATORS GATHER AT ANNUAL CEREMONY TO HONOR INDIVIDUALS CREATING LASTING CHANGE.

In recognition of their tireless efforts towards a more inclusive and just society, the NEA honored nine deserving individuals and organizations with its highest and most prestigious awards, the NEA Human and Civil Rights (HCR) Awards. The theme of the 57th annual award dinner was “Freedom Rings: Celebrating the Legacy of Inspiring Power, Dreams, and Activism,” a perfect homage to the ways in which these remarkable recipients have amplified student voices and needs around the country.

“The recipients of NEA’s Human and Civil Rights Awards embody the highest commitment to ensuring that every student, regardless of their ZIP code, gender identity, or racial background, receives the educational opportunities they deserve,” said NEA President Becky Pringle. “These social justice advocates work diligently, and often without much fanfare, to bend the arc of history toward a more just and equitable society. We proudly honor their contributions, sacrifices, and accomplishments. By embodying what is right and just, they motivate us to purposeful

and principled action, and create long-standing impact in our communities and schools.”

BREAKING THE CYCLE

From a past stricken by poverty and criminal activity to a present committed to advocacy, Alejandro De La Peña is a perfect symbol of what it means to break a cycle. The special education teacher from El Paso, Texas was the first in his extended family to graduate high school and attend college.



Alejandro De La Peña

“It’s not impossible to break that cycle,” De La Peña said in an NEA video honoring the awardees. “You just have to find your way.” De La Peña teaches students with severe disabilities at Parkland Pre-Engineering Middle School. He has changed the lives of thousands of low-income

students at the school by securing grants and donations. Besides his work in special education, he has also improved the lives of homeless families, and students who risk failing classes or dropping out of school.

Nine NEA members and organizations receive the Union’s highest and most prestigious award, the NEA Human and Civil Rights Award.

“Hopefully the impact that I am making is to let our students know, let our parents know, let our community members know that you can go as far as you want to, and I’m here to help you along that path,” De La Peña said. De La Peña is the recipient of the George I. Sánchez Memorial Award for the impact he has made on the lives of Hispanic families, educators, and students.

LIFTING UP LGBTQ+ STUDENTS

Kate Okeson is grateful to be part of a union that not only gets LGBTQ+ voices a seat at the table but creates meaningful change with those voices. Her work centers around making spaces in which LGBTQ+ youth feel heard and celebrated.

Okeson has been an art teacher for over 20 years, but her impact in New Jersey goes beyond the paint brushes. She is the president of the Rumson-Fair Haven Regional Education Association and founder of the Gender and Sexuality Alliance Club at Rumson-Fair Haven Regional High School.

Okeson has worked to lobby for and implement a mandate by the state legislature that focused on LGBTQ+ related instruction in lesson plans for middle and high school students. After the mandate passed in 2019, she led the production of model curricula and delivered professional development on the topic, ensuring intentional implementation of the official order.

“Sharing our potential is one of the great gifts we have as educators,” Okeson said. The Virginia Uribe Memorial Award for Creative Leadership in Human Rights award has been given to Kate Okeson for her exceptional influence in how LGBTQ+ education and inclusion is being addressed across New Jersey in the classroom and beyond.



Kate Okeson

COMMITMENT TO ADVOCACY

United Teachers Los Angeles, or UTLA, is an organization that promotes advocacy and social justice. In 1970, the group was formed through a merger of two organizations. Today, it symbolizes the messages it promotes, as the organization’s diversity index is over 65 percent, and its board of directors is majority women. With the leadership of President Cecily Myart-Cruz, UTLA is committed to a vision for a more equitable education for every student.

UTLA works with various marginalized groups and initiatives like the Black Student Achievement Plan and the LGBTQIA+ Task Force.

Because of its victories around inclusion and equity in public education, UTLA has received the Rosena J. Willis Memorial Award.

CELEBRATING OTHER CHANGEMAKERS

Al Alexander of Virginia is the recipient of the H. Councill Trenholm Memorial Award. As the chairman of the New Chesapeake Men for Progress Education Foundation, he has empowered the next generation of leaders and shaped the future of education in Chesapeake.

Black Leaders Acquiring Collective Knowledge La Crosse—or B.L.A.C.K. LAX—is an organization dedicated to supporting marginalized youth in La Crosse, Wis. Because of its commitment to addressing issues of identity, racial trauma, poverty, mental health, and more, the organization is the recipient of the Reg Weaver Human and Civil Rights Award.

Cia Siab, Inc., a non-profit based out of La Crosse, Wis., is the recipient of the Rosa Parks Memorial Award. Through its bilingual and bicultural advocacy services and group programming

“The recipients of NEA’s Human and Civil Rights Awards embody the highest commitment to ensuring that every student, regardless of their ZIP code, gender identity, or racial background, receives the educational opportunities they deserve.”

—NEA President Becky Pringle.

for young people and adults, the organization upholds its mission to serve Hmoob community members who have been victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.

Eddie McAllister’s four-decade career as an activist and mentor promoting civil rights, social justice, and better education in his hometown of Shasta County in Redding, Calif., has made him an exceptional recipient for NEA’s Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Award.

Fred Flores is the recipient of the Elilison S. Onizuka Memorial Award. As the Field Operations and Resource Manager for Mālama Hūel’ia in Kauai, Hawaii, he works to revitalize the Alakoko Fishpond and sustain its cultural heritage.

Sreenidi Bala is the only junior to sit on the senior-led Social Justice Council at Farmington High School in Connecticut. As the President of the Multicultural Student Union, she is an advocate to racial equity. For her work in celebrating the identities of her peers, she is the recipient of the SuAnne Big Crow Memorial Award. 🌟

LEARN MORE



To read more about the award winners and our HCR awards, scan the code or visit nea.org/hcrawards

member spotlight

WORKING, GROWING, AND BECOMING STRONGER TOGETHER

As told by Tom Zigan, President of WEAC-Retired and Wes Tessman, President of Education Minnesota Retired

It had been a long day on the floor of the Representative Assembly in Houston in early July 2019, when Tom Zigan, then vice president of WEAC-Retired, asked the leaders of Education Minnesota Retired if they would like to get together for dinner. Zigan had ulterior motive: He wanted to start a new joint state conference.

"I went to that dinner prepared! I had a hand-written tentative conference schedule ready to pitch, complete with potential speakers and breakout sessions. I wanted this idea to work for our members," said Zigan, now president of WEAC-Retired.

The Ed Minnesota leaders listened carefully and agreed something needed to be done to bring members together. "We both wanted to be part of something new and exciting," said Tessman.

Beyond the Mississippi

The Mississippi River separates Minnesota and Wisconsin, but the two states have more in common than not. WEAC-Retired members who live in the northern part of the Badger State often identify more with the Twin Cities than Milwaukee or Madison, due to their geographic proximity.

Realizing that union members in northern Wisconsin sometimes felt disenfranchised simply due to their geographic distance from Milwaukee or Madison, the creation of what would come to be known as the Border Conference seemed like an important way to show respect and increase engagement of among WEAC-Retired members.

"We knew we had to bring something to our members that kept them coming back each year. We use the time to network with old friends, to educate our members on important issues impacting education and our lives, and to activate the membership on key advocacy issues," said Zigan.

From that goal, came the birth of what is now known as the Joint State Border Conference.

Learning Together

To keep retired educators engaged, the conference has unique offerings including keynote speakers, like former NEA

Executive Director John Stocks, former Wisconsin Governor Marty Schreiber, President of NEA-Retired Anita Gibson, former President of NEA-Retired Sarah Borgman, and even a special presentation by the Gabbert Raptor (yes, actual raptors!) Center from the University of Minnesota.

On tap for members at this year's event: information on Medicare Scams, Racial and Social Justice, Chair Yoga, and more.

"This Border Conference has been a game-changer for members in both states. Working together our membership is more engaged, and every year our retirees look forward to learning, growing, and most importantly developing stronger relationships with one another," said Tessman. ✈

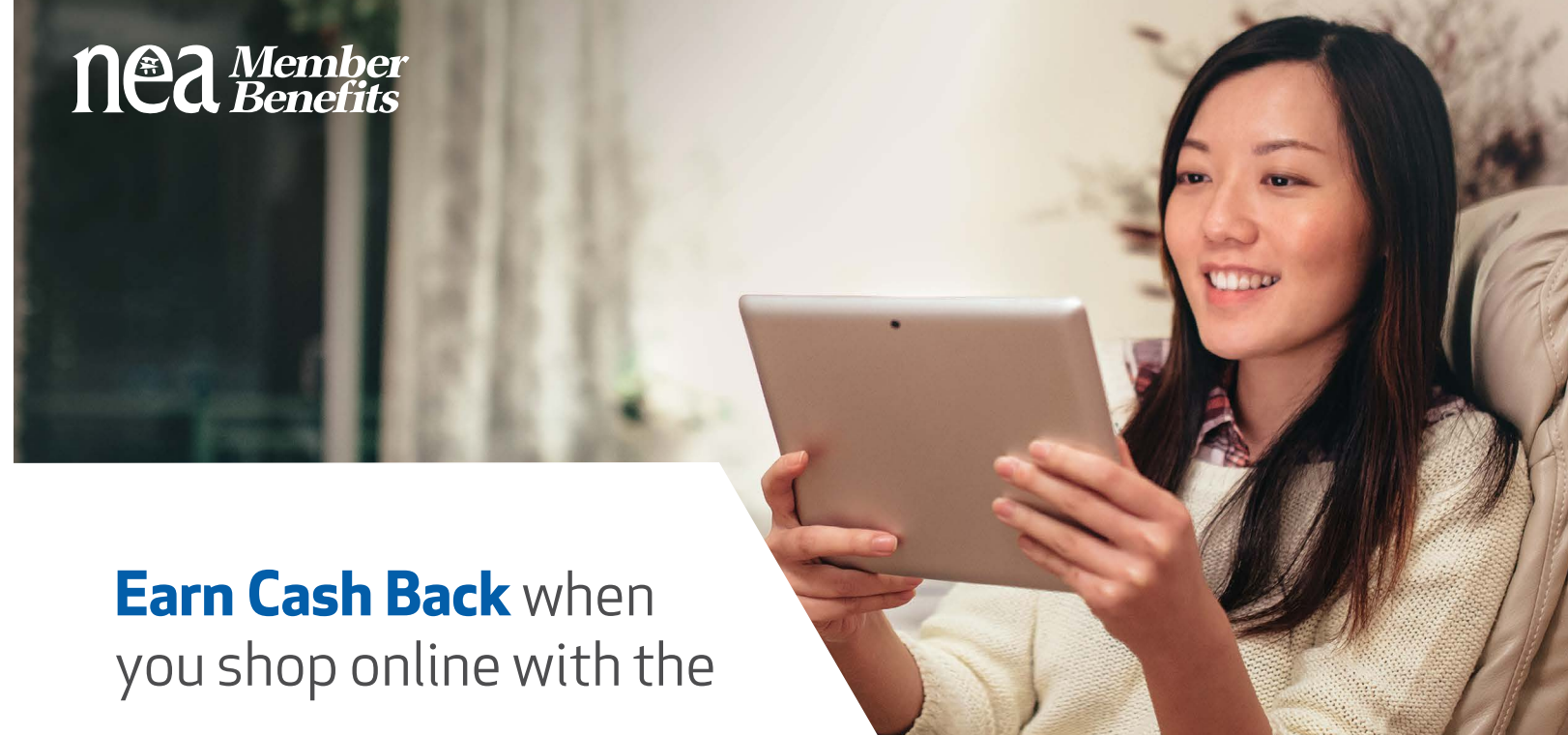


From left: Wes Tessman, NEA-Retired President Anita Gibson, Tom Zigan

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For more member stories, go to nea.org/member-spotlight, or submit the name of an educator you'd like to see featured at nea.org/submit-member-spotlight.

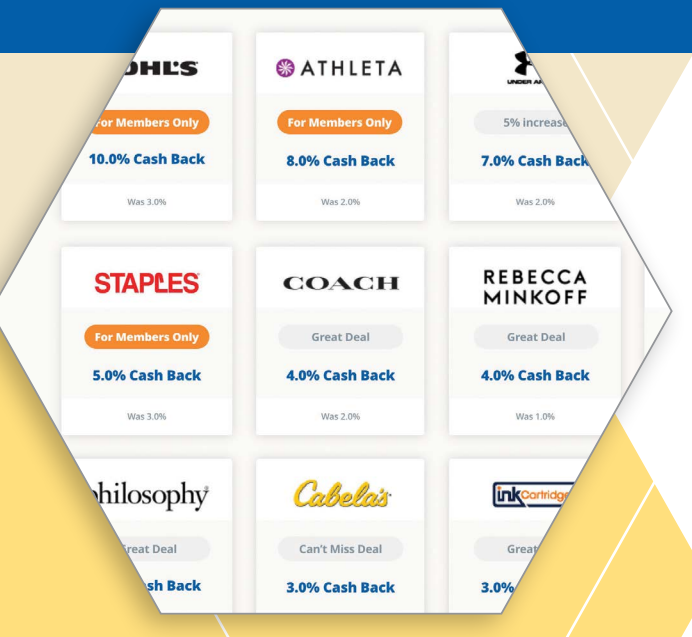
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Adventure Awaits

How Retirees Discover Hidden Gems on a Budget

By James Patterson

Terri Domenigoni had a range of thoughts as she, her husband and two friends hurtled through the streets of Hanoi on the back of mopeds with local residents as their drivers.

“It was a little scary, but we were going to five restaurants that were favorites of locals and not frequented by tourists. They were wonderful. And, better yet, it was free.”

Domenigoni and her husband, Dan, who both retired from teaching, aren’t “cheap travelers,” she says. They love less traditional experiences and travel in a “thrifty way.” In this case, she booked with an affordable tour group that provided extras—like the unexpected evening Hanoi restaurant tour.

“If you are smart about it, you really can travel reasonably and have wonderful trips,” says Domenigoni, who has traveled domestically and abroad since the two retired. She says it takes research and planning—and sometimes flexibility. Here are some tips:

Do your homework and plan—early

Domenigoni researches prices and often books trips more than a year in advance for the best deals. She then checks to see if prices come down for airfare, cruises or tours. She uses travel or tour companies, but selects them very carefully and has found NEA Member Benefits offers some of the best deals.

“Be informed,” says Anna Cicero, a retired teacher and school counselor from Mesa, AZ. “Retirees often have the time to get tips from trustworthy sources and then they can visit places for less and without fear.”

Travel budget tracker apps and some airlines and travel businesses provide price alerts that will notify

you of low prices, even if you have booked already. Investigate exchange rates and travel reward credit cards that don’t have foreign transaction fees.

Glenn Schmidt, a retired teacher from Sun Prairie, Wis., leads travel groups and does presentations for retired members. He recommends closely comparing planned travel groups with independent travel. He says going on your own can be cheaper and more customizable, while travel groups can keep you from doing what you want.

“You’re really paying for people to watch over you in a one-size-fits-all tour environment,” Schmidt said. “In other words, a kids’ field trip.”

“Be informed. Retirees often have the time to get tips from trustworthy sources and then they can visit places for less and without fear.”

—Anna Cicero (right)



From elephants in Thailand, to rivers in Hanoi, to waterfalls in Laos, and camels in Morocco, the Domenigoni family travels on a budget but manages to see it all.



Go where others aren’t...

Geoff Morrison, a travel writer and author of the book *Budget Travel for Dummies*, says many less expensive spots are under appreciated. “Taiwan is one of my favorites. The food is varied, delicious, and wonderfully inexpensive,” he says. “The people are some of the friendliest and welcoming of any place I’ve ever visited. Vibrant cities, gorgeous mountains and parks. Just an absolute gem of a place.”

Travel expert Kristin Addis says travelers can find good deals and see unique sites in unexpected spots. “Your money can go way farther if you look at places like Southeast Asia or Central America,” she says. She also suggests visiting smaller towns near higher-priced cities.

...and go when others don’t.

Off season or “shoulder seasons” nearpeak travel times often offer the same weather and lower prices, Addis says. “Alaska was great in the winter, and we saw the northern lights,” she says.

If you want a more temperate vacation, however, try Key West in October when room rates may drop by 50 percent. The rule of thumb, Addis says: Choose the month right before and right after peak season—or check rates for a variety of dates and you’ll see a pattern.

Fly on Wednesday

Some research says for lower rates, the best day to book flights is Sunday and the best days to fly for lower rates are on Saturday or Wednesday.

“There are still deals, especially if you will put up with



"You're really paying for people to watch over you in a one-size-fits-all tour environment. In other words, a kids' field trip."

—Glenn Schmidt

some inconveniences, like changing planes twice or a five-hour layover in Newark," says Schmidt. He uses Google Flights or Skyscanner and changes search parameters several times to get different options.

"In Skyscanner I put in an airport in Belgium, but not a destination. Skyscanner found [a flight to] Plovdiv, Bulgaria, a lovely city, for \$30. I did the same for a flight out of Plovdiv and came up with Bergamo, Italy, for another \$30. The flight back to Charlerois [Airport, in Brussels] was about \$33. So, for less than \$100, I flew halfway around Europe."

Lodging

Airbnb, VRBO and similar platforms have changed how people stay during travel. Under certain circumstances rentals are cheaper than hotels, Schmidt says,

"We rented a five-bedroom former parsonage outside of Bastogne, Belgium, for a month," he recalls. "The cost per day for each bedroom amounted to a paltry \$25. Plus, we had a huge, well-equipped kitchen, so we didn't have to eat every meal at a restaurant."

Morrison says hostels are often "clean, quiet, safe", and may have private rooms that are far cheaper than hotels. You can find hostels online through sites like Hostels.com or HostelBookers.

"If you're the outdoorsy type, you can really enjoy the U.S. as a budget traveler by camping and roughing it,"



Schmidt leads travel groups, and scours websites to find the cheapest way to see the world.



Cicero says NEA Member Benefits often have the best deals, seen here on a recent trip to Europe.

says Addis. Camping can put you in beautiful spots and at luxurious campgrounds. Recreational vehicles for all tastes are available to lease, including on Outdoorsy, where you connect with owners.

"If you really are shopping for bargain basement accommodations in Europe but don't want to relive your counterculture days in hostels or campgrounds, consider monasteries and convents," Schmidt says. "Many of them provide clean but spartan places for little money, especially if you help weed the garden or harvest the grapes."

Moving around

Schmidt says that overnight trains are making a comeback in Europe after losing ridership to 185-mph



Terri and Dan Domenigoni and their friends share an authentic cooking experience in Barcelona, Spain after a visit to a local market. They booked the tour using the Viator website.

high-speed trains that made them unnecessary.

"Nightjet serves locations throughout Europe. For less than \$150 on the Munich to La Spezia, Italy train you can have a bed for the 15-hour journey. It replaces an expen-

sive hotel room and provides comfortable transportation."

He says leasing rather than renting a car is cheaper in many locations, but travelers should know that some companies won't rent to people over a certain age. In

countries such as France, you can get a good deal on a lease from the car rental agencies, he says, though there may be a minimum lease period.

Thinking of a river cruise? Schmidt says for the same or a lower price he rented a four-bedroom boat and floated along the canals of France. "It may not sound as luxurious as Viking, but it feels like you're on your own personal yacht as you tie up to a pier in small-town France and head out in search of croissants." ☘

NEA Member Benefits

Member Benefits offers a number of travel deals—and an option to earn NEA Travel Dollars to pay for vacation packages, resorts or cruises. As an NEA member you can take advantage of deals on car rentals, group tours, cruises, airfare, resorts and hotels. Member Benefits also offers a NEA Discount Tickets Program with special rates on admissions to theme parks and other events while you travel.

"Our mission is to make members' lives better and we know that means their whole lives," says Priya T. Mahfooz, a senior marketing specialist at Member Benefits. "Nearly all our products have a price-match guarantee and members also receive NEA Travel Dollars, which are applied differently than other rewards programs from a credit card or

independent travel companies, and that's a real value."

Members who register for a travel account receive \$500 in Travel Dollars and earn more with each flight booked through the program. These can then be used for various NEA Travel services.

The NEA Travel web site provides useful travel information. Members can also subscribe to the free monthly NEA Travel Newsletter (see link below).

Helpful links:

NEA Member Benefits: <https://www.neamb.com/>

NEA Travel Program: <https://www.neamb.com/products/travel>

Subscribe to the NEA Travel Newsletter:

<https://www.neamb.com/pages/sign-up-for-the-nea-travel-newsletter>

NEA Auto Buying Program:

<https://www.neamb.com/products/nea-auto-buying-program>

ELECTION 2024: Education on the Ballot

EVERYTHING WE WANT FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS STARTS WITH ELECTING THE RIGHT LEADERS.

From more school counselors and social workers to universal school meals to student loan forgiveness, NEA members have seen transformative changes in their schools and their lives thanks to unprecedented investments by the Biden-Harris administration and the members of Congress who support public education.

The American Rescue Plan (ARP), which President Joe Biden championed, and was only approved after Vice President Harris cast the tie-breaking vote in the Senate, provided the single-biggest investment in public schools in our nation's history—delivering nearly \$170 billion to states to address students' needs. Among the greatest necessities: mental health supports.

Through the shared leadership of the Biden-Harris administration public schools received nearly \$1 billion more to support school-based mental health resources for students. Vice President Harris has vowed to continue this work to support public schools and educators, but she can't do it alone. This November, it's critical that we elect leaders to Congress, statehouses, and school boards across the country who share our belief that all students deserve a well-resourced, properly staffed public school where they feel safe and ready to learn.

Here are some of our members' stories where federal dollars made a difference in the lives of our students—it's proof that elections do matter.

Prioritizing mental health

WASHINGTON:

Like every other state across the country, Washington saw students' mental health needs grow exponentially during the pandemic.

"It forced us, as a district and as an entire state, to ask what social-emotional support should really look like," says Shawna Moore, the dean of student success at the Puget Sound Skills Center, in SeaTac, Wash.



Washington educator Shawna Moore (left) says the leaders we elect this fall must address student mental health; Michigan's successful school therapy dog program—founded by Karen Storey (above)—was expanded thanks to the American Rescue Plan.

Districts used some of the state's \$1.85 billion in ARP funding for education to hire additional school counselors, psychologists, and social workers, and to provide training for educators on social and emotional learning.

Those resources also helped kick-start critical conversations about race and equity—key factors impacting students' mental health.

The Washington Education Association was at the forefront of this work, supporting its locals with tools and resources to engage with administrators.

"When you talk about addressing student needs, you have to step back and look at everything," Moore says. "If we have an inclusion policy, but kids aren't feeling included, then what are we doing? If we have an anti-discrimination policy, but students are facing some kind of discrimination, what are we doing?"

As vice president of the Highline Education Association, Moore helped establish the Highline Equity and Anti-Racist Team, which brings together union members and administrators to examine how every prac-

tice affects students. The district also helped each school create its own equity team.

Electing leaders who will continue to invest in public schools is critical to improve student mental health and well-being, says Moore.

"It takes resources to make sure that every one of our students is seen and heard and valued. That's huge."

MICHIGAN:

Michigan also used ARP funding to address long-standing student mental health needs that grew during the pandemic.

"There's no question our students need a strong support system at school, starting with a team of mental health professionals," says Karen Storey, who leads the Brighton School District's multitiered system of support. "And there's a special role that therapy dogs can play to keep students' day-to-day stressors in check."

When Storey launched the program in 2009, long before the pandemic, students benefited immediately. Students who were too anxious to leave their buses eagerly rush down the stairs to greet the dog at the

curb. The emotional and educational benefits of the therapy dogs were immediately evident. "Even the most reluctant readers will read to the dogs," Storey says. "There's no judgment there."

After the school lost a student to suicide in 2015, Brighton's canine staff expanded to 15.

Then, as student mental health suffered during the pandemic, Michigan districts used ARP funding to expand the *Pack of Dogs* program to 52 counties.

Colorado, Oklahoma, and Virginia used ARP resources to launch therapy dog programs of their own.

Since ARP funds became available, mental health has been one of the top three school spending categories nationally. A 2022 survey by the School Superintendents Association found that 82 percent of districts planned to use ARP dollars to expand programs that foster social, emotional, mental, and physical health and development.

"Some of our locals are writing support for therapy dogs into their contracts to make sure their programs live on," Storey says. "Everyone wraps their arms around this once they see the benefits."

ELECTION 2024: Education on the Ballot



Universal school meals help the entire school community, says Nevada nutrition director Elizabeth Martinez.

NEVADA: Ensuring all hungry students are fed

Elizabeth Martinez, the director of nutrition services for Nevada's Carson City Schools, says having universal school meals for the last three academic years "has been transformative" for the entire school community.

All schools had funding for universal meals through the 2021 - 2022 school year, reaching 5 million more students than before the pandemic. Nevada used some

of its ARP funding to continue providing school meals for all students for the next two academic years.

Martinez explains that universal school meals changed things overnight for students and families, as well as her staff.

"I work with the most amazing people who just have the biggest hearts," says Martinez, who oversees 42 workers across 11 kitchens. "It was so hard on them to have to take away a meal from a student who couldn't pay for it," she says. "All of that goes away with universal school meals."

Staff time no longer had to go toward sending letters to families about students' negative lunch account balances. No longer did teachers see behavior issues from students who were going hungry or being embarrassed in the cafeteria.

The number of meals served in the district before the pandemic, roughly 700,000 per year, increased to over a million once universal meals went into effect.

"So many more students took advantage of it," she says. "That really speaks to the need in Carson City and how much universal meals help." She hopes that lesson is not lost on state and federal lawmakers, who will make decisions about whether to extend universal meal programs.

"The income limits to qualify for free and reduced-price meals are unrealistic, and we need leaders who understand that," she says. "There's a lot of unseen need."

Kentucky teacher Tyler Murphy says Joe Biden's work on student debt relief shows he's looking out for educators.



KENTUCKY: Lifting the weight of student debt

High school social studies teacher Tyler Murphy remembers the day last fall when he noticed that his student loan payment wasn't withdrawn from his bank account as scheduled. He logged into his loan servicer website to figure out what was going on.

"I pulled up my account and it said, 'Amount owed: \$0.' All the little bars on the payment tracker were filled in green," Murphy recalls.

For a few moments, he couldn't believe it. But thanks to Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF)—a priority for the Biden-Harris administration—his student debt had been forgiven.

Murphy knew he was on track with his payments, which he had meticulously monitored. Still, he crossed the finish line more quickly than expected because of improvements to PSLF.

Since October 2021, more than 793,000 borrowers serving as public employees have been granted \$56.7 billion in student loan forgiveness through PSLF. Vice President Harris intends to continue the work to ensure that educators can live without the crushing weight of student debt.

For Murphy, who is starting his seventh year teaching at Boyle County High School, in Danville, Ky., having more than \$50,000 in debt forgiven has given him room to breathe.

"I've been surprised how much more flexibility it has given me for things like saving for retirement and that elusive goal for my generation, as a millennial, of home ownership," Murphy says.

"So many borrowers in the past have gotten to the point where the interest is accruing at a rate that makes it essentially impossible for them to ever claw their way out on an educator's salary," he says.

"Kamala Harris thinks we deserve better," Murphy adds. "And her efforts reflect that."

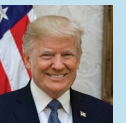
SIDE BY SIDE: Kamala Harris is the clear choice for our students

Public Education at Risk: Harris Defends, Trump Diverts



VICE PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS is a champion for our public schools. As a senator, Kamala Harris voted against voucher measures that would strip critical funds from public schools where 90 percent of students attend. She pushed back against Trump and Betsy DeVos' incessant efforts to "divert public school funding to private school vouchers," and voted against Trump's nomination of DeVos.

TRUMP IS PRO-VOUCHER: Donald Trump supports vouchers that take needed funding away from public schools where 90 percent of students learn. In Trump's first term, he entrusted education to Betsy DeVos, a voucher proponent and the least qualified Secretary of Education in history. She had no experience and never set foot in a classroom. Yet, she has devoted her entire career and millions of dollars to pushing vouchers, which tend to help the wealthiest families and take money away from our public schools.

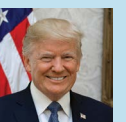


Harris Expands School Meals; Trump Cut Them



VICE PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS knows that no child can learn while hungry. The shared leadership of the Biden-Harris administration expanded access to school meals to 5 million more children in 3,000 more schools. Harris will continue to invest in healthy, free school meals so every child is nourished and can thrive at school.

TRUMP tried to make school meals less healthy and refused to expand access for hungry families during the pandemic. Congress was forced to act to feed children when his Administration should have led.

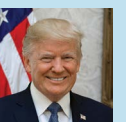


Commitment to School Safety



VICE PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS: From her tenure as district attorney and attorney general to the U.S. Senate and the White House, Harris has devoted her career to creating a safer future for our students and communities by combating gun violence. She is a leader on this issue and is dedicated to making our schools the safest place in every neighborhood. The Biden-Harris administration passed the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, the most significant gun violence prevention legislation in 30 years. Harris will keep working to keep our communities and schools safe.

TRUMP opposed universal background checks and has even said teachers and parents should be able to bring guns to school. Trump bragged to the NRA that he did nothing about mass shootings, and after a school shooting in Iowa, he said that we "have to get over it."



LEARN
MORE

Scan the code to see how Harris and Trump differ on more issues, such as book bans, Title IX, and student loan forgiveness.



ELECTION 2024: Education on the Ballot

NORTH CAROLINA: Big academic gains

How did Club Boulevard Elementary School, in Durham, N.C., go from struggling academically to leading the district in early-grade reading scores in just a few years' time?

Every educator was engaged. They leveraged every resource at their disposal to drive toward that goal, including federal ARP dollars as well as Title I—the federal program that supports schools with large



(Top to bottom) At Club Boulevard Elementary, Gloria Suarez-Aviles coordinates a food pantry and other supports; school rescue funds helped improve reading scores at the school.

numbers of low-income families—which the Biden-Harris administration expanded by \$1.9 billion since 2021.

Gloria Suarez-Aviles, the community schools coordinator at Club Boulevard, is one of those staff members who seems to be everywhere. She's at the drop-off loop to greet students in the morning, on lunch duty in the cafeteria, then coordinating with colleagues and working with small groups of students who need extra support to meet—and exceed—academic expectations.

To help boost early-grade reading skills, Club Boulevard dedicated ARP funding to after-school tutoring provided by the students' classroom teachers, who already have their second- and third-graders' trust and know their struggles.

In addition to ongoing supports like the food pantry, the clothing closet, and family check-ins with Ms. Gloria, these tutoring sessions helped catapult Club Boulevard's reading scores to the top of the district.

Suarez-Aviles says recognizing students who uphold school values and creating clubs that meet during the school day made students feel more connected to their education. ✨



"I love working with those kids. ... They can see their effort paying off, and that's them actually enjoying the struggle of learning."

—Gloria Suarez-Aviles, community schools coordinator, North Carolina

Take This Pledge!

Scan this QR Code, sign our Public Education Voter pledge!



The Biden-Harris Administration Invests in Public Schools

The shared leadership of President Biden and Vice President Harris, and the members of Congress who stand up for public education—made the single-largest investment in U.S. public schools in history. They passed the \$170 billion American Rescue Plan, delivering critical services and resources to students and educators around the country. Here are just a few examples of how the funds helped:



Summer reading in Alabama
The Alabama State Department of

Education committed \$18 million to Summer Reading Camps and the Alabama Summer Achievement Program, both of which were available to all K-3 students struggling with literacy.



Lost students found in Florida
More than 7,000 students were

missing from Hillsborough County Schools at the start of the 2020 – 2021 school year. The district deployed social workers to homes, motels, and shelters; created social media pages in Spanish to reach Latinx families; and helped parents make informed decisions about sending their children back to school. By December 2020, 96 percent of those students had been located.



School counselors in Arizona
In 2021, Arizona dedicated \$21

million to support unfunded school counselor and social worker positions at more than 140 schools. The new staff provide one-on-one counseling and suicide prevention support, connect families with social services, and alleviate the strain on teachers and principals.



HVAC upgrades in Iowa
Iowa made facility repairs across

multiple districts, including an HVAC overhaul in many buildings.



Summer supports in Connecticut
The state invested \$8 million of ARP

money to provide more consistent mental health supports for students. This work included mental health training programs and summer camps for students. All camp and program staff received training on social and emotional learning strategies for students.



Career coaches in Montana
To reverse pandemic

learning loss, the state launched the Montana Ready program and added new career coach positions. The goal of the program is to support college- and career-readiness among students through partnerships with public groups, private businesses, nonprofits, and other community stakeholders.



Teacher diversity in New York
The state began Teacher Diversity

Pipeline pilot programs to help teacher aides and assistants become certified teachers. The program focuses on increasing diversity among the state's teaching force and addressing teacher shortages.



Learning recovery in Ohio
Columbus dedi-

cated more than \$15 million to address pandemic learning loss. The district hired additional counselors, intervention specialists, social workers, and support staff; partnered with local organizations to offer social and emotional services; offered free online tutoring; and expanded its summer school program.



More staff in Pennsylvania
The Butler Area School District

hired more teachers and support staff to curb pandemic learning loss, and brought on eight full-time mental health counselors to support students' social and emotional wellness.



Literacy and math specialists in Wisconsin
The Appleton

Area School District hired additional literacy and math interventionists as well as graduation coaches for juniors and seniors who fell behind during the pandemic.

FROM **Classroom** TO **Campaign**

6 WAYS NEA MEMBER TIM WALZ IN THE WHITE HOUSE WILL HELP EDUCATORS AND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

With so much at stake in the coming election, Vice President Kamala Harris' choice of Minnesota's "Education Governor," Tim Walz, as her running mate has been met with celebration. A former teacher and National Education Association (NEA) member, Walz is a staunch advocate for students, public education, and working families. His selection signals that a Harris-Walz administration would build on the Biden-Harris administration's accomplishments, which NEA President Becky Pringle has praised as "the most pro-public education and pro-union administration in modern history."

1. From the Classroom to Congress

Growing up in rural Nebraska, Walz enlisted in the Army National Guard as a teenager. He attended college on the GI Bill, earned through his military service. Afterward, Walz embarked on a nearly two-decade teaching career. Encouraged by his students, Walz ran for Congress in 2006, winning the election in Minnesota's rural 1st Congressional District. During his 12 years in Congress, Walz consistently championed pro-public education policies.

2. Historic Investments in Minnesota Public Education

Walz pledged to make the largest investment in Minnesota public education in state history, and he delivered by signing bills that increased public school funding. The bill package also included provisions to address shortages of school counselors, social workers, and other essential staff.

3. Opposition to Vouchers

Walz, like Harris, opposes school vouchers. As governor, he blocked all attempts to bring vouchers to Minnesota, emphasizing the importance of public schools, especially in rural areas.

Reflecting on his experience growing up in rural America, Walz told MSNBC, "They [Republicans, Trump] talk about private schools. Where in the heck are you going to find a private school in a town of 400? Those are public schools. Those are great teachers that are out there making a difference and gave us an opportunity to succeed."

4. Addressing Child Poverty and Food Insecurity

A viral photo shows Walz surrounded by public school students after he signed a bill providing universal free school breakfast and lunch to all Minnesota public school children.

During the March 2023 bill-signing ceremony, Walz said, "I do think this is one piece of that puzzle in reducing both childhood poverty and hunger insecurity."

5. Expanding Paid Family Leave

In May 2023, Walz signed legislation providing all Minnesota employees with 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave annually, set to begin in 2026. The NEA has long supported expanded paid family leave legislation.

To critics of this law and his other initiatives, Walz tweeted, "You don't win elections to bank political capital — you win elections to burn political capital and improve lives."

6. Gun Safety Reforms and Supporting Collective Bargaining

A gun owner and hunter, Walz also supports common-sense gun control legislation. The Parkland, Florida, shooting intensified his awareness of America's gun violence epidemic.

As governor, Walz expanded bargaining topics in state law so teachers could negotiate educator-to-student staffing ratios. He also signed a bill adding preschool and adult education teachers to the main bargaining units in their districts, giving many educators significant pay raises and overdue respect for their work.

Left: A Harris-Walz administration will support our students and schools. Below: Photo from the Mankato West High School yearbook featuring Tim Walz.



A Clear Choice for the Future

While Minnesotans will be sad to see Walz go, it is clear this change is what the nation needs. "Trump's extreme, unprecedented Project 2025 agenda would fundamentally alter the American government and jeopardize our children's futures... Simply put, Donald Trump and J.D. Vance would be disastrous for the future of our country," said President Pringle. "The choice in this election could not be more clear," Pringle concluded. "The 3 million members of the NEA will show their power by turning out, volunteering, and making their voices heard because we know that electing Kamala Harris and Tim Walz is the only way we can take America forward."

Hope for the Future

THE NEXT CROP OF TEACHERS SHARE THEIR MOTIVATION FOR STEPPING INTO THE CLASSROOM.

One of the biggest hopes for public education is Aspiring Educators, who are crucial to helping students of all races and backgrounds learn, grow, and fulfill their potential. And despite the manufactured outrage over culture war issues—such as books about LGBTQ+ people and People of Color—future educators are coming into the profession with a hefty dose of joy, excitement, and inspiration.

During a recent conference, aspiring teachers came together to celebrate the resilience of educators and reflect on why they first answered the call to teach. They wrote their inspirations on large puzzle pieces and displayed them on a wall for all to see.

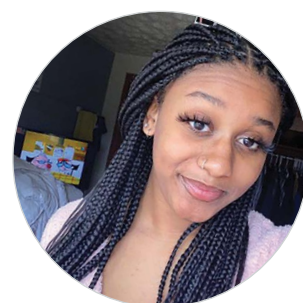
For Anesha Ward who studied at Capital University,

in Bexley, Ohio, the reason is clear: It's to help better the world for everyone.

"Bad things continue to happen in [education, society, and our democracy], but children are our future. They will be the people who can change that," Ward says. "I want to be a part of building that foundation, giving students the tools to be the best version of themselves, and help right the wrongs of the world."

Ward's first taste of teaching came at the age of 12, when she worked at the nursery in her church. Her role was to be a friendly face for the younger kids, particularly those with disabilities. "I was to be their friend, and I fell in love with that," Ward recalls.

Like most teachers, she also experienced the happiness of those 'aha moments'. "It brings me so much joy to



Anesha Ward

"It brings me so much joy to see a student get the right answer or do something on their own and then get excited about it."

—Anesha Ward



Nicholas Fischer

"My [high school] government teacher inspired me to become a teacher. ... I want my classroom to be a warm, welcoming environment, and to be that role model my students can relate to."

— Nicholas Fischer

see a student get the right answer or do something on their own and then get excited about it," says Ward, who majored in primary education and studied to be an intervention specialist, which will prepare her to work in special education.

This, along with other early teaching experiences, helped to solidify her journey into the profession.

One message she wants her future K–12 colleagues to hear: "We're coming in droves, we're not backing down from any challenge, and we're here to support you," she says, adding that members of the NEA Aspiring Educators (AE) program are taking full advantage of conferences and trainings to learn about the supports and resources of the NEA family.

'I'M HERE TO STAY'

Like Ward, many educators know from a young age that they want to teach. This was not the case for Marina Lagattuta, who started out as a biology major at the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg and then switched to political science.

Teaching, she says, was "something I didn't know I wanted to do until I was directly working with kids." The experience (and it's a familiar one!) that put Lagattuta on a teaching path occurred when she was selected to work at a summer school program near her college campus. She was paired with a group of high school students who were making up academic credits to meet their graduation requirements.

"I worked with at-risk youth and with kids who had horrible family situations," she says. "Seeing the look on their faces when the material clicked or they accomplished something is what made me realize I could see myself doing this ... for the rest of my life."

Lagattuta is fully aware of the challenges educators face.

The issues that get her the most fired up? Book banning and the overhyped use of "critical race theory" as a rallying cry for anti-public school lawmakers.

"Educators want the best for their students, and they want to be able to broaden their thinking. You can't teach students about different cultural experiences and backgrounds, empathy, or experiences that you have no knowledge about, when we're forced to abandon books. Some politicians want to scare people ... [and] this is dangerous."

As for Lagattuta's puzzle piece, her "Why I Want to Teach" message read: "For the younger me." She explains that as a teen, school was both an escape and an unsafe space for her.

"I fell victim to kids who were awful, mean, and rude, but I had great teachers who stuck up for me," she shares. "Kids need people in their corner, [especially] when they might not have anybody else."

She adds: "I'm not scared of the problems in and around education. I'm here to stay and am prepared to do what's right and to do what's necessary for the next generation." ✨



Marina Lagattuta

"I'm not scared of the problems in and around education. I'm here to stay and am prepared to do what's right and to do what's necessary for the next generation."

—Marina Lagattuta

THE PROBLEM CLOUDING THE CLASSROOM

VAPING REMAINS A HEALTH
AND SAFETY ISSUE IN SCHOOLS.
NOW IT'S A BEHAVIORAL
PROBLEM AS WELL.

By Grace Hagerman

A high school student paces by the classroom door as the clock ticks down, indicating it is almost time for the next period. Another student is irritable all class, often talking back and interrupting instruction. A third student leaves the classroom at the same time every day, likely meeting up with friends in the bathroom. What is the common denominator among all these teenagers? Many educators will tell you: It's the vape in their pocket.

"That's really challenging when you're trying to engage a kid in class or trying to introduce new content. It's hard when a kid is just having a fiending for nicotine," said Lillian Barry, a school counselor at Hermon High School in Hermon, Maine.

E-cigarettes, also known as vapes, came onto the market in the United States in 2007, according to the Mayo Clinic. The amount of nicotine vape products contain varies depending on the brand of the vape and the size. When an individual inhales vapor laced with nicotine, the drug is quickly absorbed through the blood vessels; research shows that the nicotine inhaled

can reach the brain in as few as 10 seconds. As a result, users, who are often young people, quickly become addicted—and the data show more middle and high school students are using vapes now than they did just a year ago.

In November 2023, the Food and Drug Administration and Centers for Disease and Prevention conducted its Annual National Youth Tobacco Survey, collecting data on tobacco use among middle and high school students. According to the survey, about 2.8 million youth currently use tobacco products. Among those who reported e-cigarette use in the survey, 1 in 4 said they use them every day. According to the CDC, 10 percent of middle and high school students used tobacco products in 2023, and 7.7 percent used e-cigarettes specifically.

"I think there is a false sense of security that it is safer because it is not a cigarette," said Paulette Luckett, a school nurse in St. Louis Public Schools.

But research shows that vapes are extremely dangerous, and a cause for concern given their popularity among middle and high school students, according to Elizabeth

Crespi, M.P.H., graduate research assistant from the Institute for Global Tobacco Control (IGTC) at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Crespi explains that nicotine is what makes e-cigarettes addictive, but there can be other toxic chemicals in the ingredients or in the aerosol, adding to the potential health risks.

"We have more than 100 years of research to prove how dangerous cigarettes are, but because e-cigarettes were popularized more recently, no one knows yet how damaging they will be to the people who use them in the long term," Crespi said, while still emphasizing that any vape use can have serious health implications. The CDC stresses the health issues associated with nicotine—citing impacts on brain development and addiction—which in youth can begin quickly among young people, sometimes before the start of regular or daily use.

For a young, impressionable student, vapes' enticing packaging, form, colors and flavors can be a powerful draw, according to the Mayo Clinic. According to research, other factors driving vape use include, peer

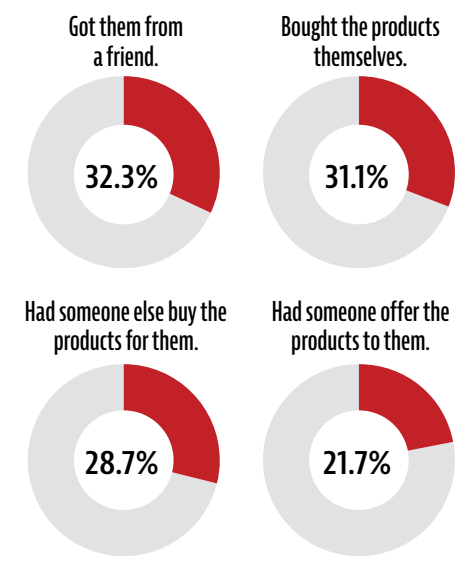


"I think there is a false sense of security that it is safer because it is not a cigarette."

—Paulette Luckett, school nurse, St. Louis Public Schools (left)

ACCESS TO THE VAPE

Among U.S. middle and high school students who used e-cigarettes in 2021:



SOURCE: CDC

Of Note: Some educators say while there are many smoke shops that sell vapes to customers, students are often acquiring vapes online because it is easier to get past an age restriction.

pressure, stress management, the fact that vape is less detectable than cigarette smoke, the idea that vaping is cool, the false belief that vapes are safer than cigarettes, and exposure to an influential parent or sibling who vapes.

"The tobacco industry makes e-cigarettes that align with current consumer trends and come in a wide variety of appealing flavors," Crespi said. "The tobacco industry is using e-cigarettes as an onramp for new consumers to start using their products."

As Luckett and Barry work to get their students to abstain from vaping, they realize what they're up against. They agree the aesthetics of vapes appeal to students; but what's more troubling is that vaping is trendy and bestows a certain "status" among their peers. Both education professionals said vapes are easy to sneak, which appeals to a student's desire to rebel.

"I think certainly, if you're also looking at social media, this is again just perceived as normalized and as cool, and not harmful. When realistically, it's exceptionally harmful," Barry said.

Social pressure is a common pattern that Barry sees among students she works with. She said she has heard from students that they will hold a vape at social gatherings instead of drinking alcohol because they don't want to jeopardize their athlete status or because they need to drive home after the gathering. "They'll intentionally hold a vape [so] somebody won't ask them to drink a beer," Barry said. "They're still like, 'No, this kid's cool,'" Barry said.

Vaping and Mental Health

Other than the trendiness of vaping, research shows young people vape to decrease stress, anxiety, or depression. Verkada's 2023 Teen Vaping Survey of 2,650 Americans—including parents, teachers, vaping teens, and non-vaping teens—to better understand vaping patterns. The Verkada survey, from a company that in part focuses on air quality, found that 51 percent of students who vape said it helps with anxiety.

"I think it's a stress relief for kids," Barry said. "You know, it's a kind of this coping mechanism for stress, anxiety,

THE PROBLEM CLOUDING THE CLASSROOM

maybe any type of emotional concern or issue that they may be having.”

Yet, vaping can make anxiety and depression worse. Newport Institute explains that when a young adult tries to quit vaping, their mental health can suffer because of nicotine withdrawal symptoms. This makes it less likely for users to quit.

“It’s a slippery slope because nicotine does give you this rush of, ‘Hey I’m feeling okay now,’ but it’s heavily addictive,” Barry said.

The Verkada survey found that students still choose to vape despite knowing the consequences. “Nearly all teenagers who vape (96 percent) view teen vaping as a problem, with 61 percent of vaping teens considering themselves to be addicted and 54 percent wanting to quit vaping altogether.”

Nicotine influences behavior

In the Verkada survey, teachers reported that vaping had a significant impact on student behavior with nearly 9 in 10 teachers saying vaping is disruptive to learning environments.

Luckett and Barry, who have seen these disruptions firsthand, work to manage the difficult behaviors while still trying to create a safe learning environment. It’s an increasing challenge as a student’s behavior can depend on the substance inside the vape. “If it’s a vape that has nicotine, maybe it’s flavored, you have kids who are addicted to it, so they become anxious when they can’t get their ‘fix,’” Luckett explains.

When a user does not have access to their nicotine, they become agitated and sometimes belligerent, said Luckett. She compared vapers exactly to cigarette smokers: “When you need your cigarette and can’t get it, it can cause an issue because you are addicted.”

Luckett then detailed the change in behavior she sees if a student is using a vape that contains substances other than nicotine, like the CBD or THC found in cannabis.

“If you have a kid who’s doing it regularly, you may have a kid who comes in hyper laid back and really relaxed compared to what they would normally look like because basically, they’re high, which happens to cause an issue with learning and doing their day-to-day school,” Luckett said. “You need to be sober in order to learn.”

Barry said that in her school district, an increase in irritability and anger-motivated behavior in students who vape has resulted in an increase in discipline from staff

“We are seeing just this kind of vicious little cycle of kids that are either reporting other kids because they’re angry, or they’re planting things because they’re angry with a kid. They’re trying to sell [vape] pods at school and they’re trying to distribute things,” Barry said.

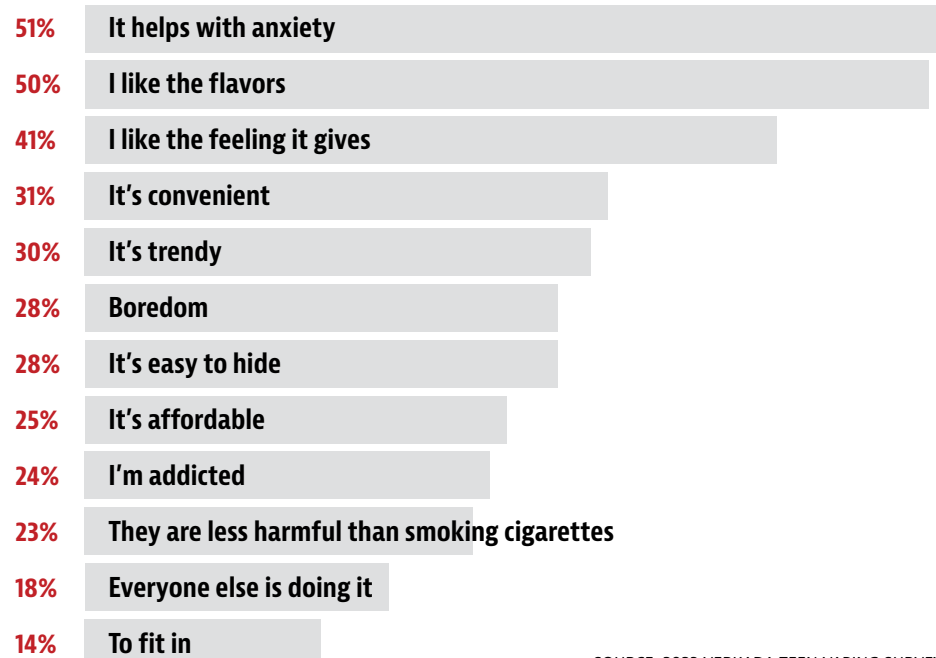
There also has been an increase in students missing class at Barry’s high

school, as vaping students will meet up with their peers in the bathroom during instruction time. Barry’s school requires students caught with a vape to meet with a certified alcohol and drug counselor. She said that the impact on the school community is substantial because administrators must work with counselors to discipline the student’s behavior, which then requires educators to intervene to catch the student up in class.

What Can Educators Do?

Vapes are hard to detect as they are small, and the scent does not attach to the breath or clothing of users like cigarettes smoke. Because of this, schools have turned to metal detectors to catch a vape the moment it passes through the school front doors or vape detectors in bathrooms to detect the puff of aerosol mist in the stalls.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING REASONS DESCRIBES WHY YOU VAPE?



SOURCE: 2023 VERKADA TEEN VAPING SURVEY



“If we could just—as a community, as a state, as educators—work together to really build some strong resources to help support these families, that would be so helpful,” says Lillian Barry, a high school counselor in Hermon, Maine.

and what it can do, and that those age limits are there for a reason,” Luckett said.

Luckett said that many places no longer require health education classes, which is a big mistake. She said that schools are seeing issues with vaping because they are not adequately educating their students on the matter.

In Maine, Hermon High School incorporated a new required health course into the curriculum after an advisory board and student panel worked to determine exactly what students need to learn to be successful. The new course focuses on vaping, and on educating students on how to handle peer interactions and develop refusal skills with the hope that this will curb unhealthy behavior.

Even with the course, the high school counselor worries there is a lack of resources for students and parents regarding vaping. “If we could just—as a community, as a state, as educators—work together to really build some strong resources to help support these families, that would be so helpful,” Barry said.

Crespi emphasized that education and support are essential for helping young people combat their vaping addictions.

“We cannot squander the opportunity to prevent future generations from susceptibility to a lifetime of nicotine addiction and tobacco use,” Crespi said. “Education is critical for informing students and young people about the dangers and addictiveness of tobacco and nicotine products. Teachers can also help by staying abreast of approved cessation tools and steering students who want to quit to available resources.” 📌

Barry said her school has also turned to more creative measures like an electronic hall pass system to track patterns among students who leave the classroom frequently to meet up with friends in the bathroom.

Both Barry and Luckett said that these methods are not enough to stop the vaping problem in their schools, though. They are asking for help from parents and guardians to address the vaping issue at home so they can focus on education in school. “Parents are going to have to take a more active role and not just

let the school do it, because schools aren’t doing it. And even if they were, parents have got to discuss these types of topics with their children, and especially if you’re a parent that participates in vaping yourself. Be open and honest, explain the dangers

According to the Institute for Global Tobacco Control, there are many free resources for students in the U.S. who wish to stop smoking and/or quit using e-cigarettes, including programs that use text messages designed specifically for young people.

Visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/e-cigarettes/youth-quitting.html>

**LEARN
MORE**



A Educator's Guide to CRACKING THE CODES

No matter the generation you're born into, when you listen to today's students it sounds like they're speaking a foreign language. But, don't sweat it, Homeskillet, NEA Today has you covered. So, take a chill pill and learn some groovy new words.

Thanks to our members, and some righteous middle school students, we've compiled this sick list to help you understand your students. If they come to class and there are new words we didn't cover here... my bad.

CURRENT SLANG

Alpha: The top dog, leader of the pack.

Aura Points: If you do something good, you get aura points.

Bet!: Yes! or Let's Go!

Cap. That's cap. You cappin?: Not true, you're lying.

Cook. Let's cook. I'm cooking: Cooking is doing well.

Coquette: An aesthetic associated with girls who love pink, frills, bows, and more. Like "cutesy."

Drip/Drippy: Good style, looks cool.

"Facts!": Used when someone believes something is very true or relates heavily to the statement.

Glazing: Worshipping someone/sucking up to another person.

"It's giving...": It feels like, it's giving off certain vibes.

Lock in: Be ready. Use in a sentence: "We gotta get locked in." "Okay, I'm locked in."

Mid: Something that is just alright.

On God/Ongod: I swear.

Opp: An enemy, someone you don't like.

Pressed: You're pressed when you're mad at someone, worrying excessively.

Rizz. Rizzler: Conversational skills, if you are a guy. Romantic charm.

Sigma. What the sigma?:

1. Dominant leader, lone wolf, cool and popular-like a Fonzie. Something can also make you look Sigma-these sunglasses make me look "Sigma." 2. Originated from a Sponge Bob meme and is just a filler phrase, means nothing.

Skibidi. Skibidi toilet. "Chad is that skibidy?": Technically it's a guy in a toilet, but it is used in a way that means something that is "trash" or no good, belongs in a toilet.

W: I took the dub.- Just means you won. You got the dub, you won.

Yappin': Talking too much.

NEW SLANG

Camp: A particular aesthetic or style characterized by being deliberately exaggerated, theatrical, ironic, and often over-the-top.

Chat/"Hey Chat": Referring to friends or people in the general area. Generally used when addressing a group.

Granola: Someone that's into the outdoors.

Guap: A large sum of money.

Fanum Tax: Theft of food between friends/stealing.

Hits different: Something exceptional, one-of-a-kind, or that evokes intense feelings that are challenging to articulate.

"I'm sat": I'm listening.

Mad Lit: Stylish.

Moots: Mutual friends/followers.

Mog/Mogging: One upping someone in terms of physical appearance or attractiveness.

OOTD/OTD: Outfit of the day.

Pookie: Term of endearment that describes something/someone cute.

Side Eye: Skeptical about what just happened or was said.

Standing on Business/10

Toes: Sincerity and seriousness about whatever was said or done.

Touch Grass: Encourage someone to spend more time in the real world instead of online.

Vanilla: Boring/Beige.

Yuurr: "Yes" or "Yessir" or "Okay." A way of saying you heard me or what's up.



"We gotta get locked in!"

Stop glazing him, he's not that good at baseball.

Use it in a sentence!

Scan the QR code to listen to kids explain their language and what's trending now.



Your Union, Your Advantage

STRATEGIES FOR LEVERAGING MEMBERSHIP LIKE A PRO

Early in his teaching career, Joseph Daily, a PE teacher in Yuma, Arizona, made a costly decision. He dropped his NEA membership to save on union dues. But with a growing family and tight finances, he quickly realized that the cost of not belonging was even higher.

Surrounded by underpaid and overworked educators, Daily rejoined NEA, believing in the power of collective action to fight for better pay, smaller class sizes, and professional development. "I rejoined because I cared about my colleagues and wanted to make a difference," Daily said. "I hated seeing first-year teachers leave because they couldn't make ends meet or didn't feel supported."

Now a vocal union advocate, Daily emphasizes the rewards of membership, which extend far beyond financial savings.

Help on the Job

NEA supports teachers and education professionals with workshops, webinars, and over 175 micro-credentials to enhance their careers. With the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), educators have more opportunities to advocate for their students' needs. NEA offers resources and tools to help members implement ESSA effectively.

The union also organizes training programs focused on social justice, cultural competence, and other critical issues. Members can connect through NEA edCommunities, an online platform for collaboration on topics like school safety and flipped classrooms.

Legal Protection

NEA members have access to UniServ directors who can advise or



represent them in employment-related matters, backed by at least \$1 million in liability insurance. While probationary teachers may lack some protections, NEA ensures they know their rights and helps them navigate potential job challenges.

Wages and Benefits Watchdogs

In states with collective bargaining, NEA helps negotiating teams secure pay raises and benefits. The union advocates for educators at all levels of government, ensuring that their voices are heard in Congress, state legislatures, and school boards.

Fighting for Better Schools

Better working conditions mean better learning environments. NEA fights for smaller class sizes, reduced standardized testing, and safe school buildings, advocating for students and

educators alike. The union also empowers educators and parents to work together for high-quality education.

Providing Educators with a Voice

A union's strength depends on active participation. NEA encourages members to stay informed on education issues and improve the profession. Daily believes growing union membership is key to amplifying educators' voices and making positive changes.

Even More Reasons to Join

Beyond professional benefits, NEA membership offers discounts on insurance, movie tickets, and retail purchases. The NEA Foundation provides grants for classroom projects, while initiatives like Read Across America campaign offer valuable resources. Learn More about your union at nea.org.

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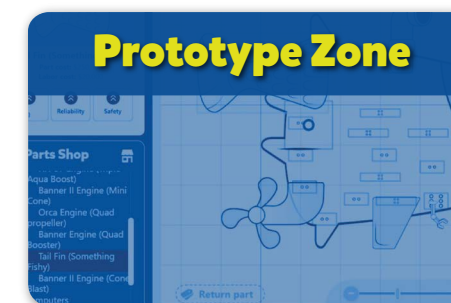
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NEA MEMBERS' VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION

Artificial intelligence isn't just knocking on the door of education; it's already here, reshaping the landscape of classrooms and campuses across the nation. In a groundbreaking move, NEA members approved the first-ever policy statement on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in education.

This policy statement empowers educators to have a voice in how AI tools are used in our schools. "Where AI once seemed like something coming in the future, it's clear the future is now," stated NEA Secretary-Treasurer Noel Candelaria, who spearheaded the task force behind this pivotal policy. This statement underscores a significant shift, as the NEA positions itself at the forefront of AI in education to ensure the technology serves the needs of students and educators in the most positive way possible.



Angie Powers

Candelaria stressed the importance of educator voice in the use of the technology, acknowledging that the new policy is just the beginning of the work around these rapidly changing educational tools. "We need to be at the forefront of how this technology is evaluated and used."

Since fall 2023, task force members, who include teachers, education support professionals, higher-ed faculty, and others, have been meeting and talking with other educators and experts. Their policy statement, reviewed by NEA members at the annual Representative Assembly, passed by an overwhelming majority.

"Navigating this significant technological shift will require intense attention and cooperation by schools, educators, state and local affiliates, administrators, and communities," said NEA President Becky Pringle.

"Above all else, the needs of students and educators should drive AI's use in education—and educators must be at the table to ensure these tools support effective teaching and learning for all students, regardless of ZIP code."

HUMANS ARE AT THE HEART OF LEARNING

Last year, just half of middle and high school teachers said they'd used AI at school or personally. This year, that number shot up to more than 80 percent, according to a June report from the nonprofit, nonpartisan Center for Democracy & Technology. Meanwhile, 93 percent of those teachers say their students are using it too.

In higher ed settings, student use of AI similarly outpaces that of educators: Only 22 percent of faculty reported using AI tools in 2023, *Inside Higher Ed* reported last year, while twice as many students said the same.



Wil Page

AI is here—in classrooms, in school districts, and on higher-ed campuses across the nation. But today, less than half of U.S. states have official policies about AI to guide educators and students.

The new NEA policy statement will help educators navigate these waters as state and local policies and practices are developed.

First and foremost, the NEA policy statement demands that "students and educators remain at the center of education." Educators—that is, human beings—inspire, motivate and guide students, and the connection between them is the beating heart of learning.

"The use of AI should not displace or impair that connection," the statement says.

Additionally, the policy statement's key principles suggest that AI can be used to enhance education, if it's used responsibly; that educator and student

data must be protected; that equitable access must be ensured; and that educators and students must be given opportunities to develop AI literacy.

"As we dove into this work, it became really clear that we need educators to be part of the process," said Wil Page, a sixth-grade math and social studies teacher in Los Angeles who served on the task force. "Whether it's working with [AI] developers or working to implement tools and policies in districts and states, we need continuous educator involvement."

AI: OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS

Educators, especially those who have been learning about AI as members of the task force, say the new technology poses some exciting opportunities for educators. Chief among them is the opportunity to modify and differentiate their instructional methods and materials for students with disabilities.

This adaptive technology can help make classrooms from pre-K through higher education more inclusive and



equitable for students with disabilities and emergent multilingual learners. “It’s a potential thought-partner to differentiate for different needs,” said Angie Powers, a Kansas high school teacher who served on the NEA task force.

At the same time, AI also brings risks, including the potential to worsen biases. Technology developers are overwhelmingly white, straight men without disabilities, according to Stack Overflow’s 2022 Developer Survey. Consequently, AI products may not reflect students’ or educators’ diversity. “We don’t want to shirk away from the fact that developers don’t look like our students in our classrooms. Those biases are baked in,” said Powers.

Because of these embedded biases, the new NEA policy statement makes clear that AI shouldn’t be used to make important, high-stakes decisions, like whether students can take advanced classes or graduate.

It’s also critically important for students, educators and caregivers from traditionally marginalized groups, including people with disabilities, Native students and educators, and educators and students of color, to have a voice when districts are adopting AI technology or creating AI-related policies. “We need to ensure that everybody is involved in AI development so that in the future it’s truly, truly

inclusive. For me, that’s exciting!” said Candelaria.

Another risk? AI has the potential to accelerate climate change, educators note. A single AI query requires at least four or five times as much energy to answer as a simple search-engine request, experts told *Wired* last year.

WHAT’S NEXT?

Few educators feel prepared for AI in their workplaces. Indeed, fewer than 3 in 10 K-12 teachers have received professional learning on AI, according to a 2024 EdWeek Research Center survey. The numbers are likely even lower for paraeducators and other

staff members, said Candelaria during last month’s hearing.

It’s critical that professional learning be provided to educators—throughout their academic and professional lives—so that they can use AI effectively and ethically—and teach their students to use it effectively and ethically.

This doesn’t just mean understanding AI terms or knowing how to phrase a question for a chatbot. It means understanding AI bias and being aware of ethical considerations.

“Artificial intelligence has evolved



Noel Candelaria

into a permanent fixture in our communities and schools,” said Pringle. “Using these new tools equitably, fairly, and safely is essential for our nation’s educators to guide and inspire their students and classes.”

Years ago, when educators talked about the “digital divide,” they were talking about access to high-speed internet and computers in classrooms and homes. Today, NEA task members are talking about access to AI. It absolutely should not be restricted to the most advanced students or most well-resourced schools. “I’m most

concerned about exacerbating the digital divide,” said Page.

All students should have access to cutting-edge technology and educators who are skilled in helping them use it. This needs to happen across the curriculum—not just in computer science classes “but in all classes,” said Powers.

“To me, we’re right on the cutting edge [with this policy]. The work of the task force, by members and staff, has been really phenomenal,” said Page. “I see it being used as a guide for state and local affiliates, ensuring that unionism is at the table... and ensuring that educators have a voice.”



What Does the Research Say?

With the increase in students using AI—and, in particular ChatGPT—a research group that helps students make decisions about higher education called Intelligent.com conducted a survey of current high school teachers and college professors. The findings show many educators are changing how they teach to “combat ChatGPT use.”

Amongst the findings:

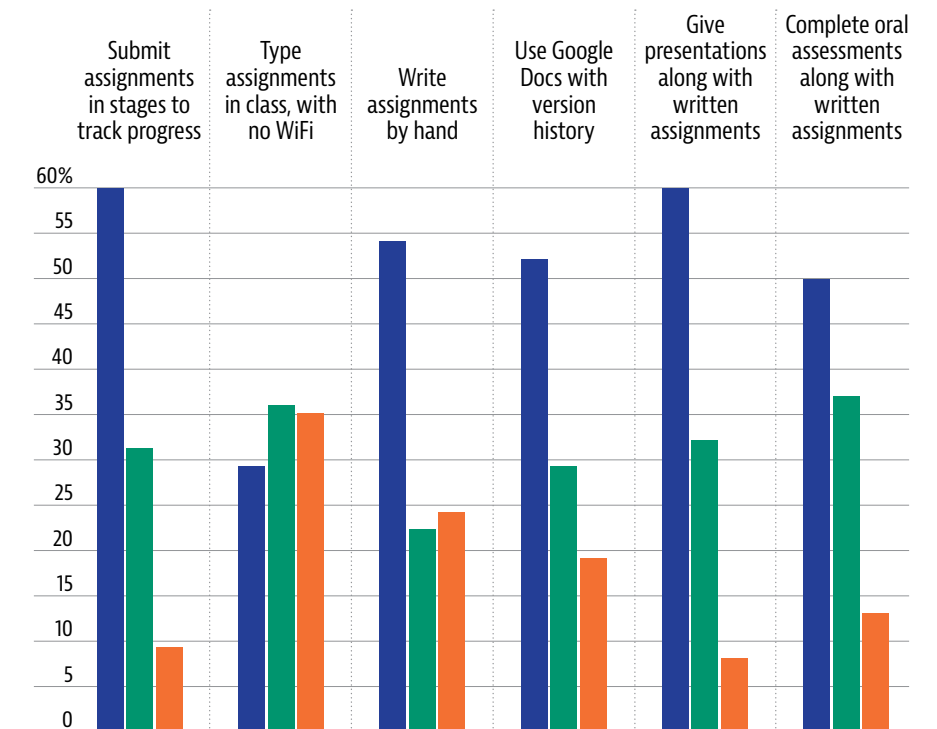
- 50% of educators are resorting to handwritten assignments
- 6 in 10 believe ChatGPT can help students learn, with many saying the tool is a mixed blessing
- More than 1 in 4 say their school has no ChatGPT policy in place
- Older educators are less likely to see the AI tool as beneficial

Many educators who do not currently require handwritten essays are planning on making changes, ranging from requiring oral presentations to having students type assignments in class without Wi-Fi.

Source: NEA Today

Which of the following methods do you currently use, or plan to use to combat the use of ChatGPT on written assignments?

■ Currently require ■ Plan to require in 2024 ■ No plans to require



Untying the Gag Orders

UNION-LED LAWSUITS ARE HALTING BOOK BANS AND STATE LAWS THAT CENSOR EDUCATORS

This year, New Hampshire teacher Patrick Keefe is putting Toni Morrison's *Beloved* back into the hands of his AP English Lit students.

Thanks to his union, NEA-New Hampshire, recently winning a lawsuit overturning the state's "banned concepts" law, Keefe can teach lessons that he knows lead to critical thinking. He and his colleagues can include novels with LGBTQ+ people, and history lessons that dive into slavery and Jim Crow laws, without fear that robust discussion will end their teaching careers.

"It's a great victory, absolutely!" says Keefe. "I haven't done *Beloved* in two years... I'll probably do *To Kill a Mockingbird* too—and I won't have to worry about being brought before some kind of rigged panel!"

New Hampshire's now-overturned law was part of a 2021 – 2022 wave of state laws banning educators from talking about race and racism, LGBTQ+ people, and other so-called "divisive concepts." Today, that wave is hitting a brick wall of fed-up educators, supported by NEA and its affiliates.

Keefe is one of the bricks. So is Iowa teacher Alyson Browder, who was a plaintiff in a similar union-led lawsuit. "I just really care about my students and their safety, and this law [hurt] them in so many ways," she says.

It's Not Just N.H.

Twenty states modeled laws on an executive order by former President Trump that banned "divisive concepts" like diversity and equality from federal trainings.

In Georgia, a trio of vaguely worded laws and school district policies led to teacher Katie Rinderle getting fired last year, after she read aloud a picture book about inclusivity that she bought at her school's book fair. In South Carolina, high school teacher Mary Wood was reprimanded for using a non-fiction book by Ta-Nehisi Coates about his experience growing up Black in America.



Patrick Keefe

"I heard we can't learn about Black people this year," a student told an Iowa teacher last year, as a new law caused Iowa educators to pull books including *1984* by George Orwell, the Holocaust memoir *Maus* by Art Spiegelman, plus a children's biography of U.S. Cabinet member Pete Buttigieg, who is gay.

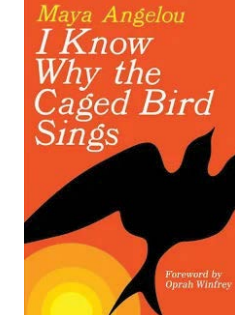
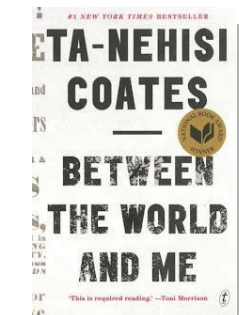
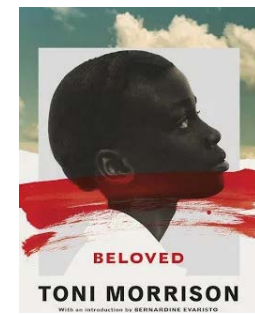
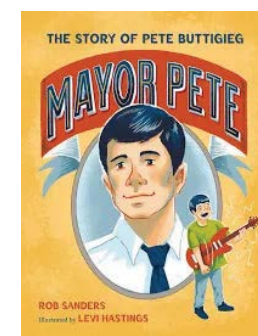


Alison Browder

The Problem with Book Bans

Books like these are mirrors for students of color, LGBTQ+ kids, and students with disabilities, making them feel seen and valued. They're also helpful to white, straight, non-disabled students who live in our multicultural, interdependent world.

"When access to these titles is lost, our students lose the opportunity to build empathy toward others who might



not look, or live, like them. Every student deserves to see themselves in the books they read. It is how they learn that their stories and their lives matter," wrote NEA President Becky Pringle in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* last year.

The Tide is Turning

Last year, the Iowa State Education Association won an injunction, blocking

parts of that state's gag-order law. It is "incredibly broad" and "unlikely to satisfy the First Amendment under any standard of scrutiny," wrote the judge.

In New Hampshire, the judge who ruled that law unconstitutional said it was too vague. People who are subject to a law "should be given a reasonable opportunity to know what is prohibited," he noted.

The Banned Lesson

In his ruling, the N.H. judge noted how the law made it hard for teachers to "encourage debate" and "critical thinking skills."

Indeed, the lesson that got Windham High School teacher Alison O'Brien yanked out of her classroom and taken to the principal's office is one of her best. In 90 minutes, O'Brien pivots from Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and the Great Migration to the Harlem Renaissance.

Poetry from Langston Hughes and Paul Lawrence Dunbar is read. Count Basie and Louie Armstrong are played. The big question: "Why art?"

"Black Americans are escaping great violence in the South,"

O'Brien notes. "Why art? Why not politics? Or speeches?" Toward the end of the lesson, in compliance with the state's social studies standards, which say students should understand the "continuity of history," O'Brien plays contemporary music videos, including a portion of Beyoncé's *Formation* that shows a child dancing in front of SWAT officers.

"I always say to the kids, we're not talking about whether we agree or disagree with these artists, we're talking about 'why art' and what they're trying to accomplish. And why art?" she says.

"At no point was I telling kids what they should believe. I'm not even saying what the artists believe," says O'Brien. "I'm asking. I'm providing information. I'm focusing on inquiry-based learning and building their critical-thinking and analysis skills."

Meanwhile, in Arizona, one of the first "divisive concepts" laws was invalidated in 2021, three months after the Arizona Education Association, with NEA's help, filed a lawsuit.

Other lawsuits are ongoing, including one filed by the Georgia Association of Educators in Cobb County, Ga., where Rinderle was fired, and one by the Tennessee Education Association.

In Oklahoma, an injunction issued in June has blocked "impermissibly vague" parts of that state law from taking effect in K–12 classrooms. And in both Oklahoma and Florida, judges have blocked the laws from taking effect in the states' public universities.

"I Can Actually Teach!"

In New Hampshire, teachers say it wasn't just history that was suppressed by the law. It was good teaching.

When Keefe teaches *Beloved*, he asks students to consider the story of Sethe, a former enslaved person, "in a contemporary framework." Do students today see a lasting impact of the trauma of slavery?

[Under the former law], "if I brought up George Floyd or any other incident involving race in contemporary society, it'd be tricky. Actually, it'd be more than tricky," says Keefe. "I could be brought before a board and have my license yanked."

So, he shelved the book and changed his teaching methods. "When the federal judge overturned [the law], I was more than thrilled," says Keefe. "It was like I can actually teach!" 🦋

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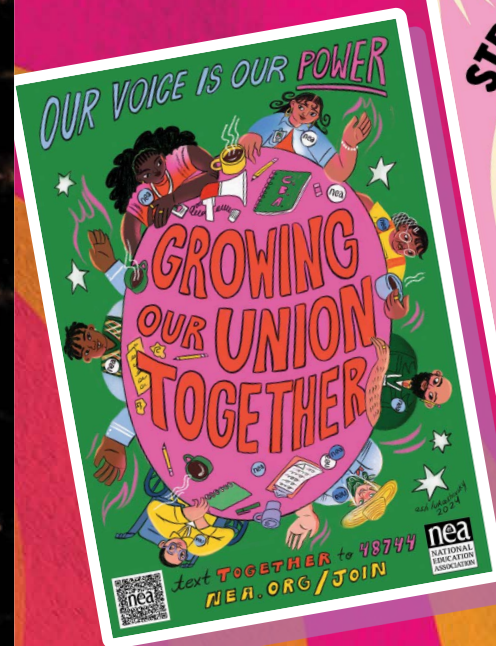
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When students' and educators' mental health are supported with social-emotional learning, we help the whole school community thrive. Explore NEA's collection of resources to help your students, colleagues, and yourself flourish academically and professionally—scan the QR code to learn more or go to <https://bit.ly/49RiHNw>.

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Go to <https://educationvotes.nea.org/take-action/vote-plan>



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LAST *Look* Cooking with Fire!



WE LOVE THE WAY YOU TEACH.



Teamwork, communication, and other life lessons are cooked up in a technical high school kitchen in New Jersey

In this 5-minute NEA Today audio story, Chef Ron Ossi's classroom at Passaic County Technical Institute in Wayne, N.J., is sizzling! Five of his students—Nellie Beato, Soleil Colon, José Dominguez, Jayden Gonzalez, and Leslie Minaya—won the state's ProStart competition this past spring. Their luscious three-course meal, including a five-layer dessert, was cooked entirely on two propane stoves in just 60 minutes. No running water. No electricity. Listen to Ossi and the young chefs as they refine their dishes and prepare for the next stage of competition and life beyond high school.

Go to nea.org/cooking or scan this code to listen to the story.



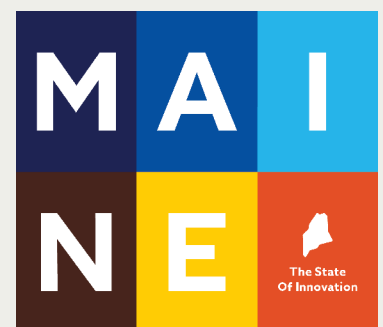
Top: High school chefs José Dominguez, Soleil Colon, Jayden Gonzalez, Nellie Beato and Leslie Minaya with their award-winning dinner. Above from left: First course, main course (osso buco), and dessert.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF RON OSSO

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