

NEA POLICY PLAYBOOK



National Education Association

The National Education Association is the nation's largest professional employee organization, representing more than 3 million elementary and secondary teachers, higher education faculty, education support professionals, school administrators, retired educators, and students preparing to become teachers.

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A MESSAGE FROM NEA PRESIDENT BECKY PRINGLE



While the impact of this year's crises seemed to come out of nowhere, it was a perfect storm.

Years of racial injustice, social neglect, divisive political discourse, and absolute refusal to address the economy responsibly left the country unprepared when calamity struck. COVID-19 entered our lives and exposed long-standing systemic racial and social disparities that could no longer be hidden. Our nationally elected leaders abdicated their responsibility to protect citizens and chose to hurt students, families, and communities by their deliberate rejection of leadership, empathy, and concern for people over political party.

Forever in my soul will be the devastation of those grief-stricken families who have lost loved ones, the eager kindergarteners and college freshmen who had to attend their first day of school via ZOOM, and caring educators driving through neighborhoods to wave to their beloved students, provide digital hotspots, and deliver meals. At the same time, our consciousness has been rocked by images of unarmed Black men and women being murdered by those who had vowed to protect them—and with no accountability. Millions of people—of all ethnicities, beliefs, and backgrounds—have taken to the streets protesting injustice and fighting to ensure Black Lives Matter, to end the caging of children, and to right the wrongs done to the Native People who occupied this land first. People are marching to show that the societal ills and injustices can and will no longer be tolerated.

That's why I'm fired up and ready to go! I'm ready to get to work and help build back a better country for all of us. We have witnessed and suffered from the failings of a corrupt administration and all who aided and abetted its criminality and assault against children, working families, and seniors. We're excited to work with the Biden administration and other national leaders who are ready to not only correct the damaging policies but also to aggressively move forward and place the country on a path yet realized. We all agree it's time to be purposeful and bold.

Educators are at the core of the American promise. They don't just go to work every day; they answer a call to serve. Today, educators are the most trusted professionals in their field: They know their students by name, they know what their students need, and their input is essential to ensuring that all students reach their full potential and excel. As respected and valued professionals, educators should have a voice in all decisions affecting our public schools and in empowering the next generation of students to take their place in a diverse and interdependent world. Public education is the cornerstone of our democracy, and the continuing vitality of our representative form of government is dependent on an educated and informed citizenry.

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Without question, the pandemic has underscored vast differences in economic and educational opportunity. The country has witnessed the devastation of this pandemic on historically marginalized communities that face heightened and unique challenges sustained by systemic racism, classism, and inadequate funding of their schools. Racial divisions in our country do not exist by accident, but by design. Similarly, the status of public education today is not by accident, but by design. The NEA's more than 3 million members know that a child's access to opportunity and success should not be affected by race, zip code, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, religion, family status, employment status, or economic background. Far too often, however, it is, and the negative impacts we continue to see are exacerbated for Native People and People of Color.

As this administration and other national leaders prepare for the significant work ahead, we recommend three overarching priorities to include in your efforts:

- ▶ **Build learning communities for the future that support students from early childhood through higher education.** Invest and fully fund programs that provide every student with an opportunity to learn and succeed—like universal preK, Title I, special education, community schools, and free community college. The administration should uplift educator diversity through support of minority-serving institutions, loan forgiveness programs, and recruitment efforts. It also should dedicate resources to support, house, and promote research that all educators need to inform their practice.
- ▶ **Fight for racial, social, and economic justice.** The administration needs to resolve funding inequities by driving more resources to students and communities with the greatest needs. In addition, the country needs an unadulterated national repudiation of white supremacist culture, and we expect the administration to reaffirm to all families, especially Native People and People of Color, that no haven exists for hate crimes, white supremacy, and anti-immigrant policies. Establishing an economy that works for all is key to achieving a more just society, and we look forward to partnering with the administration to secure adequate worker protections that provide for workers' health and safety, collective bargaining rights, and retirement security.
- ▶ **Protect and strengthen our democracy by ensuring every American's right to participate in it.** As a country, we need to do more to enable and encourage citizens to use their vote as their voice in their democracy. Unfortunately, we, as a nation, have witnessed how divisive agendas can test the fragility of our institutions. We should heed these lessons and move with definite purpose to insulate our elections from interference as well as support voter education programs, ensure voters access to a variety of reliable and accessible voting options, and institute uniform registration requirements.

Moving beyond this pandemic must include a renewed fight for racial and social justice. The National Education Association (NEA) believes that the country has an opportunity to rise to this occasion and reimagine a society that benefits all, not just the fortunate few. Our priorities, as a nation, must be reevaluated, and our approach to solving problems must change. We need the federal government to return to its role of ensuring equal access to opportunity, protecting the most vulnerable, and investing in the future of society. In addition, we need our elected leaders to commit to working in partnership with educators, families, and communities and break down those unjust and systemic structures that have denied opportunity and achievement to millions of capable, intelligent, and hardworking people whose only barrier was the color of their skin.

We look forward to working with a new administration and national leaders that support our vision of shared responsibility for equity, access, and opportunity and one that will proactively defend the rights of every American. Restoring confidence in our elected leaders and federal government is critical. Given the changing demographics that are enriching communities across the country, the administration can spare no effort in implementing and supporting concrete policies that directly confront existing racial disparities in school and campus funding, student support services, access to health care, and workers' rights.

Strong schools, supported working families, and empowered communities are the building blocks that fuel the American dream for everyone, and we still believe in that possibility.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Rebecca S. Pringle'.

Rebecca S. Pringle
President, National Education Association

INTRODUCTION

The National Education Association (NEA) works to ensure the continued vitality of public education as the cornerstone of our democracy, where education professionals have a respected and valued voice in preparing all students to succeed in a just, diverse, and interdependent world. The NEA believes public education is the gateway to opportunity.

With more than 3 million members, the NEA is the largest labor union in the United States and the world's largest professional association of educators. In fact, 1 in 100 Americans is an NEA member, and 1 in 39 voters reside in an NEA household. Advocating on behalf of our students is a responsibility that we take seriously, and we believe in working closely with our elected leaders to ensure that every student's well-being, needs, and rights are a priority.

At the NEA, we use the term "educator" to ensure that all of our members are seen and heard. This term encompasses teachers, aspiring educators, retired educators, education support professionals, specialized

instructional support personnel, librarians, and higher education faculty and staff. Because we believe in raising the voices of all of our members, regardless of their role, we also encourage all members to use their voice to enact change. Educators are the most trusted professionals in their field; they are the people who know students' names and who help students excel. Their input is vital to ensuring that public schools and institutions of higher education meet the needs of every student. It is our hope that in reading each of the following policy briefs, you will consider the whole spectrum of educators and how their voices can be embedded in the development and implementation of various policies.

Educators have the potential to be the change the education system needs. To ensure that all public schools and higher education institutions have the resources to succeed, we look forward to an active partnership with the Biden-Harris administration and other pro-public education allies.

The National Education Association (NEA) calls on national leaders to:

- ▶ Affirm that students deserve the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge in multiple ways, including the ability to apply that knowledge as part of a project or performance assessment.
- ▶ Commit to working with educators and other stakeholders to reexamine public school accountability systems throughout the state, and develop a system based on multiple forms of assessment that does not require extensive standardized testing, more accurately reflects the broad range of student learning, and is used to support students and improve schools—such as parts of the system used by the New York Performance Standards Consortium.
- ▶ Acknowledge that the over-reliance on high-stakes standardized testing in district, state, and federal accountability systems is undermining education quality and equity in U.S. public schools by hampering educators' efforts to focus on the broad range of learning experiences that promote the innovation, creativity, problem-solving, collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and deep subject-matter knowledge that will allow students to thrive in a democracy and an increasingly global society and economy.
- ▶ Recognize that the over-emphasis on standardized testing has caused considerable collateral damage—including narrowing the curriculum, teaching to the test, reducing love of learning and instructional time, pushing students out of school, driving excellent teachers out of the profession, and undermining school climate—in too many schools.
- ▶ Admit that high-stakes standardized testing has negative effects on students from all backgrounds, especially those from under-resourced communities, English language learners, children of color, and those with disabilities.
- ▶ Suspend federal testing requirements until after the COVID-19 crisis has passed.
- ▶ Oppose the use of standardized tests for federally mandated determination of a student's future or an educator's evaluation or as an indicator of school success.



The NEA believes that these are unprecedented times in public education. As the country faces multiple health and economic crises, we advocate that the federal

government devote its substantial resources to support students and schools impacted by this pandemic. As trusted professionals, educators are equipped to assess

their students using multiple measures to understand student progress and guide classroom instruction. We would call on the federal government to partner with educators to support these efforts and determine how and when to resume federal testing requirements.

In principle, however, the NEA believes that standardized tests and/or assessments should be used only to improve the quality of education and instruction for students. Standardized tests—whether norm-, criterion-, or standards-referenced—can validly assess

only a limited range of student learning. Therefore, they only should be an adjunct or supplement to information obtained through school- and classroom-based assessment conducted by teachers for purposes of supporting and strengthening instruction as well as for summarizing and evaluating student learning. Standardized tests are most useful when designed by the education professionals closest to the classroom and integrated with assessment information specific to local programs.

The National Education Association (NEA) calls on national leaders to:

- ▶ Oppose all charter school expansion that undermines traditional public schools.
- ▶ Bar federal funding to charter schools, charter school authorizers, and charter school management companies not authorized or operated by local school districts.
- ▶ Require charter schools, charter school authorizers, and charter school management companies to abide by the same laws and regulations applicable to traditional public schools.

Public education should be our first priority. Any program that diverts resources from the traditional public schools that 90 percent of American students attend by definition undermines the promise of public education. The NEA is dedicated to addressing the inequalities our students and communities face, and most charter schools do not contribute to the systemic framework that ensures all students have access to a more equitable, safe, and dynamic learning environment.

Where they operate, charter schools should be authorized and held accountable by the same agency that monitors and evaluates other schools in a public school district. They should be held to the same open meetings and public records requirements; federal, state, and local civil rights laws and regulations; and health and safety codes as traditional public schools.

Additionally, the staff should be held to the same licensure and qualifications requirements. A single authorizer, elected by the local community, ensures

integrated oversight as well as effective dissemination of effective practices. The NEA supports local charter school authorization and renewal decisions that are contingent on independent analyses, developed with community input, regarding the potential impact on other public schools and students in the district as a whole—and the attendance zone in particular—as well as whether other strategies might better serve students' needs. Public accountability ensures that schools are developed, monitored, and evaluated based on the needs of the community.

About 4 in 10 charter schools nationally are managed under contract by for-profit or nonprofit charter "chains" that may or may not be headquartered in the communities where their schools are located.¹ For-profit management companies should not operate charter schools. The NEA opposes charter schools that operate entirely online. The NEA also opposes for-profit management of public schools, which creates a conflict of interest and undermines the transparency required to maintain public accountability regarding school finances.

¹ Baker, B., Miron, G. (December 2015). The Business of Charter Schooling: Understanding the Policy's That Charter Operators Use for Financial Benefit. National Education Policy Center. Retrieved from nepc.colorado.edu/publication/charter-revenue.

The National Education Association (NEA) calls on national leaders to:

- ▶ Restore broad-based categorical eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to ensure that children and families regain the much-needed food assistance lost in the 2019 revision of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) regulations regarding categorical eligibility.¹
- ▶ Maintain healthy nutrition guidelines for school meals.²
- ▶ Strengthen and expand the reach of the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program for elementary students from predominantly economically disadvantaged families to support a reduction in chronic disease through improved dietary quality.³
- ▶ Provide funding and support to expand the Farm to School Grant Program, including continued expansion to early care and education settings, summer, afterschool, and tribal communities.⁴
- ▶ Support efforts to increase access to additional reimbursable meals and snacks for children in full-day child care.
- ▶ Increase funding and support for the School Breakfast Program.
- ▶ Train and support school food service professionals.
- ▶ Expand access to high-quality, healthy foods by promoting and funding scratch cooking, which includes providing adequate funding for purchasing, staff training, and kitchen equipment.
- ▶ Lower the area eligibility threshold and increase the per meal reimbursement rate for summer meals.
- ▶ Support unencumbered access to nutrition by enacting universal school meals.



Food insecurity is a major threat to the health and well-being of approximately 40 million people—or 12.5 percent of our population—and disproportionately impacts Native People and People of Color.⁵ It can lead to less educational attainment in children and negatively

affect social, emotional, and cognitive development. SNAP, free and reduced-price school meals, and participation in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) can help to reduce food insecurity.⁶

The NEA believes that all children should have access to healthy and nutritious meals daily regardless of their parent's ability to pay. We know that when students go hungry, they cannot focus on learning and are deprived of the opportunity to realize their full potential.

The NEA urges national leaders to commit to strengthen and improve the federal programs that serve millions of children and families across the United States.

¹ USD finalizes rule on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which triggers the loss of automatic eligibility for free school meals for many students. Final Rule. Retrieved from the Federal Register website: [federalregister.gov/documents/2019/12/05/2019-26044/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-requirements-for-able-bodied-adults-without-dependents](https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/12/05/2019-26044/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-requirements-for-able-bodied-adults-without-dependents).

² National Education Association. (April 2019). Principles for Reauthorizing Child Nutrition Programs. Retrieved from educationvotes.nea.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Child-Nutrition-Reauthorization-one-pager-April-2019.pdf.

³ USDA. (March 2013). *Final Evaluation of the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program*. Retrieved from fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/FFVP.pdf.

⁴ USDA. (2015). *Farm to School Census*. Retrieved from farmtoschoolcensus.fns.usda.gov.

⁵ Odoms-Young, A., Marino, B. (April/June 2018). Examining the Impact of Structural Racism on Food Insecurity: Implications for Addressing Racial/Ethnic Disparities. *Family & Community Health*, 40, S3-S6. Retrieved from journals.lww.com/familyandcommunityhealth/Abstract/2018/04001/Examining_the_Impact_of_Structural_Racism_on_Food.2.aspx.

⁶ National Education Association. (April 2018). Protect SNAP in the Farm Bill Reauthorization. Retrieved from educationvotes.nea.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/SNAP-and-the-Farm-Bill.pdf.

The National Education Association (NEA) calls on national leaders to:

- ▶ Reduce class sizes in consultation with educators.
- ▶ Base class size reductions on student needs, grade level, subject area content, and physical facilities.
- ▶ Lower the number of students per classroom in programs for students with exceptional needs.
- ▶ Require the collection and reporting of class size data that reflect the class size experienced by most students from state departments of education on a yearly basis.

The NEA believes that excellence in the classroom can best be attained by small class size. Research clearly demonstrates these positive impacts.

Tennessee's longitudinal class-size study—the Student Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) project—found that students enrolled in small classes as children were more likely to complete advanced math and English courses, finish high school, graduate on time, and graduate with honors than their peers who did not benefit from reduced class sizes.¹ A 2013 study published in the *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* found that class size benefits were especially pronounced for students of color, increasing their likelihood of earning a college degree and enrolling in higher-earning fields, such as STEM, business, and economics.²

Class size maximums must be based on the type of students, grade level, subject area content, and physical

facilities. The NEA believes in optimal class sizes in regular programs and a proportionately lower number in programs for students with exceptional needs.

Weighted class size formulas should be implemented to reflect the inclusion of exceptional students. The NEA further believes in establishing workload maximums for all curricular areas, not to exceed the recommendations of their respective national organizations.

Reducing class size helps to close opportunity gaps and has a positive impact on student learning. Simply stated—when qualified teachers teach smaller classes in modern schools, students learn more. Teachers with small classes can spend more one-on-one time and dedicate their energy to helping each child succeed. Smaller classes also enhance safety and positive behavior in the classroom.

¹ Achilles, C.M., Bain, H.P., Bellott, F., Boyd-Zaharias, J., Finn, J., Folger, J., Johnston, J., Word, E. (2008). *Tennessee's Student Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) project (V1)*. Retrieved from the Harvard Dataverse website: dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=hdl:1902.1/10766.

² Dynarski, S., Hyman, J., Schanzenbach, D.W. (2013). Experimental Evidence on the Effect of Childhood Investments on Postsecondary Attainment and Degree Completion. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*. 32(4): 692-717. Retrieved from classsizematters.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Dynarski_et_al-2013-Journal_of_Policy_Analysis_and_Management-1.pdf.

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The National Education Association (NEA) calls on national leaders to:

- ▶ Make community college free and eliminate costs for the first four years at all public higher education institutions, including minority-serving institutions. Provide additional grant aid to the lowest-income students and expand Pell Grants.
- ▶ Expand and simplify the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) and Teacher Loan Forgiveness programs, which enable college graduates to pursue careers in education and public service. Expand and align the Teacher Loan Forgiveness program with Public Service Loan Forgiveness by broadening those who qualify to include educators teaching all subject areas in public schools and working in all job categories in public education; all faculty, including contingent, and staff in higher education; and other education job categories. The new Secretary of Education should seek to cancel the student loan debts of experienced educators using all available tools and correct the current administrative deficiencies in the PSLF program.¹
- ▶ Expand access to high-quality dual enrollment courses, providing students with an accelerated opportunity to receive a postsecondary degree and reduce their student debt. Effectively address barriers to access for working and nontraditional students and ensure that students who qualify for student financial aid are not excluded from programs based on their immigration status or the status of their parents.
- ▶ Allow existing federal student loans to be refinanced so that students can maximize savings. Support legislation to provide individuals in bankruptcy reasonable options for discharging student loans.



Nationwide student debt is mounting, now totaling almost \$1.65 trillion.² Every American should have access to higher education, regardless of income. The staggering amount of overall student debt warrants federal intervention, including Public Service Loan Forgiveness, support for free public college, student

loan refinancing options, and the untangling of for-profit institutions from federal student aid.

Data shows that roughly one in five 15-year-olds in the United States don't understand basic financial concepts.³ For students (and families), financial literacy

is a must to help navigate the growing demand for postsecondary coursework. Student debt is a significant barrier to educational and economic advancement for students from under-resourced communities, who are disproportionately students of color.

In addition, expanding and streamlining Public Service Loan Forgiveness and Teacher Loan Forgiveness programs should be prioritized among reforms; doing so redresses long-standing institutionalized racial inequities in the country and is a key tool for diversifying the education professions.

¹ NPR. (October 2019). *Exclusive: Turf War Blocked CFPB From Helping Fix Student Loan Forgiveness Program*. Retrieved from [npr.org/2019/10/15/769326896/exclusive-turf-war-blocked-cfpb-from-helping-fix-student-loan-forgiveness-progra](https://www.npr.org/2019/10/15/769326896/exclusive-turf-war-blocked-cfpb-from-helping-fix-student-loan-forgiveness-progra).

² Hess, A. (June 12, 2020). *How Student Debt Became a \$1.6 Trillion Crisis*. CNBC. Retrieved from [cnbc.com/2020/06/12/how-student-debt-became-a-1point6-trillion-crisis.html](https://www.cnbc.com/2020/06/12/how-student-debt-became-a-1point6-trillion-crisis.html).

³ National Center for Education Statistics. (May 2017). *A First Look at the 2015 Program for International Student Assessment Financial Literacy Results*. Retrieved from [treasury.gov/resource-center/financial-education/Documents/NCES%20U.S.%20PISA%20Results%20for%20Financial%20Literacy%20Presentation.pdf](https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/financial-education/Documents/NCES%20U.S.%20PISA%20Results%20for%20Financial%20Literacy%20Presentation.pdf).

The National Education Association (NEA) calls on national leaders to:

- ▶ Increase funding for the Full-Service Community Schools Program, Magnet School Program, and other research-proven innovative school structures.
- ▶ Support only those school improvement strategies that employ an open democratic process that meaningfully engages community stakeholders, that adhere to collectively bargained labor agreements, and that require education services to be provided by public entities and public employees.
- ▶ Oppose public school options that compromise free, equitable, universal, and quality public education for every student.

The NEA believes all schools should use research-backed school improvement strategies designed to support an adequately and equitably resourced and racially just education system. The Community School Model (CSM) has a strong track record of closing opportunity gaps, supporting a culturally relevant and responsive climate, and causing significant and sustained school improvement. The NEA supports the use of the CSM in public schools where the local staff and community are supportive.

Community schools are community centers—open all day, every day to everyone. They bring together academic coursework, health and social services, youth and community development, and community engagement under one roof, leading to better learning, stronger families, and healthier communities. They build trust by opening and maintaining lines of communication and contribute to the necessary partnership that provides all children access to a high-quality public education, no matter the zip code in which they live.

NEA's model for community schools rests on six pillars of practice:

- ▶ Strong and proven culturally relevant curriculum that is inspiring and engaging, is well-rounded, and prepares students for college and career;
- ▶ High-quality teaching and learning delivered by fully licensed knowledgeable educators who are collaborative in their approach to instruction, curriculum design, and school improvement;
- ▶ Inclusive leadership that engages educators and administrators in planning and implementation of student-centered practices;
- ▶ Positive behavior practices that incorporate social and cultural considerations and support students academically and emotionally;
- ▶ Partnerships and collaboration that integrate families, local businesses, and community and civic groups into programs and services; and
- ▶ Coordinated and integrated wraparound support programs and services that address the needs of students, families, and the community.

The National Education Association (NEA) calls on national leaders to:

- ▶ Increase funding for Early Head Start (EHS) and Head Start (HS) to ensure all eligible children are served. In 2018-2019, only 11 percent of eligible children under age 3 had access to EHS, and 36 percent of children ages 3-5 had access to HS.¹
- ▶ Provide more children with access to high-quality child care programs. Too many families do not have high-quality child care options in their immediate communities.²
- ▶ Ensure no family making under 150 percent of state median income pays more than 7 percent of their income on child care. Child care is a major household expense and can comprise as much as 20 percent of the pay for moderate income families.³
- ▶ Provide universal access to high-quality pre-kindergarten (preK) programs for all 3- and 4-year-old children during the school day. Research on the publicly funded preK programs in Oklahoma, Boston, and districts in New Jersey demonstrate that high-quality preK programs can be implemented to scale across diverse communities when they have high program standards, teacher qualifications and compensation, and ongoing support for teachers.⁴
- ▶ Make kindergarten attendance mandatory for every 5-year-old child and require districts to offer full-day kindergarten. Only 17 states and the District of Columbia require children to attend kindergarten, and only 14 states and the District of Columbia require school districts to offer full-day kindergarten.
- ▶ Improve the compensation, education, and training of the early childhood workforce to ensure that all children have access to an educator equipped to meet their needs regardless of setting. Teacher qualifications, compensation, and professional development are strong determinants of early childhood program quality.⁵

The NEA is concerned about the growing number of children who enter kindergarten already behind their peers socially and academically. Evidence suggests this “school readiness” gap begins before children enter school and places children at risk of failure in school.

The NEA believes all children deserve access to early learning opportunities that will increase their chances for success in school and in life. However, access to high-quality early childhood programs is extremely uneven in the United States, with African American and Latinx children



and children from under-resourced communities less likely to have access to the kinds of early childhood programs that improve school readiness.⁶

The COVID-19 pandemic has further revealed how tenuous early childhood education and care is without universal public preschool. The daycare sector has been leveled by this crisis, and many parents of young children may find themselves without adequate daycare options when they are otherwise able to return to their normal workplace.⁷ While it is well understood that economic recovery depends on workers having reliable child care and schools for

their children to attend, the lack of funding for these necessities raises deep concerns about potential impacts on the ability of women who are also primary caregivers to continue to fully participate in the paid workforce, a particularly troubling trend given the high proportions of women who are sole, primary, or co- breadwinners for their families.⁸

The NEA believes it is time for every child to have access to high-quality early childhood programs. The NEA urges national leaders to make high-quality early childhood education programs a priority and consider it an integral part of the public education continuum.

¹ National Head Start Association. (2020). *Access to Head Start in the United States of America*. Retrieved from nhsa.org/national-head-start-fact-sheets.

² Sandstrom H., Giesen L., Chaudrey A. (2012). *How Contextual Constraints Affect Low-Income Working Parents' Child Care Choices*. Retrieved from the Urban Institute website: urban.org/research/publication/how-contextual-constraints-affect-low-income-working-parents-child-care-choices.

³ Erickson, J. (2014). *The Middle-Class Squeeze: A Picture of Stagnant Incomes, Rising Costs, and What We Can Do to Strengthen America's Middle Class*. Retrieved from the American Progress website: americanprogress.org/issues/economy/reports/2014/09/24/96903/the-middle-class-squeeze.

⁴ Yoshikawa, H., Weiland, C., Brooks-Gunn, J., Burchinal, M., Espinosa, L., Gormley, W. T., Ludwig, J., Magnuson, K., Phillips, D., Zaslow, M. (October 2013). *Investing in Our Future: The Evidence Base on Preschool*. Retrieved from the Foundation for Child Development website: fcd-us.org/assets/2013/10/Evidence20Base20on20Preschool20Education20FINAL.pdf.

⁵ Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Kasmin, R. (May 2018). *NIEER Pre-K Data Snapshot: Lead Teacher Workforce Qualifications, Pay and Parity*. Retrieved from National Institute for Early Education Research website: nieer.org/policy-issue/nieer-pre-k-data-snapshot-lead-teacher-workforce-qualifications-pay-and-parity.

⁷ Vesoulis, A. (September 2020). COVID-19 Has Nearly Destroyed the Childcare Industry—and It Might Be Too Late to Save It. *Time*. Retrieved from time.com/5886491/covid-childcare-daycare.

⁸ Glynn, S.J. (May 2019). Breadwinning Mothers Continue to Be the U.S. Norm. Center for American Progress. Retrieved from americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2019/05/10/469739/breadwinning-mothers-continue-u-s-norm.

The National Education Association (NEA) calls on national leaders to:

- ▶ Reach an agreement with Congress on at least \$175 billion in additional federal emergency aid to stabilize public education funding for students in communities and schools and on campuses. The funding should be distributed to states and local districts based on need and may be allocated in phases, with a significant amount allocated initially, followed by gradually lesser amounts to mitigate against a fiscal cliff. The agreement should also include \$12 billion for the E-rate program, which helps schools ensure Wi-Fi hotspots and connected devices for K-12 students who do not have Internet access and connected devices at home; and ample fiscal relief for state and local governments like that provided in the House-passed HEROES Act to avoid laying off public service workers—in health care, public safety, education, and other areas—who are on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ▶ Propose a down payment on a historic investment in public education—to be known as U.S. Public Education is a Priority, or U.S. PEP—as part of the first budget plan that would increase the federal investment in public education from about 2 percent currently to 5 percent over a specified number of years. This bold commitment would help ensure every student has access to a great public education and is crucial in preparing students to become active civic participants in a vibrant democracy and to compete in a 21st-century global economy. U.S. PEP would include a multiyear effort to quadruple the federal investment in Title I; fully fund IDEA; and, at a minimum, restore funding, adjusted for both inflation and enrollment growth, for all other major federal education programs—such as Title II, Part A and Title III for English learners—to authorized levels or those that existed prior to the enactment of the Budget Control Act of 2011.
- ▶ Establish federal financial incentive grants for states to increase equity, sufficiency, and fiscal effort in state education finance systems.

Persistent and entrenched inequities in state public school systems existed prior to COVID-19, but the pandemic has exposed them in a way that presents an opportunity to address the underlying causes, which, in other circumstances, would typically be ignored. A robust and sustained federal response can be the catalyst for permanent change.

The last economic crisis—now known as the Great Recession—demonstrated the painful consequences of cutting off federal aid before a recovery could take hold. When federal aid disappeared, states were forced to cut spending deeply and lay off workers to balance their budgets, which delayed an economic recovery and weakened the U.S. economy longer term. On average,

states took at least six years (from 2008 to 2014) to recover the ground they lost in education funding, and at least half did not return to the funding levels they had experienced pre-recession until several years later.¹ State spending cuts in education disproportionately harmed already under-resourced school districts that were more dependent on state aid. Moreover, multiyear state cuts to education set back student learning for years, especially for the most vulnerable students. Overall gains in student achievement stalled and graduation rates declined in districts with a higher proportion of students from under-resourced communities, students with disabilities, English language learners, and Black students.^{2,3}

For decades, Congress has failed to fully fund Title I, Part A grants to local educational agencies and IDEA state grants. Presidential leadership has also been lacking for most of the same period. For school year 2019–2020, the federal government provided \$29 billion less than the level required to fully fund Title I, Part A⁴—with more than half of all public school students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch—and \$23 billion less than the level required to fully fund IDEA state grants. The current federal share is the lowest it has been since 2000.⁵ Because services for children with disabilities are required by law, states and local school districts must absorb the costs not covered by the federal government.

The Budget Control Act of 2011 restrained domestic spending through the enforcement of strict spending caps and the threat of sequestration. FY 2019 discretionary resources for the U.S. Department of Education are more than \$7 billion below the FY 2011

level (adjusted for inflation)⁶—a direct result of this period of misguided austerity. Nondefense domestic spending, which includes education, is not the cause of rising annual deficits; in fact, it has accounted for the smallest share of the national economy for the last 20 years.⁷

Today, most state school finance systems are not fair, adequate, or well-designed, with outmoded, arbitrary funding formulas that lazily adhere to distributing funding based on prior year spending and political, not educational, considerations. Federal incentive grants can be an effective lever in moving states off the status quo and encouraging greater fiscal effort. A large body of evidence from rigorous empirical research says money matters. Sustained improvements in the level and distribution of funding across local public school districts lead to improvements in the level and distribution of student outcomes.⁸

¹ Griffith, M. (April 30, 2020). The Impact of the COVID-19 Recession on Teaching Positions. Learning Policy Institute. Retrieved from learningpolicyinstitute.org/blog/impact-covid-19-recession-teaching-positions.

² Knight, D.S. (2017). Are High-Poverty School Districts Disproportionately Impacted by State Funding Cuts? School Finance Equity Following the Great Recession. *Journal of Education Finance*. 43(2), 169–194. Retrieved from muse.jhu.edu/article/688011.

³ Kirabo Jackson, C., Wigger, C., Xiong, H. Do School Spending Cuts Matter? Evidence from the Great Recession. Northwestern University Institute for Policy Research. Retrieved from ipr.northwestern.edu/our-work/working-papers/2018/WP-18-02.html; and Shores, K., Steinberg, M. (2017). The Impact of the Great Recession on Student Achievement: Evidence from Population Data. Stanford Center for Education Policy Analysis. Retrieved from cepa.stanford.edu/content/impact-great-recession-student-achievement-evidence-population-data.

⁴ Data pulled from *Title I Funding Gap*, National Education Association (April 2019).

⁵ Data pulled from *IDEA Funding Gap*, National Education Association (March 2019).

⁶ Committee for Education Funding. (September 2019). *Budget Charts*. Retrieved from cef.org/wp-content/uploads/FY-2020-budget-charts-9.18.19.pdf.

⁷ Congressional Budget Office. (August 2019). *An Update to the Budget and Economic Outlook: 2019 to 2029*. Retrieved from cbo.gov/publication/55551.

⁸ Baker, B.D. (2018). *How Money Matters for Schools*. Learning Policy Institute. Retrieved learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/how-money-matters-brief.

The National Education Association (NEA) calls on national leaders to:

- ▶ Provide comprehensive and critical COVID-19 relief (HEROES Act or another stimulus).
- ▶ Implement a nationwide mask mandate and condition COVID-19 relief funding on implementation of effective mitigation strategies, including, but not limited to, the use of masks and social distancing as well as notice to and quarantine of close contacts of individuals infected with COVID-19 in schools and institutions of higher education.
- ▶ Create robust, universal, and well-funded testing and contact tracing systems.
- ▶ Extend unemployment benefits, including Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation, Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA), and Pandemic Unemployment Compensation under the CARES Act; expand PUA to individuals who are advised by a medical professional to leave their employment to protect a high-risk household family member; and provide funding to and oversight of state unemployment systems to ensure those benefits are paid out to workers.
- ▶ Ensure that additional federal funding is not offset by diversions or cuts in local or state public school or institution of higher education funding.
- ▶ Ensure that recovery efforts are designed to advance equity by conditioning funds on effective state initiatives to bridge the digital divide and support students who are not able to fully access educational services during the pandemic.



Since March 2020, our society and our economy have been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite more than 200,000 fatalities, millions of positive cases, thousands of shuttered local businesses, and tens of millions of people out of work, the Trump administration has refused to lead the country out of the

pandemic. Their actions have intensified the effects of the pandemic and further divided our society. Among their more egregious acts, the Trump administration attempted to divert over \$1 billion in CARES Act funds from public schools to push for vouchers and threatened to withhold federal resources from schools

that did not open in-person regardless of local COVID cases.

The consequences of the pandemic have affected Native People and People of Color particularly hard in terms of access to education, job losses, pay cuts, and cases and death rates.¹

- ▶ About 16 million students are not able to participate in digital learning because they don't have the broadband Internet and/or technology they need.
- ▶ After layoffs and furloughs, it has been most difficult for mothers of school-age children, Black men, Black women, Hispanic men, Asian Americans, younger Americans (ages 25-34), and people without college degrees to return to the workforce.
- ▶ Nearly half (45.9 percent) of all COVID-19 cases in ages 5-17 were among Hispanic/Latinx children, with a similar percent in children ages 0-4 (45.2 percent). Only about a quarter of all U.S. children are Hispanic/Latinx. Hispanic/Latinx individuals also make up a plurality of diagnosed cases within the key age groups for parents: 34.9 percent of those 18-29, 38 percent of those 30-39, and 38.6 percent of those 40-49.
- ▶ In contrast, white children make up about half of the under-17 population; yet, they represented

only about a quarter of COVID-19 cases. Black and Native American children made up a slightly greater percentage of COVID-19 cases than they do the white child population but were not overrepresented nearly to the degree of Hispanic/Latinx children.

- ▶ Similarly, a study of children tested for COVID-19 in Washington, DC, showed the highest positive rates for Hispanic/Latinx children (46.4 percent), followed by Black children (30 percent), and then non-Hispanic white children (7.3 percent). Children from historically marginalized communities were also more likely to test positive, with those in the lowest median family income quartile far more likely to test positive than those in the highest quartile (37.7 percent vs. 8.7 percent).

Federal recovery efforts must explicitly address these inequities. We need our national leaders to prioritize public education in this country, strengthen students' access to postsecondary options, and put in place the protections and significant resources needed to support digital learning and the safe and just return to in-person instruction in schools and on campuses. It also must secure a real economic stimulus package that addresses workers' needs through critical unemployment supports so that Americans can continue to survive beyond the pandemic and into the post-COVID economy.

¹ National Education Association. (August 10, 2020). Rapid Research Review: Children and COVID-19. Retrieved from mnea.org/Uploads/Public/Documents/News/COVID/NEA-RapidResearch-COVID-19_08102020.pdf.

The National Education Association (NEA) calls on national leaders to:

- ▶ Declare that affordable, comprehensive health care is a right.
- ▶ Ensure that national health care policy mandates universal coverage with the highest quality health care at the lowest possible cost.

In addition to our advocacy for broad health system change, the NEA advocates for incremental reforms to improve the health and health care of children, students, communities, and active and retired educators, whether or not they receive employment-based insurance.

The NEA is a strong supporter of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and the employment-based health care system upon which much of the ACA rests. We will continue to work to defend the ACA, including its consumer protections and employer-penalty provisions and the tax exclusion for employment-based health coverage. At the same time, we will maintain our efforts to improve the law through the complete elimination of the excise tax on high-cost health plans, a component of the ACA that will have a disproportionately negative impact on women, older workers, and those individuals who happen to live in areas of the country that have higher health care costs.

The NEA also supports single-payer health care, with the understanding that employment-based health benefits may still have an important supplemental role to play, medically and financially, in a single-payer system.

We will continue to advocate for single-payer initiatives that ensure that school-based health services and health coverage for children and others are cost-effective and appropriately broad and tailored. The NEA will continue to defend the tax exclusion for employment-based insurance in this context.

Students face complex health threats in and outside of schools that require comprehensive policies tailored to their needs. In today's health care system, protection of and adequate funding for Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program, and Medicare are essential. The NEA opposes efforts to undermine these programs whether by block-granting Medicaid, establishing Medicare vouchers, or shifting the cost of these programs to beneficiaries and their families. Similarly, the NEA supports health care initiatives designed to lower costs, improve quality, and protect children and other health care consumers, including plans to lower prescription drug costs, protect health care consumers from surprise medical bills, expand school-based mental health services, and ensure that school-based health centers are funded into the future.

The National Education Association (NEA) calls on national leaders to:

- ▶ Implement comprehensive immigration reform that ensures the humane treatment of all immigrants and a reasonable, fair, and orderly immigration process for all aspiring citizens while permanently ending policies that separate families, divide communities, and encourage racial profiling.
- ▶ Immediately end the detention and criminalization of immigrant children and their families, including an end to ICE raids, which inflict chaos, fear, and instability on entire communities.
- ▶ Support legislation and take executive action to put immigrant youth, including past and present Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients, and long-time beneficiaries of Temporary Protected Status and Deferred Enforced Departure on a path to citizenship.
- ▶ Support Safe Zones in schools through legislation or executive action so that students do not fear immigration enforcement actions will take place at their school or on their school routes.



Our nation's public schools form the center of our communities, and as educators, we believe that all students deserve the support, tools, and opportunity to learn and thrive with safety and dignity. Public schools unite students and communities, and education is central to reaching and striving for greater opportunity and cultural understanding.

Educators interact with diverse students every day in our classrooms, schools, and communities. They play a unique role in supporting immigrant students and creating inclusive school communities.

Real immigration reform will strengthen our communities and make us all safer. The NEA believes that to accomplish this, we must:

- ▶ Fund alternatives to detention and invest in the necessary mental health supports for children and families who have been subjected to the horrors of

forced separation. Families belong together, but, even together, they do not belong in jail or detention.

- ▶ Provide a path to permanent legal status for those immigrants who are full and contributing members of U.S. communities, raising families, paying taxes, and enriching society in myriad ways.

- ▶ Affirm the right to every child, regardless of immigration status, to access a free public K-12 education. All students should have the opportunity to learn without fear and distress from harsh and unfair immigration enforcement.

As we move forward, our laws should reflect our core values as a nation that welcomes immigrants, respects due process, and gives everyone fair treatment under the law. They should reflect equality, fairness,

accountability, and opportunity. We have to continue to connect to these core values and protect them against those seeking to exclude and divide.

We make gains together as a country when we welcome immigrants, ensure that everyone is treated with dignity and respect, and embrace the diversity, strength, and new perspectives immigrants bring to our communities. We are all better when we welcome immigrants into our communities.

The National Education Association (NEA) calls on national leaders to:

- ▶ Add additional judgeships to the federal district and circuit courts, increasing the number of judgeships for each circuit and district according to population growth. This is particularly important for the Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Circuits. The overwhelmed dockets of the federal courts have led courts to limit access to justice, and ordinary Americans seeking relief from civil wrongs have been the most affected by the closing of the federal courthouse doors.
- ▶ Nominate lawyers who represent both the diversity of the nation and the professional diversity of attorneys. Nominate People of Color, women, LGBTQ people, those with disabilities, immigrants, and those from various religious backgrounds. Prioritize nominating lawyers for judgeships who have represented labor unions, workers, consumers, immigrants, or civil rights plaintiffs.
- ▶ Consider steps to rebalance the Court by adding associate justice seats and nominating individuals to those seats who reflect the diversity of the modern United States. The unprecedented power grab by the Republican Senate during the last year of the Obama administration and the last year of the Trump administration has left the U.S. Supreme Court tilted far to the right, both out of step with most Americans' views and unrepresentative of most Americans' experiences.

For decades, conservatives have waged an aggressive campaign to take over the courts, including the nation's highest court, and have used that power to entrench their political, economic, and social power. The past few years have seen that long and deliberate campaign come to fruition. Republicans not only blocked President Obama's nomination of Merrick Garland, but they also refused to consider it. And Republicans did so even though many had specifically called on President Obama to nominate Garland in the past, citing his legal brilliance and impartiality. At the same time, Republicans blocked well over 100 lower court judges, leaving them open for President Trump to fill. Because of these unprecedented actions, the Republicans appointed two young ideologues to the Supreme Court and many more to the lower courts, who will likely serve for decades. And with staggering hypocrisy, Republican senators acted with unprecedented haste to hold hearings and, ultimately, confirm a third ideologue to the Court only weeks before the 2020 presidential election.

The lower federal court judges are young, extreme ideologues, who do not reflect the modern United States. Of the 218 federal judges confirmed under the Trump administration, 76 percent are men and 84 percent are white.¹ We need to build a bench with judges who understand the interests of ordinary Americans.

Meanwhile, our courts are overwhelmed because, while their dockets continue to swell, no judgeships have been added since the 1990s. The overwhelmed lower courts have led judges to create procedural hurdles and substantive law that keeps civil rights plaintiffs—and particularly plaintiffs bringing employment disputes—out of federal court. Adding judgeships to the lower courts would not only relieve unmanageable caseloads and overworked judges, but it would also present an opportunity to improve judicial diversity.

¹ American Constitution Society. (2020). Diversity of the Federal Bench. Retrieved from aclaw.org/judicial-nominations/diversity-of-the-federal-bench.

The National Education Association (NEA) calls on national leaders to:

- ▶ Ensure the protection of transgender students. The administration should clarify and reinstate Obama-Biden guidance, which outlined anti-transgender bias that was covered by laws against gender bias and, thus, led the way for investigations into such discrimination. Prior to that guidance, some cases involving transgender students were investigated as gender discrimination but advocates for transgender students said some of their cases needed to be defined as anti-transgender bias.¹
- ▶ Support developmentally appropriate gender identity and LGBTQ equity education programs.
- ▶ Rescind any efforts made by the Trump administration to weaken the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), including the U.S. Department of Education’s proposal to further amend the definition of harassment and bullying based on sex in the 2019-2020 CRDC; the definition in its current form eliminates specific reference to gender identity, gender expression, and nonconforming gender stereotypes.²
- ▶ Pass the Safe Schools Improvement Act of 2019 (H.R. 2653/S.2548), which prohibits bullying and harassment on sexual orientation or gender identity.
- ▶ Enforce and strengthen the protections granted under the Supreme Court ruling in the *Bostock v. Clayton County, Georgia* case (2020), which announced that LGBTQ employees—including all LGBTQ educators—are protected under federal law from discrimination at work based on sexual orientation or gender identity.



All students and educators deserve to be treated with respect, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. Safe and affirming schools are a core element of student success.

Seventy-seven percent of K-12 students who were out as (or perceived to be) transgender experienced at least one significant form of discrimination, such as being verbally harassed by peers, disciplined more harshly

than cis-gender (not transgender) peers, or physically or sexually assaulted because others believed they were transgender. Harassment can force LGBTQ students to avoid classes or extracurriculars, stay home from school, or even leave school entirely. All schools should be safe and welcoming environments for all students.

¹ Office for Civil Rights. (June 6, 2017). OCR Instructions to the Field re Complaints Involving Transgender Students. Retrieved from documentcloud.org/documents/3866816-OCR-Instructions-to-the-Field-Re-Transgender.html.

² U.S. Department of Education. (September 19, 2019). Notice: Agency Information Collection Activities; Proposals, Submissions, and Approvals: Agency Information Collection Activities; Comment Request; Mandatory Civil Rights Data Collection. Retrieved from beta.regulations.gov/document/ED-2019-ICCD-0119-0001.

POSTSECONDARY FACULTY, STAFF, AND INSTITUTIONS

The National Education Association (NEA) calls on national leaders to:

- ▶ Accelerate postsecondary investments. Provide incentive programs to spur state reinvestment in institutional capacity for instructional and student support services. Increase funding for institutional aid programs and capital financing that provide support to Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribal Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and Asian-Pacific-Islander-Serving Institutions.
- ▶ Promote parity across the board. Ensure equal treatment of two- and four-year institutions. Require students to be exposed to both in-person and technological education modules. Provide fair and equitable treatment for contingent employees in higher education. We need to prevent the overuse and exploitation of contingent faculty to improve student learning.
- ▶ Give voice to higher education faculty and staff. Promote articulation agreements between secondary and postsecondary institutions. Resume funding for the National Study of Postsecondary Faculty and include data collection on both tenure-line and contingent faculty. Support efforts to recruit and retain diverse faculty and staff.
- ▶ Ensure campus safety and inclusion. Provide federal funding for programs that assist postsecondary institutions develop emergency response plans. Ensure that campuses and law enforcement have the resources to enforce laws that protect against sexual assaults and harassment. Ensure all campus employees have access to resources that help support today's increasingly diverse campuses.

Our institutions of higher education need renewed and significant financial commitments from state and federal governments. The ability to provide students with the education they need and desire to be competitive and contribute to our society hangs in the balance as resources continue to decline.¹ Our students need safe and technologically current learning environments, where they are supported by faculty and staff who are respected.

Data confirms a steady and growing income gap between college graduates and those without a bachelor's degree. Without sufficient financial resources and human capital, postsecondary institutions will struggle to meet the pressing challenges of "controlling costs amid increased fiscal pressures, ensuring that graduates are prepared for the jobs of the future, adapting to changing technology, and responding to the country's changing demographics."²

¹ Brownstein, R. (May 2018). American Higher Education Hits a Dangerous Milestone. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/05/american-higher-education-hits-a-dangerous-milestone/559457.

² Parker, K. (August 2019). *The Growing Partisan Divide in Views of Higher Education*. Retrieved from the Pew Research Center website: pewsocialtrends.org/essay/the-growing-partisan-divide-in-views-of-higher-education/.

PRIVATE SCHOOL VOUCHERS

The National Education Association (NEA) calls on national leaders to:

- ▶ Oppose the enactment of any new voucher program, including education savings accounts and tuition tax credit schemes, or the expansion of existing programs.
- ▶ Repeal the expansion of Section 529 of the Internal Revenue Code that permits the use of distributions from education savings plans for qualified elementary and secondary education expenses.
- ▶ Limit use of Coverdell Education Savings Accounts to qualified higher education expenses.
- ▶ Discontinue funding of the Scholarships for Opportunity and Results (SOAR) Act. This voucher program authorizes the diversion of \$20 million annually to private schools in the District of Columbia; it also offers taxpayers no accountability for the use of the funds and has consistently failed to demonstrate academic effectiveness.
- ▶ Prohibit the disbursement of federal funds to organizations or providers that discriminate on the basis of race, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, disability, national origin, or immigration status.

The NEA believes that our nation's continued success as a participatory democracy and as a world leader depends on our commitment to excellence in public education. This commitment carries with it the need for a reliable source of adequate funding that is equitably distributed. The NEA further believes that voucher plans, tuition tax credits, education savings accounts, and related funding mechanisms undermine support for public education, facilitate racial and socio-economic segregation, and weaken the wall of separation between church and state.

Vouchers divert scarce resources from public schools, while offering no countervailing benefits. Multiple studies analyzing assessment data confirm that voucher students do not perform better than their public school peers. Furthermore, accountability in these programs has been notoriously lax, resulting in the loss of millions of taxpayer dollars. Private schools can and do discriminate by denying admission on the basis of religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, citizenship status, English language proficiency, and disability.¹ Using federal tax dollars to subsidize such discrimination is unconscionable.

¹National Education Association. (2019). *Vouchers Do Not Improve Student Achievement: Research Summary*.

The National Education Association (NEA) calls on national leaders to:

- ▶ Eliminate the (pay) penalty of working in education by advocating for fair, equitable, and professional wages for all educators, including teachers, education support professionals (ESPs), and specialized instructional support personnel (SISP) in PreK-12 schools and faculty and staff in institutions of higher education (IHEs).
- ▶ Commit that all public dollars will only be used in ways that respect the dignity of living and work by requiring that wages in PreK-12 school systems and IHEs sufficiently provide for the regional cost of living and enable educators to hold only one job.
- ▶ Ensure that all working in PreK-12 and IHEs have the opportunity for professional growth and salary advancement.



Professional pay is a critical tool to recruit and retain highly qualified school staff, though educators continue to face a significant wage gap compared to other college-educated professionals in comparable fields. This is present for all who work in education, but most commonly described and evidenced in teachers. According to the Economic Policy Institute, this gap in pay (often referred to as the “teaching penalty”) has grown substantially since the mid-1990s; in 2019, it was 19.2 percent. Teachers in every state are paid less than their professional counterparts who have similar degrees and skill sets. Now, the total compensation gap is 10.2 percent, and salaries alone are 19 percent behind other college-educated workers.¹

Pay erosion and the marginalization of the education profession have created a growing shortage of educators—including teachers, paraeducators, nurses,

social workers, etc.—in the United States. At the same time, for-profit entities have secured contracts with and profited off of public school systems.

Cuts in education funding over the years have resulted in minimal salary increases, and those who have received increases have seen them wiped out by inflation and increases in insurance premiums. After adjusting for inflation alone, the national average teacher salary has decreased by 1.7 percent over the last decade. Starting teacher pay has decreased by 2.6 percent over the same period, with 59 percent of public school districts still offering teachers a starting salary that is below \$40,000.² For most ESPs, average salaries are often well below the cost of living; for example, the average salary of transportation workers is

\$30,794, of food service workers is \$22,203, and of paraeducators \$27,100.³

These low salaries force many educators to work second and third jobs. Increasingly, ESPs are working solely for health and retirement benefits, and their second and third jobs are often the source of take-home pay. This low pay prevents educators from being able to afford to live where they work, which also factors into the high turnover rate. And with increasingly difficult working conditions, teaching is becoming a less appealing profession.

Raising educator salaries to be commensurate with competing fields will help school districts recruit and retain a high-quality workforce. In the absence of

this, the effects of low pay are apparent: Most states are experiencing teacher, paraeducator, and bus driver shortages, among others. Just as professional compensation is vital to recruiting and retaining high-quality educators over time, a high-quality workforce is vital to providing student services and creating the conditions under which student learning can thrive. The two cannot—and should not—be separated.

We know that salary and education funding were major motivators in many of the “Red for Ed” walkouts; we must ensure that educator pay be sustainable through improved and consistent education funding. Programs such as temporary stipends or test-score-based bonuses, which can disappear by funding cutbacks or policy changes, are not the answer.

¹ Economic Policy Institute. (September 2020). *Teacher Pay Penalty Dips but Persists in 2019*. Retrieved from epi.org/publication/teacher-pay-penalty-dips-but-persists-in-2019-public-school-teachers-earn-about-20-less-in-weekly-wages-than-nonteacher-college-graduates.

² National Education Association. (June 2020). *Rankings of the States 2019 and Estimates of School Statistics 2020*. Retrieved from nea.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/2020%20Rankings%20and%20Estimates%20Report%20FINAL_0.pdf; National Education Association. (May 2020). *Teacher Salary Benchmark Data*. Retrieved from nea.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/2018-2019%20Teacher%20Salary%20Benchmark%20Report.pdf.

³ Data pulled from the 2014–2018 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample.

The National Education Association (NEA) calls on national leaders to:

- ▶ Provide adequate funding for the state's general education fund, which would support the retirement system's annual recommended contribution.
- ▶ Fully repeal the Government Pension Offset (GPO)/Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP).
- ▶ Strengthen Social Security by eliminating the cap on maximum taxable earnings. By eliminating the cap, the Social Security trust fund is strengthened, funding problems are reduced, benefits remain steady, and every American worker pays their fair share.
- ▶ Ensure that all public workers, whether public or private sector, are offered retirement plan options.

In addition, the NEA opposes:

- ▶ Any proposal to privatize Social Security;
- ▶ Provisions and regulations that deprive public employees of Social Security benefits;
- ▶ Mandatory coverage of public employees under Social Security for employee groups that have declined coverage; and
- ▶ The present practice of taking back earned benefits from Social Security permitted through the Government Pension Offset (GPO)/Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) even if benefits are already being paid.

The NEA believes that retirement security for education employees can be assured only by participation in a defined benefit retirement plan from a state or local retirement system.

Keeping experienced educators in the classroom improves instruction and creates stable environments for students. Research demonstrates that the best educators develop their skills through years of experience.¹ That is why it is so important for states to not only attract the best teaching talent but also retain those educators. Strong, well-run defined benefit (DB) pension plans are key to attracting and retaining high-quality educator talent. They are more cost effective and provide greater retirement security than the alternatives. This, in turn, encourages younger educators to make teaching their career instead of a short-term stopping-off point.

This is especially timely as more states and school districts face growing shortages of qualified teachers. Some states have taken shortsighted and damaging actions to undercut traditional defined benefit plans. Educators see those actions as an attack on their profession and public education, driving more of them out of teaching. Since the recession, teacher retirement systems have been under constant attack, causing the number of students enrolled in teacher education programs to plummet, which has horrible consequences for our classrooms. In states with long-running, highly public fights over teacher retirement programs—like Pennsylvania, Kentucky, and Michigan—the teacher pipeline is down about 60 percent (versus the national average of 40 percent).²

In states where educators have a choice between a pension and a savings plan like a 401k, they

overwhelmingly choose a pension after learning the details. Pension plans are comprehensive, providing disability benefits, death benefits, and often cost-of-living adjustments; and the short-timers who leave their profession before reaching vesting still get their contributions back with interest, just like in a 401k. Unfortunately, nearly every teacher retirement system has undergone changes that require educators to sacrifice in order to make their retirement system sustainable. They have also paid the price with a decade of wage stagnation to help generate funds for fixing their pension systems. These so-called reforms worsen the growing retirement security anxiety that millions of Americans feel.

The NEA also believes that Social Security is a social contract between the U.S. government and its citizens that must never be breached. Social Security benefits

should be guaranteed for all participants regardless of age, gender, or marital status. To better ensure retirement security, Social Security benefits should not be integrated with other retirement benefits. Social Security is a critical social insurance program, and therefore, initiatives should be undertaken that ensure its long-term solvency. These measures should guarantee at least the current level of promised benefits that provide inflation-adjusted retirement benefits for retirees, family survivors of deceased workers, and disabled workers and their families.

The Association supports the availability of voluntary Social Security coverage to eligible school employee groups—when initiated by those groups—in states and localities in which public employees are not covered by Social Security.

¹ Rice, J.K. (2010). *The Impact of Teacher Experience: Examining the Evidence and Policy Implications* (Brief 11). Retrieved from the Urban Institute's website: urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/33321/1001455-The-Impact-of-Teacher-Experience.PDF.

² National School Boards Association. (2019). *Fixing the Holes in the Teacher Pipeline: Three Ways for School Leaders to Act*. Retrieved from nsba.org/Perspectives/2019/Fixing-Teacher-Pipeline-Holes.

SAFE AND JUST SCHOOLS AND CAMPUSES

The National Education Association (NEA) calls on national leaders to:

- ▶ Acknowledge that COVID-19 has shone a bright light on vast racial inequities in society, and champion efforts to fix the vast systemic injustices in the education system. Black and Brown students, LGBTQ students, and differently abled students face disproportionately high discipline rates; 47 states and the District of Columbia do not meet the recommended student-to-counselor ratio; and 14 million students are in schools with police officers but no counselors, school health professionals, school psychologists, or school social workers.¹
- ▶ Prioritize racial, social, and economic justice in developing guidance and providing fiscal support for states, local public school districts, and institutions of higher education (IHEs) as they implement or update plans for our students and educators to return to in-person instruction that ensure the health, safety, and wellness of all while also ensuring the quality education opportunities every student deserves.
- ▶ Provide sufficient resources so that educators receive training in proven strategies, such as restorative justice practices and trauma-informed practices, and so that there is a market increase in counseling and school health staff to effectively and empathetically support student learning and growth through the pandemic and beyond.
- ▶ Establish a federal floor for health and safety protections in schools and IHEs that specifies when in-person instruction may safely resume based on scientifically valid measures of community transmission and requires that effective mitigation measures—including the use of masks and social distancing—be in place before such instruction resumes.
- ▶ Provide increased funding for school-based health and mental health services, including school nurses and counselors, to ensure access to mental health supports for pandemic-related trauma and stress for students and staff.
- ▶ Establish a federal database where all positive cases in a school can be reported and publicly available.
- ▶ Incentivize school cooperation with public health officials for contact tracing and provide guidance on how best to keep staff and students out of school if they test positive or are identified as a close contact and need to quarantine.



- ▶ Ensure local access to robust, universal, and well-funded testing.
- ▶ Bridge the digital divide where in-person instruction cannot safely resume to ensure families can access distance learning on behalf of their children and support educators with resources to ensure effective distance learning.
- ▶ Provide federal guidance and resources to support effective plans for distance learning and related professional development.
- ▶ Require the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to systematically gather and make publicly available data on COVID-19 mitigation strategies and COVID-19 cases—including case data disaggregated by demographic characteristics—in schools and IHEs.

No one wants to be back in classrooms more than educators; however, the health and safety of our students, families, and educators must be the primary driver to determine when it is safe to reopen and return to school buildings and campuses. Extended school and college closures have upended families and student learning. It has been most drastically felt in Native communities and communities of color. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that our public schools are the cornerstones of our communities, and it has become clear that we cannot fully reopen the economy and our communities until we reopen public schools; and we cannot reopen schools until resources and assistance are available to support students' ability to learn and succeed in a safe environment.

Many educators struggle with these same demands in their own families and also face demands to return to work under conditions that are unsafe. Teachers have had to convert months' worth of in-person lesson plans to distance learning contexts, support both in-person and distance learning at the same time, and work with ever-changing and large cohorts of students. Food service workers have consistently prepared nutritious meals for students during the pandemic, and school counselors, social workers, and paraeducators have

supported students and families in this time. All of these demands have led to unprecedented retirements and resignations from our public schools.

As part of a comprehensive COVID-19 response and recovery plan, it is imperative that the federal government provide at least \$175 billion for the Education Stabilization Fund to distribute to states, allocated by formula, for public preK through post-secondary education to fill budget gaps caused by declining state revenues.² School districts and college campuses need this to adapt facilities for social distancing; provide necessary equipment for students and educators, including PPE when appropriate; adjust staffing and schedule patterns; and take other steps crucial to the safe and just return to in-person instruction.

In addition, at least \$4 billion is needed for the E-rate program to help schools ensure Wi-Fi hotspots and connected devices are available for K-12 students who do not have Internet access and connected devices at home.³ COVID-19 has brought home the stark realities of a digital divide that impacts up to 16 million students. The most negatively impacted are those living in poverty and in rural areas. In addition, deep disparities exist based on race regardless of socio-economic status or community type.

The NEA believes that it is unjust for any students to be at risk of falling behind their peers because they do not have Internet access at home or adequate hardware. Through no fault of their own, they are, in effect, being denied the opportunities to learn that are afforded to their well-resourced peers.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government has a crucial role to play in establishing education- and mitigation-related guidelines, promoting science-based responses to the crisis, and providing the funding necessary to facilitate safe and equitable in-person instruction in schools and institutions of higher education. The federal government must prioritize providing schools and

campuses with the support and guidance needed to safely and equitably resume in-person instruction and, when that is not possible, support educator-led distance learning that is both effective and accessible to all.

We need our national leaders to meet this staffing crisis head-on by being an outspoken advocate for public education, higher education, and educators; by ensuring that no educator need ever choose between protecting their own and their family's health and their job; and by providing educators and students with the resources they need to teach and learn effectively until it is safe to return to consistent in-person instruction in schools and on campuses.

¹ American Civil Liberties Union. (2020). Cops and No Counselors: How the Lack of School Mental Health Staff Is Harming Students. Retrieved from aclu.org/report/cops-and-no-counselors.

² National Education Association. (May 21, 2020). Top Requests for Next COVID-19 Legislative Package. Retrieved from educationvotes.nea.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Coronavirus4-two-pager-051220.pdf.

³ Ibid.

The National Education Association (NEA) calls on national leaders to:

- ▶ Invest in comprehensive transformative and restorative justice practices that ensure the humane treatment of all students.
- ▶ Reinstate the U.S. Department of Education/U.S. Department of Justice School Discipline Guidance to assist states, districts, and schools in developing practices and strategies to enhance school climate and ensure policies and practices comply with federal law.
- ▶ Fully implement the Every Student Succeeds Act, which allows states the option to select school climate as an indicator of school quality; all states must describe in their plan how they will support districts to reduce the overuse of practices that push students out of the classroom.
- ▶ Maintain the U.S. Department of Education's current level of Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) by preserving the existing questions and disaggregation of data by student subgroups, requiring all schools and districts to collect and report the data annually and continuing to make the CRDC accessible to the public.
- ▶ Ensure that the U.S. Department of Education's Civil Rights Division vigorously enforces the civil rights laws by reinstating a focus on systemic investigations into disparate treatment of students based on race, disability, or other factors.
- ▶ Provide funding for school mental health professionals and school counselors who provide necessary support for students and staff that is critical to maintaining safe and supportive schools. Providing more mental health professionals and counselors in schools would help reduce the issues that later spiral into discipline concerns.
- ▶ Issue guidance from the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Justice regarding the role of school resource officers (SROs) that is aimed at reducing the overreliance on SROs in schools and spurring investment in programs that assist schools in eliminating or reducing the role of SROs.



Our nation's public schools form the center of our communities, and as educators, we believe that all students deserve the support, tools, and opportunity to learn and thrive with safety and dignity. Even though incidents of school violence have decreased overall, too many schools are still struggling to create positive, supportive environments.

Each year, significant numbers of students miss class due to suspensions and expulsions—even for minor infractions of school rules—and students of color and students with disabilities are disproportionately impacted. The school-to-prison pipeline is the result of myriad policies and practices fed by institutional racism that disproportionately place students of color—including those who identify as LGBTQ, have disabilities, and/or are English language learners—into the criminal justice system for minor school infractions and disciplinary matters, subjecting them to harsher punishments than their white peers for the same behaviors. The policies and practices include harsh school discipline that overuses suspension and expulsion; zero tolerance that criminalizes minor infractions of school rules; increased policing and surveillance in schools, creating prison-like environments; and over-reliance on exclusionary disciplinary referrals to law enforcement and juvenile justice authorities. The school-to-prison pipeline diminishes students' educational opportunities and life trajectories.

Schools can improve safety by making sure that climates are welcoming and that responses to misbehavior are fair, nondiscriminatory, and effective. Public schools unite students and communities; they are central to reaching and striving for greater opportunity and cultural understanding. The federal government can provide resources to states and school districts that will assist in creating nurturing and

supportive teaching and learning school environments and positive school climates that are essential for boosting student academic success.

To that end, we must keep the following in mind:

- ▶ We must allocate resources to create positive, culturally relevant, and culturally responsive school climates and build the capacity of schools to promote positive alternatives to out-of-school suspensions.
- ▶ The Civil Rights Data Collection must continue to monitor school districts' progress and ensure that school discipline policies and practices are not adversely impacting certain groups of students.
- ▶ Funds must be allocated to hire school mental health professionals, such as school social workers, psychologists, counselors, therapists, etc.
- ▶ We must support the development of effective school disciplinary procedures that support high expectations for quality instruction and learning, treat students respectfully, and provide all students with a supportive and nurturing school environment. This includes ensuring that routine school discipline matters are handled by educators not SROs.
- ▶ It is the right of every child to be treated fairly regardless of gender identity and expression, race, sexual orientation, and ability status to access nurturing and supportive learning in public K-12 education. All students should have the opportunity to learn without fear and distress from harsh and unfair discipline practices and policies.

As educators, the NEA is in the best position to develop model discipline policies that encourage the use of fair and effective discipline practices and discourage the use of school-based arrests and referrals to law enforcement before educators attempt corrective action.

The National Education Association (NEA) calls on national leaders to:

- ▶ Authorize federal assistance for school construction, maintenance, renovation, and repair, such as the Rebuild America's School Act (H.R. 865).
- ▶ Reauthorize tax credit bonds similar to Build America Bonds and qualified school construction bonds.
- ▶ Direct federal assistance to educational institutions for technology, equipment, accompanying peripherals, and software, including maintenance, service, and training of users of the technology as well as for broadband Internet access for students and employees.
- ▶ Improve and expand the federal E-rate program to support technology access in public schools.
- ▶ Provide federal funding on an emergency basis to aid in safely reopening public schools in line with CDC public health guidelines in regard to heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems.



Our nation's public schools are, on average, 50 years old. Every weekday, 56 million children and adults walk through a public school's doors: 1 in 6 of all Americans. Half of these schools need repairs, especially in urban and rural areas that lack the economic base to raise adequate funding. Yet, the federal government provides no support for this vital part of the country's infrastructure—the second largest construction spending sector behind only transportation.

School districts have spent \$1 trillion (in 2014 dollars) over the last 20 years for school construction, but they can't keep up with the need. Local school districts paid for 82 percent of the building construction costs over the last two decades and have nearly \$450 billion in

long-term debt (at the end of 2016)—an average of about \$9,000 per student. There is a \$38 billion annual gap between what districts and states spend and what is necessary to modernize school facilities. Even where states are doing their share, districts fall short.¹

Under tax credit bonds, municipalities issue taxable debt but receive a subsidy from the federal government. According to the Joint Committee on Taxation, in the two years qualified school construction and Build America Bonds lasted, more than \$200 billion worth of bonds were issued, financing thousands of projects from public school and community college construction to road maintenance across all 50 states.² Projects are selected by the municipality, which can use the bonds for routine

maintenance and other projects that lack a revenue stream. Bonds similar to Build America Bonds are attractive to investors who do not pay U.S. taxes—such as pension funds, endowments, and international investors—increasing demand and lowering borrowing costs.

Like education, access to technology can be a great equalizer. Its absence creates a digital divide. The federal government can help bridge the digital divide by bringing new technologies and the power of the Internet to urban, rural, and under-resourced schools and communities nationwide. For example, the E-rate program helps close the school connectivity gap by providing \$3.9 billion in discounts annually to ensure that all public libraries and K-12 public schools gain access to broadband connectivity and robust internal Wi-Fi.³

More than half of public school districts need to update or replace multiple building systems or features in their schools, according to the U.S. Government Accountability Office's (GAO) recent national survey of school districts. For example, an estimated 41 percent of districts need to update or replace heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems in at least half of their schools, representing about 36,000 schools nationwide that need HVAC updates. In about half of the schools GAO visited in six states, officials described HVAC-related problems, such as older systems that leaked and damaged flooring or ceiling tiles.⁴ If not addressed, such problems can lead to indoor air quality problems and mold and, in some cases, cause schools to adjust schedules temporarily. In its guidance to school districts, the CDC advises that ensuring "ventilation systems operate properly" is a key consideration for schools seeking to reopen amid the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵

¹ [Re]Build America's School Infrastructure Coalition. Retrieved from buildusschools.org/.

² Joint Committee on Taxation. (2011). *The Federal Revenue Effects of Tax-Exempt and Direct-Pay Credit Bond Provisions*. Retrieved from jct.gov/publications.html?func=download&id=4470&chk=4470&no_html=1.

³ Federal Communications Commission. (February 2018). E-rate: Universal Service Program for Schools and Libraries. Retrieved from fcc.gov/consumers/guides/universal-service-program-schools-and-libraries-e-rate.

⁴ U.S. Government Accountability Office. (June 2020). K-12 Education: School Districts Frequently Identified Multiple Building Systems Needing Updates or Replacement. Highlights of GAO-20-494. Retrieved from gao.gov/assets/710/707374.pdf.

⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2019). Considerations for K-12 Schools: Readiness and Planning Tool. Retrieved from cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/community/school-admin-k12-readiness-and-planning-tool.pdf.

SCHOOL SAFETY (GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION)

The National Education Association (NEA) calls on national leaders to:

- ▶ Increase funding for Student Support and Academic Enrichment grants, Title IV-A of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA); these grants should not be used to arm educators.
- ▶ Promote adequate staffing ratio of students to specialized instructional support personnel (SISP), including school social workers, psychologists, school counselors, nurses, speech-language pathologists, and others.
- ▶ Expand and increase professional development funding for educators in bullying, mental and behavioral health, trauma-informed practices, cultural competence, restorative practices, positive behavior intervention strategies, and classroom management.
- ▶ Provide funding for research; the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has authority to research gun violence as a public health issue.
- ▶ Support the following legislative measures:
 - ▶ The Keep Americans Safe Act (H.R. 1186) makes importing, selling, manufacturing, transferring, or possessing high-capacity magazines illegal and prohibits their future manufacture for civilian use.
 - ▶ The Background Check Expansion Act (S.42) prohibits transfer of a gun between private parties unless a licensed gun dealer, manufacturer, or importer first takes possession of the firearm to conduct a background check. The law also applies to sellers wherever they operate: online, at gun shows, or out of their own homes.
 - ▶ Extreme Risk Protection Order (ERPO) bills (H.R. 1236 and H.R. 3076) empower family members and law enforcement to intervene when a person sends warning signals that pose a danger to themselves or others and create a national system for ensuring that emergency action can be taken in every state to intervene before tragedy strikes.

Research shows that every year, firearms are the leading cause of death for children and teens in the United States.¹ In fact, children and teens who died by suicides in which a gun was used has increased by 65 percent over the last decade.² Forty-five percent of U.S. children have experienced at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE), according to recent Child Trends

data.³ ACEs are potentially traumatic experiences that can have negative, lasting effects on health and well-being later in life. One mechanism responsible for these effects—these toxic levels of stress—can be substantially buffered by a stable and supportive relationship with an educator/caregiver.

¹ EveryTown for Gun Safety Support Fund. (2020). Child & Teen Gun Safety. Retrieved from everytownresearch.org/issue/child-teen-safety.

³ EveryTown for Gun Safety Support Fund. (2020). Firearm Suicide in the United States. Retrieved from everytownresearch.org/report/firearm-suicide-in-the-united-states.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

The National Education Association (NEA) calls on national leaders to:

- ▶ Advocate for effective social and emotional learning (SEL) programming for preK–12.
- ▶ Support SEL programming based on the understanding that best learning emerges through supportive relationships that make learning challenging, engaging, and meaningful.
- ▶ Support the six recommendations from the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development report, "From a Nation at Risk to a Nation at Hope," as well as the action agenda.¹
- ▶ Implement these recommendations and the action agenda in our schools and communities, which urges and prioritizes social, emotional, and academic development in every state and district school improvement plan to ensure student success.

To develop the competencies that are critical to student success in college and in careers, the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development makes the following recommendations:²

- ▶ Set a clear vision that broadens the definition of student success to prioritize the whole child;
- ▶ Transform learning settings so that they are safe and supportive for all young people;
- ▶ Change instruction to teach students social, emotional, and cognitive skills and embed these skills in academics and in schoolwide practices;
- ▶ Build adult expertise in child development;
- ▶ Align resources and leverage partners in the community to address the whole child; and
- ▶ Forge closer connections between research and practice by shifting the paradigm for how research gets done.

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, establish and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

There is a growing recognition nationwide that we must support the whole learner through social, emotional, and academic development, and it is time to gather this momentum of parents, educators, community leaders, policymakers, and elected officials to ensure success for every student. SEL is imperative to implementing schoolwide restorative practices, trauma-informed practices,³ and multi-tiered systems of supports.

¹ The National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development. (2018). *From a Nation at Risk to a Nation at Hope*. Retrieved from nationathope.org/report-from-the-nation-download/.

² Ibid.

³ Williams, J. (2017). *Trauma Toolkit: Tools to Support the Learning and Development of Students Experiencing Childhood & Adolescent Trauma*. First Book in partnership with Maryland State Education Association. Retrieved from nea.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/MSEA-Trauma-Toolkit-for-Educators.pdf.

The National Education Association (NEA) calls on national leaders to:

- ▶ Repeal or amend certain tax breaks in the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) for the wealthy and corporations, and replace them with a progressive tax system based on individual and corporate ability to pay in order to yield sufficient revenues to address national needs.
- ▶ Repeal TCJA's dollar cap on state and local tax deductions.
- ▶ Strengthen the estate tax for the purpose of funding public education.
- ▶ Enable full miscellaneous deductions for educational materials purchased by all educators for classroom use.

In addition, the NEA opposes:

- ▶ Arbitrary maximum limits on any state or local government's ability to spend or tax, particularly since such limits have a negative impact on the full funding of schools;
- ▶ The use of federal tax dollars to subsidize preK-12 private school education;
- ▶ Tax loopholes or giveaways that reduce revenues and shelter corporations and high-income individuals from paying taxes; and
- ▶ Tax loopholes and incentives to offshore profits and outsource jobs.



After analyzing the fiscal and economic impact of the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service (CRS) confirmed what the NEA already knew—the massive tax cuts have largely favored the wealthy and corporations, have failed to significantly raise wages, have had little effect on business investment, and have come nowhere close to “paying for themselves.” CRS’s careful analysis shows that the \$1.5 trillion tax cuts (which will add \$1.9 trillion to the deficit due to interest costs) have

failed to produce the economic growth and other benefits promised by its proponents.¹

State and local tax deductions help state and local governments fund public services that provide widely shared benefits. With this deduction in place, higher-income households are more willing to support state and local taxes. Capping the deduction will make it harder for states and localities to raise sufficient revenues in the coming years to fund preK-12 and higher education, health care, and other services.

While the benefits of the deductions accrue the most to those with higher incomes, the revenues from capping the dollar amount of the deductions were used to cut marginal tax rates that disproportionately benefit higher-income individuals at the expense of lower- and middle-income families.²

The estate tax has a long and effective history in its ability to raise significant revenue and modulate the

excesses of wealth inequality. Today, high exemption levels and loopholes limit its effectiveness, while, at the same time, inequality has risen to historic levels with the richest one-tenth of the 1 percent owning as much as the bottom 90 percent. Further weakening or eliminating the estate tax would do nothing to help 99.8 percent of families; it would only lead to greater economic inequality.³

¹ Gravelle, J., Marples, D. (2019). *The Economic Effects of the 2017 Tax Revision: Preliminary Observations*. Retrieved from the Congressional Research Service website: everycrsreport.com/files/20190522_R45736_8a1214e903ee2b719e00731791d60f26d75d35f4.pdf.

² Leachman, M., Lav, I. (2017). *Eliminating State and Local Tax Deduction to Pay for Tax Cuts for Wealthy a Bad Deal for Most Americans*. Retrieved from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities website: cbpp.org/research/state-budget-and-tax/eliminating-state-and-local-tax-deduction-to-pay-for-tax-cuts-for.

³ Americans for Tax Fairness. *Estate Tax*. Retrieved from americansfortaxfairness.org/issues/estate-tax.

TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

The National Education Association (NEA) calls on national leaders to:

- ▶ Allocate funding for states and public school districts to implement programs, such as Grow Your Own, that recruit high school students to enter the teaching profession.
- ▶ Provide aspiring and certificated educators with specific and sufficient financial support to reduce the high cost of degree programs.
- ▶ Increase funding for colleges of education in minority-serving institutions to promote recruitment of teachers of color.
- ▶ Eliminate student loan debt for educators.
- ▶ Allocate specific and ample funding for public school districts to implement comprehensive induction programs in Title II of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

The teacher shortage in the United States is a multifaceted issue that stems from multiple sources. In particular, contributors to the shortage include inadequate compensation, increased demand for educators, declining enrollments in schools and colleges of education, working conditions, and lack of comprehensive induction and mentoring programs that provide professional support to beginning teachers.¹

Teacher Recruitment and Diversity: Teacher shortage and attrition can be addressed by creating a strong pipeline into teaching. One strategy is to identify students—particularly students of color—as early as high school who are interested in teaching and provide those students with the necessary support for college entry.

Grow Your Own (GYO) programs are helpful as a mechanism and strategy to recruit educators of color. GYO programs recognize the cultural capital in recruiting, preparing, placing, and retaining culturally knowledgeable and community-grounded teachers of color. Potential candidates from GYO programs (e.g., paraeducators) often live in diverse communities and

are familiar with the backgrounds and cultures of their students. Teacher diversity benefits all students, and it is important to provide all communities with a diverse educator workforce.²

College Affordability and Preparation: Promising potential teachers often are recruited into shortcut preparation programs that lack crucial clinical practice in the classroom or under the guidance of a fully licensed teacher. Such shortcut strategies often are implemented either to fill teacher vacancies more quickly and/or decrease the cost of preparing new educators. But these strategies result in novices leaving the profession before ever becoming skillful practitioners, creating more vacancies to be filled and leaving students with the greatest need for support perpetually in a classroom of teachers with limited skills and experience. Shortcuts to teaching for fiscal reasons are unwise strategies; they create significantly greater expense to schools and districts that have to recruit and provide induction for large numbers of beginners. Instead, we must work to make high-quality preparation programs accessible and affordable to potential teachers.

Eliminating federal loan debt for educators enables them to live and thrive in the communities in which they work and serve. The elimination of this debt could positively impact the recruitment and retention of teachers of color, who often carry a greater financial student loan debt than their white counterparts. Educators are inadequately paid and often must work additional jobs to meet basic housing and medical needs. They also spend their own money on classroom supplies. Therefore, releasing educators from the burden of debt will improve the likelihood they will remain in the classroom.³

Comprehensive Induction and Teacher Mentoring:

Comprehensive induction programs that integrate an array of complementary components have proven to produce teachers who deliver high-quality instruction and remain in the profession. While mentoring as a practice has merit, it has not proven to be as successful as a stand-alone practice in supporting beginning teachers. Numerous studies demonstrate that the implementation of comprehensive induction cuts new teacher turnover rates in half.⁴ Comprehensive induction is a sound investment to address teacher recruitment and retention.

Comprehensive induction programs include the following key components:⁵

- ▶ New Educator Orientation Week at the beginning of the school year;
- ▶ Mentoring by a qualified and trained mentor for those who are in their first two years of teaching;
- ▶ Support teams (for example, grade-level and department colleagues, staff development teachers, and consulting teachers);
- ▶ Courses and workshops for beginning teachers offered by school district central offices on relevant topics;

- ▶ Courses and workshops for mentors throughout their mentoring career;
- ▶ Courses and workshops for principals on how to support early educators and mentors; and
- ▶ Evaluation process that focuses on developing teaching skills and professional knowledge.

Many school districts implement pieces of the comprehensive induction program; however, few districts provide all components.

A Cost-Effective Alternative: The investment in quality induction support not only retains teachers in the profession, but it also has a long-term impact on student achievement. School districts spend large amounts of money replacing teachers each year.⁶ On average, urban districts spend more than \$20,000 per new teacher hired through recruitment, hiring, and training costs. Districts with high teacher turnover rates spend hundreds of thousands of dollars each year to recruit and hire new teachers. Further, districts in communities with high poverty rates are often the most impacted by high teacher turnover. These district investments don't yield their full potential dividend when teachers leave within the first or second year after having been hired.

Student access to a quality education is a civil right. Comprehensive induction for novice teachers is critically important to fulfilling this right and ensuring an equitable education for all students. Fortunately, decades of research on the factors that contribute to attracting and retaining teachers in the classroom can guide district strategies to meet this challenge. Districts should leverage federal dollars for comprehensive induction programs in addition to traditional professional learning for teachers.⁷ But they can't leverage federal dollars if they do not exist. Sufficient investment cannot be made without full federal funding.

Local context will determine how funding builds an overall system that supports and retains skilled educators throughout their careers. A set of policies that fully fund all components of comprehensive

induction programs effectively recruit and support potential and aspiring educators, and eliminating student loan debt is necessary to ensure every child is taught by a profession-ready, committed teacher.

¹ Ingersoll, R., Strong, M. (2011). The impact of induction and mentoring for beginning teachers: A critical review of the research. *Review of Educational Research*, 81 (2), 201-233.

Podolsky, A., Kini, T., Bishop, J., Darling-Hammond, L. (2016). *Solving the Teacher Shortage: How to Attract and Retain Excellent Educators*. Retrieved from the Learning Policy Institute website: learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/solving-teacher-shortage.

Sutcher, L., Darling-Hammond, L., Carver-Thomas, D. (2016). *A Coming Crisis in Teaching? Teacher Supply, Demand, and Shortages in the U.S.* Retrieved from the Learning Policy Institute website: learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/A_Coming_Crisis_in_Teaching_REPORT.pdf.

² Carver-Thomas, L. (2018). *Diversifying the Teaching Profession: How to Recruit and Retain Teachers of Color*. Retrieved from the Learning Policy Institute website: learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/diversifying-teaching-profession-report.

Muñiz, J. (2018). *Diversifying the Teacher Workforce with 'Grow Your Own' Programs*. Retrieved from the New America website: newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/diversifying-teacher-workforce-grow-your-own-pathways.

³ Flannery, M.E. (2016). What do we want? Degrees Not Debt? *NEA Today for Aspiring Educators*. Retrieved from ftp.arizonaaea.org/home/66237.htm.

⁴ Ingersoll, R., Strong, M. (2011). The impact of induction and mentoring for beginning teachers: A critical review of the research.

Podolsky, A., Kini, T., Bishop, J., Darling-Hammond, L. (2016). *Solving the Teacher Shortage How to Attract and Retain Excellent Educators*.

Sutcher, L., Darling-Hammond, L. Carver-Thomas, D. (2016). *A Coming Crisis in Teaching? Teacher Supply, Demand, and Shortages in the U.S.*

⁵ Ingersoll, R., Strong, M. (2011). The impact of induction and mentoring for beginning teachers: A critical review of the research.

⁶ Podolsky, A., Kini, T., Bishop, J., Darling-Hammond, L. (2016) *Solving the Teacher Shortage How to Attract and Retain Excellent Educators*.

⁷ Ibid.

The National Education Association (NEA) calls on national leaders to:

- ▶ Support efforts to expand voting rights, create independent redistricting commissions, strengthen ethics rules, create a small-donor public financing system, and limit the influence of corporations and wealthy special interests in campaigns.
- ▶ Make Election Day a national holiday.
- ▶ Provide federal resources to protect every vote, including resources for election security and cyber security, and support for legislation that curbs voter suppression.
- ▶ Support all students' access to civics education by restoring and strengthening civics education in public education.
- ▶ Restore voting rights to formerly incarcerated citizens who have served their sentences.



The ability to exercise one's civic duty is at the core of what it means to be an American. The NEA recognizes the right to vote as a constitutional right guaranteed to all eligible citizens. Efforts to encourage voter disenfranchisement must be stopped, and maintenance of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the nonpartisan drawing of district lines must continue to ensure fair and competitive elections are upheld.

All voters have a right to know and access all information pertaining to an election. Voters also

should have full access to a variety of voting options, such as mail-in voting and early voting. The federal government should incentivize voter education programs and uniform registration requirements that do not include restrictive residency provisions or restrictive identification requirements. As a country, we should be doing more to enable and encourage citizens to fully participate in their democracy.

The National Education Association (NEA) calls on national leaders to:

- ▶ Support the Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which would make the fair treatment of women by federal, state, and local governments a constitutional guarantee.
- ▶ Eliminate discriminatory practices against women in employment, including in promotions and compensation. Personnel policies must include family and medical leave; leave for pregnancy-related medical needs and childbirth; gender-neutral bonding leave; leave for adoption of a child or for surrogacy; child care leave; and professional leave that enables women to advance in their careers by pursuing professional growth opportunities.
- ▶ Support the Family and Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act or comparable legislation, which would at a minimum provide 12 weeks of paid leave at a portion of workers' salaries when they take time off for their own serious health conditions, including pregnancy and recovery from childbirth; the serious health condition of a family member; and/or the birth or adoption of a child. Any such legislation should take into account the progress that various states have made with respect to wage replacement levels, definitions of family, and job protections—all of which increase access to paid leave, particularly for lower wage workers.
- ▶ Provide parents with a minimum of two days every year to participate in school events for their K-12 aged children.
- ▶ Support legislation that would extend Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) coverage to part-year paraprofessionals.
- ▶ Fully support Title IX's protections against gender discrimination in educational institutions that receive federal funding, including rescinding regulatory changes and other guidance that discourage reporting of sexual harassment and assault, reduce obligations on schools and higher education institutions to investigate and address sexual harassment and assault, and create burdensome, complex procedures for resolving complaints.
- ▶ Reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA).



The NEA believes that all persons, regardless of gender, must have equal opportunity for education, employment, promotion, compensation (including equal pay for comparable work), and leadership in all activities. All workers should be paid on the basis of requirements,

skills, and worth of their job; factors such as gender or race should never play a role in determining salary. Providing equal opportunity for women requires addressing the role that many women play as the primary caretaker for their young children by ensuring that families have paid parental

leave available to meet those child care needs and that all families may take paid time off to participate in their K-12 children's school activities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has only served to elevate the importance of these issues. Of the many things the pandemic laid bare is the tremendous value of women's labor in our economy. This is true both in terms of paid labor, with so many of the hardest hit industry workforces and frontline workers being predominantly female, as well as women's unpaid labor in the home.¹ Women—particularly women of color—are disproportionately impacted by this crisis, in terms of the industries that have been hardest hit and the stress and trauma associated with being primary caregivers to relatives who are ill and children whose schools and daycares have been closed to in-person instruction.² In addition, domestic violence is of particular concern in times when women and children may be trapped in homes with abusive partners or parents.³

The NEA is also particularly concerned that this all comes on top of existing issues of fair pay, given that women comprise nearly 70 percent of our members and almost 80 percent of the teaching profession. Fair pay is critical to women's economic security, particularly in the current economic crisis. Today, women working full-time earn just 82 percent of what men earn—a pay gap of 18 percent.⁴ Gender-based pay discrimination can mean the loss of hundreds of thousands of dollars over a woman's lifetime.⁵ The pay gap affects everything

from the ability to repay student loans to the ability to retire. The pay gap is even more pronounced for Latina women and African American women, whose earnings are only 54 percent and 62 percent, respectively, of white men's earnings.⁶

The NEA further believes that robust enforcement of Title IX's guarantee of equal access to education regardless of gender is important to achieving equal opportunities more broadly. In particular, female students are disproportionately impacted by sexual harassment and assault, and they often suffer lasting consequences in terms of academic success, behavior, and health. Nonetheless, sexual harassment and assault are estimated to be greatly underreported both at the K-12 level and on college campuses. The NEA believes that K-12 classrooms and all school communities should encourage equality, respect, and healthy and safe relationships and that schools should have the flexibility to implement policies to prevent and address sexual violence to reflect these values.

Moreover, issues related to pay equity, equal access to education, and access to the leave that workers need to care for themselves and their families go well beyond a matter of gender equity. The NEA supports these policies because they are crucial to the health of our communities and schools, they help to address systemic racial inequality, and they respond to challenges our society faces.

¹ Boesh, D., Hamm, K. (June 2020). Valuing Women's Caregiving During and After the Coronavirus Crisis. Retrieved from americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2020/06/03/485855/valuing-womens-caregiving-coronavirus-crisis.

² Frye, J. (April 2020). On the Frontlines at Work and at Home: The Disproportionate Economic Effects of the Coronavirus Pandemic on Women of Color. Center for American Progress. Retrieved from americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2020/04/23/483846/frontlines-work-home.

³ Evans, M.L., Lindauer, M., Farrell, M.E. (September 2020) A Pandemic Within a Pandemic: Intimate Partner Violence During COVID-19. *New England Journal of Medicine*. Retrieved from nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp2024046.

⁴ National Partnership for Women & Families. (2019). America's Women and the Wage Gap Fact Sheet. Retrieved from nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/fair-pay/americas-women-and-the-wage-gap.pdf.

⁵ Gangl, M., Ziefle, A. (2009). Motherhood, Labor Force Behavior, and Women's Careers: An Empirical Assessment of the Wage Penalty for Motherhood in Britain, Germany, and the United States. *Demography*, 46(2), pp. 341-369. Retrieved from ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2831275.

⁶ National Partnership for Women & Families, America's Women and the Wage Gap Fact Sheet.

The National Education Association (NEA) calls on national leaders to:

- ▶ Condition federal education funding on state and local laws or policies permitting collective bargaining by education employees over terms and conditions of employment and key student learning conditions such as class size and appropriate school staffing.
- ▶ Condition federal education funding of any school improvement or professional development initiatives on educators being provided effective input and voice.
- ▶ Support federal legislation extending to public-sector employees the same rights to organize and bargain collectively that private-sector employees have long enjoyed. The new minimum federal requirements would serve only as a floor on which states could build upon. The new requirements would not preempt or weaken current state or local bargaining laws.
- ▶ Support federal legislation to provide parents with paid leave time to care for their children for the 12 weeks for which they may now take Family and Medical Leave Act unpaid leave following the birth or adoption of a child or due to a child's health needs. In addition to such protected paid leave time, add at least two days a year of paid leave for parents to attend school events for their children.
- ▶ Support federal labor law reform for the private sector to allow private-sector employees to engage in industry-wide bargaining, use wage boards where needed, strengthen penalties for anti-union retaliation, hold joint employers accountable, and prevent the mischaracterization of employees as independent contractors.
- ▶ Rescind the regulatory provision that exempts teachers from the protections of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), which would provide teachers with the same wage and hour protections as every other profession (except doctors and lawyers) including the protections of the FLSA's Break Time for Nursing Mothers Act, 29 U.S.C. § 207.¹



The NEA believes that the fundamental foundation for quality public schools and an economy that works for all are protections for collective bargaining that improve working and learning conditions. No one is more committed to our nation's students than the educators who work second and third jobs to stay in the profession and pay out of pocket to make sure students have the supplies and support they need. Educators and all workers deserve a legally protected voice at work through collective bargaining and minimum workplace protections.

As we look forward, our rigged economy will only be fixed if effective collective bargaining rights are reinstated for private-sector employees and extended to all public-sector employees. Currently, only 34 states have bargaining laws for teachers and only 31 states have bargaining laws for education support professionals. We also know that since Wisconsin's Act 10 in 2011, several states—including Arkansas, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, and Missouri—have severely reduced public-sector bargaining rights.

In the education sector, strong and effective labor management relations has been proven again and again to be a cornerstone of quality education. If given the opportunity to negotiate, educators and their employers can collaborate on student-centered issues, such as setting limits on class size, specifying time for teachers and paraeducators to share effective classroom practices, and enhancing professional learning opportunities—all of which help students thrive.

Strong and effective public-sector bargaining also lifts state and local economies. The beginning salary of teachers in states with a bargaining law for educators is \$2,566 more than states without a bargaining law. Top pay for teachers is \$13,120 higher in states with a bargaining law.²

Educational innovations developed without educator voice and expertise often fail and set our schools back. Placing educator voice at the center of educational improvements ensures their success.

¹ **Rationale:** Given that teaching remains not just a historically underpaid field, but also one in which the wage penalty for entering the profession has grown significantly in the last two decades, and that it is a field predominantly staffed by women of childbearing age (approximately 77 percent of teachers are women, and the average age is 43), rescinding the teacher exemption is a critical step in addressing the deficits in pay and protections.

² National Education Association. (June 2020). *Rankings of the States 2019 and Estimates of School Statistics 2020*. Retrieved from nea.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/2020%20Rankings%20and%20Estimates%20Report%20FINAL_0.pdf.

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