

MEA voice

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Feeding the future

Letter to Members: We celebrate you

With March is Reading Month behind us and American Education Week on the horizon, let's take stock of the important contributions educators make to the success of our students — from teachers to paraprofessionals to bus drivers to higher education faculty.

For one example, certified librarians within a school have been shown to improve student literacy and educational attainment. That's why Michigan must work to ensure every student has access to a certified librarian in their school. (Read more about this in Chandra's recent Detroit News column at mea.org/media.)

We honored these professionals in March to raise money through MEA's Classroom Support Fund to buy books for school libraries in need. Many thanks to MEA member Sarah Ellis for allowing use of her amazing artwork, inspired by certified librarian Christine Beachler.

In this issue of the *Voice*, we spotlight food service professionals, particularly in light of Michigan's historic commitment this year to provide free school meals for students. Hungry kids can't learn so these dedicated

professionals are feeding them, thanks to support from both Lansing and Washington, D.C.

Together, we can continue addressing student hunger by lobbying lawmakers to fund free school meals permanently in our state budget — and by electing more friends of public education to office at the local, state and national levels this fall.

In these pages, we also celebrate the contributions of two educators recently recognized with MEA awards: Educational Excellence Award winner Matt Hamilton of East Jordan and Maurine Wyatt Feminist and Gender Equity Award winner Amy French of Delta College.

Educators like Matt and Amy represent all of us who strive daily to give every student the opportunity they deserve. In classrooms to libraries to lunchrooms and beyond, MEA is proud to celebrate great people whose incredible work benefits our kids and communities.

In Solidarity Always,

Chandra Madafferi
Brett Smith
Aaron Eling



Chandra Madafferi,
MEA President



Brett Smith,
Vice President



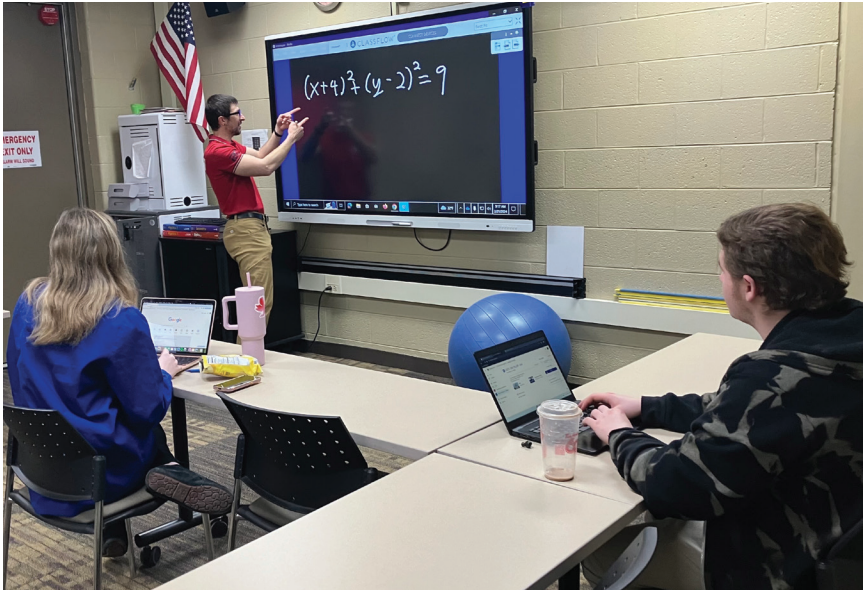
Aaron Eling,
Secretary-Treasurer

SUPPORTING THE UNITED TEACHERS OF FLINT

As of press time, Flint teachers are still working to address the district's educator shortage through collaboration with their school board. Flint's students deserve great educators who are respected and compensated as professionals. MEA is proud to stand with our members there to get a fair agreement as soon as possible. For the latest, visit mea.org.

MEA SCHOLARSHIP FUND GOLF OUTING

Mark June 10 on your calendar and plan to support the 22nd Annual MEA Scholarship Fund Golf Outing at Forest Akers Golf Course. It's a fun-filled day to support the MEA Scholarship Fund, which has provided more than \$893,000 in college scholarships to Michigan public school students since 1997. Golfers will have a shotgun start at 9 a.m. in a four-player scramble format. The golf fee is \$120 per person which includes breakfast and lunch, and a portion of the fee is tax-deductible. Go to mea.org/golfouting to learn more, register to attend, sponsor a hole, or make a donation.



MEA member John Kusku is a blind teacher and two-time Team USA Paralympian who hopes his example shows students at Oakland Schools Technical Campus Southwest that people with disabilities can achieve great things, page 12.

For more indepth story coverage with links and additional photos, visit mea.org/voice



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MEA • VOICE

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ABOVE AND BEYOND

When Mattawan Middle School won a prestigious award last fall, it wasn't for a new program or a single employee. The School of Distinction award bestowed on the west Michigan school recognized a building-wide team-based commitment to students built over two decades. Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist II visited Mattawan Middle in Van Buren County in February and was joined by MEA President Chandra Madafferri to learn how the school became one of only 11 middle schools nationwide to be honored by the Association for Middle Level Education in 2023. "I'm just incredibly proud of everyone here," Gilchrist said in remarks to district students, leaders and staff. "You're presented with an award because you've already done the work, so every education professional who works in every capacity here in this school has made it an amazing environment." Karrie Smith, president of the Mattawan Education Association, invited Gilchrist on the tour. A 24-year math teacher, Smith has worked at the middle school for 18 years and wanted to call attention to the collaborative model that creates staff cohesion and student success. "Our administrative team has been together for 17 years, which is unheard of, and our building on the whole sees very little turnover from year to year because people love working here," Smith said.

Read the story at mea.org/gilchrist-tours-mattawan.



QUOTABLES

“Most private providers deliver quality instruction, but with the first segment of driver’s ed costing as much as \$650, many families simply can’t afford it.”

Jocelyn Benson, Michigan Secretary of State, speaking at a press conference with MEA President Chandra Madafferri, on state grants to help more families afford driver’s education and allow public schools to offer programs in under-served areas. In 2004, the state shifted the cost to families. Benson and Madafferri announced the grants in Kearsley, a Flint-area district that still provides in-school driver’s ed, alongside local union president Kristen Kilpa, driving instructor Andy Nester, and students. Read the story at mea.org/benson-mea-drivers-ed.

ICYMI

In planning best uses for federal COVID-relief money in the past few years, Michigan’s public school educators prioritized the safety, health, and success of students. The deadline for allocating Federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding is Sept. 30 of this year. The funds, distributed district by district, include the largest amount allocated by Congress and signed by President Joe Biden in the American Rescue Plan to address learning challenges in the wake of the global pandemic. Public schools statewide identified the most urgent student needs, with the greatest priority placed on student mental health, instructional upgrades, technology, personnel, and salaries and wages.

At mea.org/arp, find stories on some of these uses for ESSER money. To share how your district is spending that funding, or if your local union needs help to have a voice in decisions (which is mandated in the spending bill), contact Heather Palo, MEA ARP organizer, at hpalo@mea.org.

THE FUTURE IS NOW

At inaugural Ed Rising conference MEA partners to inspire next generation

“Thinking about the teacher who inspired you...it will be your responsibility to be that teacher for a student you work with. You get to inspire future generations. You get to be the reason why Michigan students love learning.”

That was Gov. Gretchen Whitmer’s message to more than 400 aspiring educators attending the first-annual Educators Rising Conference at Wayne State University on March 13. From middle and high schoolers interested in the education profession to college students preparing to enter a classroom, future educators received a dose of inspiration.

Whitmer talked about the rewarding work of educators making a difference in students’ lives — sharing how her second-grade teacher, Mrs. Buie, helped her through her a tough time during her parents’ divorce.

“We want Michigan students and educators to have the path into this important profession. We want Michigan kids to be life-long learners. None of that is possible without a great group of people going into education. You’ll all play a part in helping every student discover their potential.

“That’s why my partners in the Michigan Legislature and I are committed to supporting our students, teachers, and schools every step of the way.”

Celebrating that commitment — from record investments in public education to educator recruitment policies and supports — was a recurring theme. MEA President Chandra Madafferri and Denise Taliaferro Baszile, dean of Wayne State University’s College of Education, echoed praise and enthusiasm for




Hundreds of aspiring educators attended the inaugural Ed Rising Conference in March, created through a partnership between Educators Rising, MEA and Wayne State University.

students attending the event, created through a partnership between Educators Rising, MEA and WSU.

Madafferri shared her story as a college education student who shifted focus from elementary to career tech to special education over her time at Central Michigan University.

“Right now, you might think you know what you want to do, but there are so many opportunities to try things in the education profession,” Madafferri said. “Teaching is a very diverse profession. If you are here, that means you have a spark of interest — don’t give up, and continue to explore.”

Students at the conference learned through informative sessions, engaged in competitions to showcase their presentation and teaching skills, and enjoyed campus tours and networking opportunities.

One of those students, Makayla Nieman from the Lenawee ISD Tech Center, was excited and inspired to be part of the day. “It’s so cool to see all these people so motivated and going towards the same goals as me,” Nieman said. “It helps me to know that I’m not alone in wanting to become an educator.” 





Awash in wellness

Middle school teacher's innovative project bathes colleagues in calming music

In a darkened planetarium at Macatawa Bay Middle School in Holland, four students work together to create a sound bath, immersing a reclining teacher in waves of serene sounds.

Led by band and choir teacher Carrie Ledet, students Sophie Walsh and Jalen Sims make the air hum with Tibetan song bowls; Sebastian Vasquez adds depth when he strikes a gong; Jordan Vantil gently coaxes sound from the suspended cymbal and then brings it all to a close with a rain stick.

"A sound bath is an immersive experience where you're exposed to different vibrations and frequencies in sound," said Ledet, a MESSA member her entire life. "You're immersed in a dark, quiet place, where the sounds come around you, and your body takes them in. And in that experience your body is healing, you are relaxing,

your blood pressure is lowering, your heart rate is lowering."

Ledet and her students have taken worksite wellness to another creative level. The idea for the project came while she was watching an episode of the "Today" show. Hosts Hoda Kotb and Jenna Bush Hager, in search of wellness treatments, experienced a sound bath at a tony wellness spa in New York City.

"As I was watching the program — and envious of what they were experiencing — I realized that the items they had, we have in the band room here at our school," said Ledet, who started the free project in February 2023.

MESSA Health Promotion Consultant Rhonda Jones knows the importance of creating a work culture that inspires healthy living and prioritizes mental wellness. She has worked with 186 groups since 2021 to

help set wellness activities in motion in local districts.

"It's important to focus on the needs of our caregivers — the people that are caring for and educating our children," Jones said. "Worksite wellness programs are created to do just that. When we invest in improving the well-being of school employees by offering those opportunities during the workday, we are investing in and supporting the health of our children. This makes district-wide worksite wellness programs a worthwhile investment."

Jones is hosting a virtual Worksite Wellness Conference on May 3, where she will provide guidance for creating a wellness program for your local group. Attendees will also learn how to nurture mind and body with simple self-care strategies, healthy exercise routines and a nutritious diet.

Featured speakers include Lauren Kazez, author of *found of Living S.L.O.W.*; Dr. David Weismantel, MESSA's medical director; Megan Neubauer, executive director of the Michigan Ovarian Cancer Association; and Dr. Ann, author, physician and founder of the Healthy Living School.

Learn more at messa.org/wellness. **v**

Spring Worksite Wellness Conference: Pace Yourself

When: Save the date for Friday, May 3

Where: Live on Zoom

Learn more: messa.org/wellness

School food service professionals deliver on state's popular free school meals program

*By Brenda Ortega
MEA Voice Editor*

The professionals entrusted with delivering healthy, delicious food to hundreds of thousands of students in school cafeterias across Michigan say they're serving more kids than ever as part of the state's one-year trial of universal free school meals — and rising to the challenge with skill, focus and teamwork.

In approaching a new role as lead cook at Wyoming Junior High in Wyoming Public Schools, MEA member Delee Bruining has called on all of her experience in food service: four years as lead cook at a summer camp. Seven years working at an elementary school in the district.

To connect more kids with high-quality food and time to eat, Bruining revamped the kitchen's structure and works to ensure all staff are cross-trained and feel heard and valued. "We're really functioning and flowing as a kitchen, and I'm pretty proud of this staff for going the extra mile," she said.

Dozens more kids per day have come through food lines this year in Wyoming, south of Grand Rapids, even though the district had offered universal free school meals before. Awareness seems higher, and perhaps stigma surrounding free meals has lessened since Gov. Gretchen Whitmer signed the Michigan School Meals program, Bruining said.

The program gives preK-12 public schools that participate in the U.S.

Department of Agriculture School Nutrition Programs the option of offering one free breakfast and lunch for every student.

More than 850,000 of the state's schoolchildren are eating school lunches this year, and more than 474,000 are eating breakfast there also, according to the Michigan Department of Education (MDE). On average statewide, 74,000 more students eat breakfast daily — a 23% increase compared to last year.

Studies show students who eat breakfast have better brain function, memory, attention and energy.

"We are excited to see that the greatest increases are in middle and high school student participation," said Diane Golzynski, MDE deputy superintendent of Finance and Operations. "Many older students felt stigmatized if they were eligible for free meals and would not eat them. Now all students eat for free, which ensures that all students have a positive experience getting a free breakfast and lunch."

Bruining and a crew of five other food service professionals are serving breakfast and lunch to about 600 students per day at the junior high while working through changes related to construction of a new addition — including a new section of cafeteria — to open next year.

"We've managed because we came together. We help each other out; it's a team effort."



Delee Bruining says hard work and consistent team effort make it possible to feed 600 kids a day at Wyoming Junior High School.

The school meals program has been popular with families across the state, lowering morning stress levels along with saving an estimated \$850 annually per household, according to school administrators. "That's a big financial strain off of our families, so that's a great benefit," Bruining said.

Last summer Michigan became one of seven states to offer universal free school meals in approving \$160 million for the program through this school year. Now Whitmer and legislative leaders are hoping to extend free school meals permanently in the next state budget and meet higher



MEA members Jodie Jacobs (left) and Kim Machette say food service employees in Stockbridge Community Schools — like others across the state — are going above and beyond to handle a 30% increase in demand for school breakfasts and lunches this year.

demand by allocating \$200 million to the program.

Hungry children can't learn, and students spend up to eight hours a day in school, advocates say: No child should have to worry about not having enough to eat. Amid the pandemic, federal funding ensured universal access to nutrition via schools, but that was discontinued in 2022.

"Meals at school provide three purposes: to ensure no child goes hungry; to prepare children for learning; and to teach children what a healthy meal looks like," said Melanie Brummeler, interim assistant director of MDE's Office of Health and Nutrition Services and a registered dietitian nutritionist.

With the state now ensuring every child can eat in Michigan schools this year, food service employees in Stockbridge Community Schools are universally happy to not be tracking student lunch debt any longer, said MEA member Jodie Jacobs, a 19-year food service veteran who works in the district's elementary school.

Participating districts were required to eliminate old student debts by Feb. 1, and "It's definitely a huge weight off everyone's shoulders to take that component away, so all of our students can just get the food they want and need," Jacobs said.

"Food is a symbol of love. It gives students a feeling of security and comfort and connection. I look forward to seeing those kids that give me hugs every day, or they show me their new shoes or talk about their new puppy."

However, with state funding only guaranteed for one year, district officials have not increased staffing nor boosted pay and benefits to ensure an adequate work force, she added.

The same number of food service employees in Stockbridge are handling a 30% increase in meals served district-wide — which is a testament to their hard work and love for students and also a sign of how little their importance is recognized, Jacobs said.

"The staffing issue comes with not having subs," she said. "People get sick or have to take time for medical, and we don't have anybody to fill in. And you have to keep things going — this is a school; you have to stay on schedule, so when you are short-staffed, it wears on you.

"We love our jobs. We love the students. We love our coworkers. But everybody has those days where they're stressed and pushed to the limit. I think it comes down to wanting to feel more appreciated — and that's all staff, whether you're a teacher or a secretary or a driver."

From Jacobs' long-term perspective, staffing problems began when districts in many places got rid of health care benefits for support staff, and "It's never going to stop until you start bringing back those types of benefits that give people something to work for," she said.

Everyone in the tight-knit food service crew looks for ways to work more efficiently together, and the district has cut menu options to try to reduce work loads in Stockbridge, said Kim Machette, who works at the high school and started in the district around the same time as Jacobs 19 years ago.

But when staffing is short the remaining workers shoulder the burden, Machette added. "I end up being the only cashier (documenting meals served) for 300-plus kids a day. There's two lines usually, and if there's only one cashier it's you, you, you, you, you — back and forth, and that's my only moment with the kids.

"I barely register who it is on those days; there is absolutely no time. They've got to get through so they have time to eat."

Like so many, Machette began working in the school cafeteria to sync with her own kids' schedules



Annie Millspaugh is hopeful a pay raise negotiated for food service professionals in Saline will help improve employee retention.

when they were young, and now she stays for the students. “I still enjoy being a friendly face to these kids. Even though it’s just a small interaction every day, I feel it has an impact.

“It’s just great to be a part of their best time of day — I don’t mind cooking the food and doing the cleaning.”

MEA member Annie Millspaugh similarly started working in a cafeteria in Saline Area Schools 18 years ago when her son was in second grade and she wanted her schedule to match his. Now 60, she says, “It is taking a toll on my body, standing on my feet all day. But ultimately it’s the kids that keep me going.”

Known as “Miss Annie,” Millspaugh enjoys daily interactions with youngsters coming through the line. In time she learns names and develops relationships, she said, describing one boy for example who didn’t talk at first and was a picky eater as her son had been years ago.

“Now he’ll talk to me, and I’ll say silly things like, ‘I see a chocolate

“Ultimately it’s the kids that keep me going.”

MEA member Annie Millspaugh, Saline Area Schools food services

muffin coming out of your ear,’ and he’ll giggle and laugh — just little things like that.”

Millspaugh, who retired from a career as a flight attendant when her son was born, believes most people don’t understand how hard food service employees work every day. She starts at 7:30 a.m. and feeds two rounds of breakfast — to latchkey and bus students — before two assistants arrive at 10.

“Every minute counts in the 15 minutes I have between the two breakfast groups,” she said. “I’m getting muffins ready for lunch; I’m pulling peanut butter and jelly; I might be cleaning wells, wiping down the salad bar, wiping down the milk cooler, things like that.”

For lunch Millspaugh and the two assistants chop vegetables for a salad bar, prepare hot foods, and fill self-serve items. “It’s quite the production,” Millspaugh said. “We have a lot of work to do in an hour and a half.”

Before the state’s free meals program this year, she would expect to serve lunch for up to 170 kids on a typical Monday, for example. This year she’s seeing closer to 300, she said, and “There’s a lot of moving parts involved in feeding 300 kids.”

With more funding to increase capacity this year, the local union negotiated pay raises for food service workers in Saline to try to improve employee retention, Millspaugh said. “We went from \$13.50 to \$17, so it’s enabled us to get people to come and

actually stay in the lunch department. Overall it’s been very good.” There’s no down side to feeding hungry kids at school, and she hopes Michigan’s free school meals program will continue, she said. “I think it helps everybody involved; it’s just a win-win-win.”

In Farmington Public Schools, new staff were added to help with the increased workload, said Ann Duprey, president of the local union representing food and maintenance employees. At her school, the STEAM Academy, lunch numbers shot up from 250 per day last year to 380 this year.

Retaining those employees is another question, Duprey added. “We can’t keep a staff if we’re not making money. Other places will hire them for more.”

Those who work everyday in schools recognize how important it is for children — and their growing brains and bodies — to have enough nutritious food to eat every day, she said.

“Talking with the teachers’ union, they say ‘If we don’t get kids in our class that have something in their belly, we’re going to have trouble.’”

Duprey has also heard people from outside the district appreciating the value of making sure kids have healthy food to eat in school. “My sister said something that I think other people believe in, too. She said, ‘If I had the choice to spend my tax money on anything, it would be that: let’s feed the kids.’” ▼

Members step up in key election year

MEA member Sara Williams has never before been involved in politics in her 10-year teaching career in Livonia. But Williams says she is stepping up now because “It feels like education is going in the right direction finally. We have educators on the education committee fighting for us.”

Williams and other volunteers on the local union’s Political Action Committee (PAC) recently kicked off this major election year with a very successful fundraiser with Sen. Dayna Polehanki (D-Livonia), a former high school English teacher who is chair of the Senate Education Committee.

“We felt helpless for so long, like there was nothing we could do because Lansing was Lansing,” Williams said. “Now we finally have our voices heard, and it’s exciting — the things that are starting to happen. We’re seeing the results of what voting can do for us.”

The event’s great turnout and response is spurring her onward, said Williams, who followed in her mother’s footsteps teaching elementary

school in Livonia and says “Being an educator and wanting to make a difference is in my blood.”

About 70 people showed up to meet Polehanki and Rep. Matt Koleszar (D-Plymouth) — also a former teacher who chairs the House Education Committee — and \$4,500 was raised to help elect and re-elect others who share a similar pro-education vision.

Just as encouraging to Williams was the range of people who attended, mostly from Livonia but some from neighboring communities: student teachers to retirees, paraeducators and custodians.

“I feel a sense of hope and a sense that good change is coming in these next few years, and I want to be part of it,” Williams said. “This was the first event I took part in, and I was very much inspired after.”

MEA members across the state are joining the effort, starting now, to elect officials in November — from school boards to the White House — who support public schools and the vital work of educators.

In the same week as Livonia educators turned out, retirees in Genesee County showed up for a phone bank with Gov. Gretchen Whitmer. The call for volunteers brought out a very senior retired Flint educator, said Michelle Gushen, president of the Genesee Lifelong Education Association-Retired who also retired from teaching in Flint in 2017.

Sen. Dayna Polehanki poses with a painting from Livonia art teacher Heidi Posh, who helped organize a recent fundraiser on her behalf.

Gushen acknowledged that everyone is tired in the wake of several challenging years, but “if a 95-year-old former Flint teacher can show up to a phone bank, then the rest of us can push past the fatigue and do our part,” she said.

A building rep and vice president of her local during her active years, Gushen said she continues to take on volunteer roles because she wants all children to receive a great education — no matter where they live. “I feel like it’s my responsibility to my grandkids and to all of these kids.”

Most who came to phone bank at the MEA office in Flint had no experience making calls to voters and were nervous at the outset. But meeting Whitmer and watching her demonstrate several calls eased fears, and positive responses to their outreach energized the group of a few dozen volunteers.

The callers reminded likely voters of Michigan’s presidential primary in February and asked if they would be supporting President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris.

“It’s really important that we support Gov. Whitmer and President Biden, so I was really pleased with the turnout and the success these new volunteers experienced,” Gushen said. “Retirees need to be heard. We have the time; we have the voices. We need to use them.”

Seeing such a wide range of members get involved in Livonia also is feeding the spirit of MEA member Heidi Posh, a Livonia art teacher for 28 years who has been a union building rep since her first year and also serves on the MEA Board of Directors.





(Left) An overflow crowd showed up to support Sen. Polehanki and Rep. Koleszar. (Right) Livonia educators Alex Hutko (left) and Heidi Posh — along with Sara Williams — are looking to do more after the success of the first fundraiser they organized.

Posh volunteers for the local PAC and helped to organize the event with Polehanki and Koleszar alongside Williams and another younger MEA member, Alex Hutko, an elementary special education teacher in her first year at Livonia after three years working elsewhere.

“To do this work with younger people who are passionate and excited and such great gals has been a lot of fun and very exciting for me,” Posh said. “I think about how many years I have left, and how I can help the next generation take over, so honestly Sara and Alex and I became a bit of a dream team.”

Like Williams, Hutko said this was her first time getting involved in politics, and she was struck by the personal feeling of attending an in-person event to meet lawmakers, hear what they’re doing, and share feedback from the classroom.

“I thought this would be a good way to get involved and learn what’s

happening in Lansing,” Hutko said. “For me, being at a small event like this made it more of a conversation. It humanized them and made me realize they’re politicians, but they’re really just people, and they were once doing what we are doing now.”

The lawmakers spoke about many education-related bills signed into law last year and now taking effect. They took questions and mingled with the crowd, the organizers said.

Williams added the excitement began building as the planning crew worked to ensure people turned out for the event. Much of that effort involved one-on-one conversations, and amid those talks she realized how many people don’t know all that’s been accomplished in the Legislature.

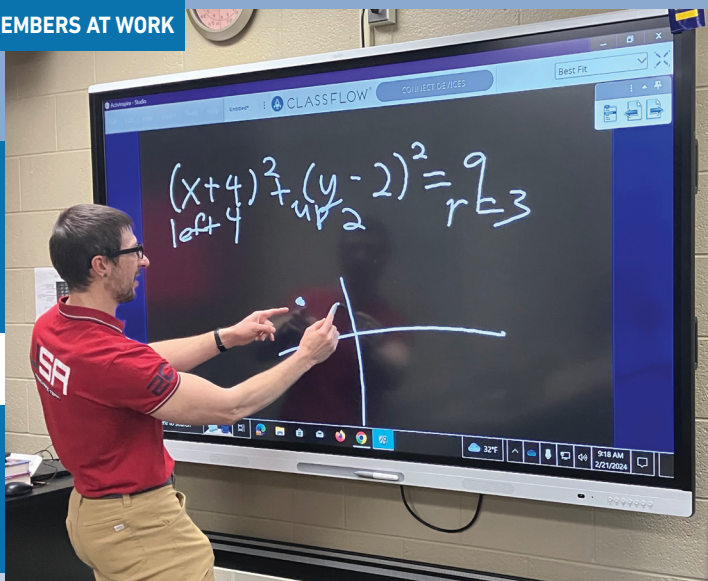
The list includes among others: increased education funding overall and additional targeted spending for educator pay, at-risk and special education students, student mental health, and rural transportation;

teacher evaluation reform; eliminating the third-grade retention mandate; and return of collective bargaining rights for educators.

When the legislative leaders began sharing accomplishments, the crowd clapped and cheered, Williams said: “Dayna and Matt were like — ‘But wait, there’s more!’”

The experience has her revved for the next one, she added. “It was energizing to feel like we did the right thing and made the two of them feel appreciated for all their hard work. It felt very much like a ‘We’re in it together’ vibe — they’re fighting for us, and we’re fighting for them.

“The way they spoke about education and what they believe in, I felt impassioned. We joked about it afterward, because we all felt like ‘Now what? What’s next? What else can we do to help?’” **v**



Blind teacher and Paralympic athlete

MEA member John Kusku has faced extra challenges throughout his 39 years, but he learned a key philosophy from his mother who told him as a little boy: Goals might be harder for you to achieve, but you can still do anything you want. “That’s been kind of the mentality of my life,” Kusku says.

The belief has served him well. Legally blind, Kusku is a two-time Paralympian for Team USA in addition to teaching math and physics at the Oakland County Technical Campus Southwest, where his example shows students anything is possible with commitment and hard work.

“The kind of thing I want my students to see is that people with disabilities, including maybe themselves, can be very highly successful,” said Kusku, whose wife Jessica is an MEA member teacher of visually impaired students in Livonia. The couple has a 10-year-old son.

Kusku has a rare genetic condition that causes progressive vision loss. He was born with 10 or 15 degrees of vision, since narrowed to less than one degree, “whereas someone with normal sight would have around 180 or 210 degrees of vision,” he said.

He and his family learned of it when he was just five years old. “The doctor was very clear in saying I could live a normal life but I would never drive a car. He predicted that I would be totally blind by the time I was 18, and my mom just said, ‘OK, those are the restrictions we have.’”

Growing up in Warren, Kusku loved playing in a youth soccer league, but when he got to middle school age — his eyesight worsening — players were getting bigger and stronger and the game was faster. “It stopped being fun,” he said.

“I didn’t know it at the time, but I was becoming a little depressed because I didn’t have anything to do. The thing that I really enjoyed, team sports, was kind of gone. And that’s when I came across goalball.”

Kusku was attending a sports education camp for blind kids at Western Michigan University, run by the Michigan Blind Athletic Association, where he got to play a very competitive level of the sport designed exclusively for visually impaired athletes.

“Goalball is played on a court, three against three, where the players are directly in front of each other,”

Kusku explained. “I got put down the line from this guy who threw the ball so hard it hit me in the nose, and I got the first and only bloody nose of my entire life — and that was when I was hooked! I was like, ‘Oh dude, this game’s awesome,’ and that moment became a huge changing point.”

Soon Kusku was invited to be part of the Michigan team traveling to youth national championships, and he formed a Michigan club travel team that played all over the U.S. and Canada. The experience proved to be beneficial for him socially as well as athletically, he said.

At the time he was a young high schooler, attending school and receiving services from a Teacher Consultant for the Visually Impaired (TCVI) who taught him to read braille and use adaptive technology. A separate mobility specialist showed him how to use a cane and navigate bus systems.

“I needed to use my cane in certain settings, but I wouldn’t because I didn’t want the embarrassment of it,” Kusku said.

Taking road trips with other athletes — some college students — changed his attitude, he said.



te shows students what is possible

“We would roll out of a 15-passenger van at a rest stop, and there’d be like 12 of us and 10 of us using canes, and it was OK. It was OK to tell the person behind the counter, ‘Hey, I can’t read the menu; can you tell me what you have?’ It was the first time I had been in those sorts of social settings.”

Today Kusku brings those experiences to young people as the coach of a youth travel team: “paying it forward, so it’s pretty cool,” he said.

Goalball is played on a 30x60 volleyball-size court with players wearing blackout goggles for fairness as they try to get a rubber ball into a four-foot-tall net running the entire 30-foot width. Players never cross half-court, and rules govern where the ball must hit the floor before crossing over.

The thick rubber ball is not inflated but has holes with two sleigh bells inside to make noise when moving. To defend their goal, players crouch and attack the incoming ball — “kind of the opposite of dodgeball,” he said. “I want to get hit because otherwise it scores.”

In 2009 Kusku made Team USA in goalball for the first time, but the team did not qualify for the 2012

Paralympics, in which the world’s top disabled athletes compete in the same years as Olympic Games.

Kusku and the American men’s team won silver in the 2016 Paralympics in Brazil and competed in Tokyo in 2020, coming in fourth. This year he narrowly missed the cut despite being among the top players in the U.S.

He plans to continue training for 2028. Meanwhile, he’s taken up cross country skiing and is pushing to become an elite competitor in that challenging sport. The first time he ever skied was in December 2022, and since then Kusku has raced in several competitions across the country.

Blind skiers have a guide who wears a microphone headset with a small speaker on his or her back to create sound and descriptions of terrain for orientation. At first Kusku thought he might try to compete in the 2026 Winter Paralympics, but he’s revised that goal date to 2030 with the difficulty level in mind.

“People say that cross country skiing is possibly the hardest thing to do on earth other than maybe hitting a baseball,” he said. “You’re literally balancing on one foot 90% of the time.”

He was inspired to become an educator by his 11th-grade Algebra teacher’s passion and excitement. He hopes to be a similar inspiration to his Career and Technical Education students, for whom he embeds math lessons into the welding work or health care roles they’re learning.

Kusku teaches with a smart screen that reads what is on the board, and he keeps notes about students to help him connect names with people. Like any educator, his biggest goal is to create relationships which clear the way to learning, and then students don’t think much about his blindness, he said.

“Because I function as well as I can, they really don’t understand how little I can see until pretty far into the school year. I don’t shove it in their faces, but my hope is they’ll realize like, Oh! He really can’t see, and he still can be a normal human being. Beyond that, he can also be an elite athlete.” ▼

John Kusku is a teacher in Oakland County and two-time Team USA Paralympian in goalball. He now coaches a youth goalball team and has taken up cross country skiing.

Delta professor seeks change through his

MEA member Amy French disrupts students' expectations in the history classes she leads at Delta College in Bay County's University Center by asking at the outset: "So what am I teaching this semester?"

French isn't joking or trying to catch anyone napping with her day-one question. As head of Delta's history department, French is acknowledging the historical narrative has revolved around wealthy white men and signaling she wants to know what students want to learn.

voices in all classes, "so students will find themselves in every single history course because it is the story of all of us," she said.

A former stockbroker who followed her passion toward uncovering and bringing forth lesser known stories of excluded and disenfranchised people, French received the Maurine Wyatt Feminist and Gender Equity Award in a ceremony at the MEA Winter Conference in March.

Her work at the college spans multiple large-scale projects beyond her

Soon after accepting a full-time tenure-track position at Delta in 2010, French and her history colleague and partner-in-creativity Laura Dull — who nominated her for the award — launched the Humanities Learning Center (HLC) to demonstrate the importance of the arts and humanities.

The HLC brings in speakers for an open-to-the-community series of brown bag talks throughout the year — informal sharing of powerful stories and ideas in a public square which French compares to Plato or Aristotle standing on the Acropolis to speak in ancient Greek times.

After handing off leadership of the HLC, French filled another hole: Not every History or Heritage month was equally represented on campus. While Black History Month might get recognized, Native American History Month or Asian and Pacific Islander Heritage Month might not, for example.

Over the past few years, she created "Celebrating Our Stories," a learning repository for each history or heritage month which she promotes along with HLC and other related events. She now brings students' work into the project with an honors option in which they identify missing narratives and complete the research and writing for inclusion in the collection.

"I love seeing it through their eyes and what they choose to focus on," she said. "It constantly teaches me and refocuses me, and that's the true joy. We're all lifelong learners, and students inspire us to be better versions of ourselves."

As chair and co-chair of the Women's History Month committee for more than a decade, French has delivered dozens of talks on women's struggles for equality, her personal focus and area of expertise.



Amy French and colleagues at Delta College use cardboard cutouts and QR codes to highlight the stories of women who've shaped history.

"The working class feels disenfranchised from history. People of color feel disenfranchised. People of non-dominant religions feel disenfranchised. So I will start teaching from whatever they say: *Can I learn more about the LGBTQ+ community? I'm working class; can I learn more about my people? What about women?*"

As its coordinator, French led a curricular change in the history department at Delta to highlight marginalized

classroom and departmental leadership duties — a fact she hadn't much thought about until seeing it all compiled for the award.

"I don't have a master narrative in my life. I'm not thinking I'm going to do this thing, which will lead to that thing, and then I'm going to have this planned outcome. Everything ties together because I see that here's a hole I can fill, there's another gap that needs bridging. One thing leads to another."

story

An early passion project French again initiated with Dull — dating back to when she was an adjunct working on a PhD — was an online women’s history exhibit called *Women who Dared*. The pair later linked cardboard cutouts with information and QR codes around campus for Women’s History Month.

And French further built upon *Women who Dared* after the disappointment of the 2016 presidential election when a colleague’s young daughter was shoved and taunted by a boy who said, “See? I told you girls can’t be president.”

“It broke my heart,” she said. “I thought, *we can do better than this*. I firmly believe that you can’t be what you can’t see, so that’s when I created *See a Girl, See a Leader*.”

French made t-shirts with the project’s name and wrote scripts about women leaders through millennia, which she invited local schoolgirls from across the Saginaw Bay region to record for airing on a local radio station and to be housed online with *Women who Dared*.

“It was so wonderful to hear little girls reading these stories and their voices being broadcast. I contacted the teacher of the boy who pushed my friend’s daughter, and I asked, ‘Could you play this in the classroom when it airs during NPR’s Morning Edition?’”

Dull — the colleague and frequent project partner who nominated her for the MEA award — said French was asked by Delta College President Michael Gavin why she puts in so much extra work on projects. She answered, “because it is important.”

“She spends the hours celebrating the stories of women and other marginalized voices because they are important and it is important work,” Dull wrote in her nomination. “That is a hallmark of true service.”



In *See a Girl, See a Leader*, French recorded local schoolgirls reading the stories of women leaders through millennia. French was honored with MEA’s Maurine Wyatt Feminist and Gender Equity Award in March. Check out her travel blog at roaminghistorian.com.

French grew up in Saginaw and attended Delta as a first-generation college student before earning a degree in history and communication at University of Michigan. She enjoyed a first career as a stockbroker but found her calling pursuing a master’s degree at Central and a PhD at Wayne State.

She holds a doctorate in legal history with an emphasis on labor law and has spoken across the country on an article she wrote in the *Michigan Historical Review* and later adapted for the Michigan Judiciary’s Journal, *The Court Legacy*: “Mixing It Up: Michigan Barmaids Fight for Civil Rights.”

In 1945 Michigan passed a law saying women couldn’t be bartenders in cities over 50,000 population unless their husband or father owned the establishment. In *Goesaert v. Cleary*, the Supreme Court upheld the law, ruling women are dependent and not guaranteed a right to wage work.

That decision referenced a 1908 ruling in *Muller v. Oregon*, which said women’s procreative value is more important than their right to labor on their own terms — and both of those rulings are still used to justify the court’s decisions today in abortion rights cases, for example, French said.

“That’s part of why my work on *Goesaert* is important is that it ties together over a century of sexual discrimination against women in the workplace and it uncovers why women have been treated as secondary citizens in work.”

Her philosophy aligns with Sister Ardeth Platte, a pacifist nun with ties to Saginaw imprisoned for anti-nuclear protests and who became the basis of a character on the TV show *Orange is the New Black*. French interviewed Platte for a history of the founding mothers of Saginaw’s domestic violence shelter.

“I just remember being awestruck at the time and asking ‘How did you do all this?’ And she said, ‘Think globally, act personally,’ so I try to keep that with me and remember how ordinary actions can become extraordinary.”

She is proud to work at Delta College, where her own journey began, because it provides the kind of small class sizes and caring instructional environment that helps students learn, grow and thrive.

“The students inspire me,” French said. “My only regret in teaching at a two-year college is that I only have them for two years. But I’m their mentor for life.” ♥

‘Blessed and lucky guy’ honored

MEA member Matt Hamilton believes his willingness to take risks spurs great teaching, so the fact it also generates occasional failures doesn't stop him. "I'm just a regular teacher who's trying new things, so it's not perfect every day by any means," he says.

It was a leap of faith 16 years ago — just five years into his middle school teaching career at East Jordan Public Schools in Charlevoix County — which led to Hamilton's signature achievement among many remarkable accomplishments over the past two decades: a program called Shoe Club.

In addition to teaching world history, video production and yearbook, Hamilton created and runs the voluntary program for middle school members and high school mentors to learn empathy, life skills and leadership; plan and carry out community service efforts; and be inspired to dream.

Members of Shoe Club have completed many projects over the years, but when COVID hit in 2020 and things got weird, Hamilton went big. Amid the challenges of the pandemic's first year, members of the club completed

the largest student-led project in East Jordan schools' history.

They raised \$70,000 to install a 30 kW solar array on the middle-high school's roof — and didn't stop there. In the few years since, two more enormous projects followed in its wake.

"I can only describe these projects as magical from start to finish," he said. "It starts with an idea, and then we make a plan, and then we execute that plan. The kids are amazing, this community is amazing, my administration and colleagues are amazing, and my family is very supportive.

"I'm telling you — I'm a blessed and lucky guy!"

For his vision and dedication to student learning and success, Hamilton received the MEA Educational Excellence Award in a ceremony at the MEA Winter Conference in March.

In addition to Hamilton's commitment to excellence, "His kind heartedness is felt throughout the school and his smile lights up almost any dim situation," said Nathan Fleshman, president of the East Jordan Education Association, who nominated Hamilton for the award.

"Matt is someone who is always willing to put in the extra effort to make someone's day brighter," Fleshman wrote in the nomination.

Shoe Club grew out of an experience from 2008, early in his career, Hamilton said. A motivational speaker appeared at an assembly to say everyone has value and no one knows what

The Shoe Club in East Jordan has collected hundreds of shoes from famous people and students alike to promote empathy and understanding.



others are going through merely judging from appearances.

"In part of his talk, he brought out a bag of shoes, and he would hold up a shoe and say things like, 'This girl was a straight-A student, got a basketball scholarship to a Division I college. On the outside everything looked great, but she was cutting herself because her dad wasn't involved in her life.'"

In discussion after, Hamilton and his students agreed: the presentation was powerful. Then in the following days, his students began showing up before school, at lunch, after school. "They were like, 'Hey, can I talk to you, Hamilton?' And they were opening up and sharing their struggles with me."

Their stories kept him awake at night for two weeks, he said. "This was in March. I realized I'd been sitting with these kids for — what? — seven months? They were coming to my class with a smile on their face, and I was finally learning that behind the smile there's a lot going on."

Hamilton decided to start Shoe Club, a place where kids could learn their value, build self confidence, and develop into leaders. He would require kids who wanted to join to read a couple of books on those subjects, write a paper, and submit 10 life goals.

Initially he hoped three to five kids would sign up in those weeks between March and the end of that school year, but 27 kids joined by June, "so I knew I was on to something."





Matt Hamilton (top, left) and middle school members of Shoe Club — assisted by high school mentors — completed three of the largest student-led service project in school district history. Hamilton won MEA’s Educational Excellence Award in March.

As part of the project, Hamilton and the students gather shoes from famous people and East Jordan schoolkids alike for a collection now grown to more than 200 pairs from athletes, scientists, entertainers, inventors, explorers and leaders. View all at shoeclub.org/shoe-museum.

The list includes autographed sneakers from Kobe Bryant; red pumps from Dolly Parton; ski boots from Olympia Mikaela Shiffrin; ballet slippers from professional dancer Misty Copeland; and dress shoes from cell phone inventor Martin Cooper.

“Every time I get a shoe, I get to share that person’s story with my students,” Hamilton said, adding he rotates the footwear displayed on a high shelf in his classroom and in a new lighted display case.

A Cadillac native, Hamilton became a teacher because he loves people and wanted to impact the world.

He makes a difference every day in his classroom by making history come alive. Hamilton brings in speakers to his history classes and uses Virtual Reality goggles and “fake field trips” — dramatic stories he tells with the lights off in which he populates the world of the past with his students.

And every year by Thanksgiving he gives every student a nickname. One boy is “Sock” because he’s a thinker who does well in class discussions held in the Socratic method. A boy who likes fishing is named Jitterbug after a lure. A Taylor Swift fan whose name starts with K becomes K-Swizzle.

“All the kids know coming into my classroom in seventh grade, so I have fifth and sixth graders who tell me they can’t wait to get their nickname. It becomes a big deal, but it’s really just building relationships and letting kids know they matter and they’re unique.”

After the success of the huge solar project amid the pandemic, Shoe Club students the next year helped to enhance a gardening program at the elementary school. They raised \$75,000 to buy fencing, a hoop house and shed, and the next year assisted in making it all operational.

This year in the ambitious “Honor and Service project,” Shoe Club is raising \$130,000 to enhance the 100-year-old GAR Park, named after a Civil War fraternal organization called Grand Army of the Republic.

Students also organized the school’s first Veterans Day Assembly last November in which veterans

and students spoke and the band played next to the honor guard and flags from the military branches. “It was super powerful and emotional,” Hamilton said.

Now they’re putting together a book from surveys and interviews the students conducted with local veterans, and they’re raising \$30,000 to take club members to Gettysburg this summer after learning about the Civil War.

The kids have become expert fundraisers — writing grants and delivering presentations to local businesses, organizations and groups who help fund projects. But Hamilton stresses that Shoe Club’s focus is not on raising money but on raising great humans, and he doesn’t do it alone.

Volunteers from the region — active and retired professionals — act as expert mentors to the students, and his family and school community are always there with support.

“I have amazing kids willing to jump in and try stuff, and I have amazing community members willing to give time, money and energy to make success happen, so it’s a huge thing that goes way beyond me. I’m just the lucky guy who gets to sit back and watch magic happen.” ▼

Candidates for NEA Director and Alternates

Candidate for NEA Director

Allyson McBride Culver

Allyson McBride Culver is a candidate for NEA Director and a proud union member. She began as a member of the student MEA chapter at CMU in 1994. She moved to Traverse City for student teaching and after graduating in 1995, became a teaching assistant. In the fall of 1997 she began teaching first grade, and has since taught in Traverse City Public Schools. Her union leadership roles include: building representative, PAC Chair, Grievance Chair, MEA and NEA Delegate, Region 15 President, trained SNAP, TCEA Vice President, TCEA President as well as MEA Board member and alternate NEA Director.



Campaign Statement:

I first extend my thanks for all that is done collectively and individually for public education as unified emerging leaders, ESP, K-12, Higher Ed, and retired members of MEA. If elected NEA Director it is my goal to proudly serve our members and students in Washington D.C. I see my service as an advocate who additionally brings a voice and a listening ear representative of many smaller, rural areas of our state. The goals and reasons why I have chosen to run for NEA Director give me the footing and motivation to participate in both dialogue and listening, as well as make tough, informed decisions when necessary.

Having had the pleasure of working with so many members from around the state in multiple capacities, my desire to pursue the NEA Director position stems from these experiences:

- Introduction to a more personal look at NEA through an opportunity provided by President Herbart and Vice President Madeffari to attend the NEA Summit.
- Local and state experiences with the lens of their connected importance to work at the national level. Especially with elected officials whose votes impact our profession and our children.
- Being able to grow our union voice for current and future education paraprofessionals and professionals to strengthen the foundation of public education for all students.

As NEA Director it is my goal to proudly serve all of my union brothers and sisters throughout the state as well as our students, in Washington D.C. I gratefully offer my thanks. It would be a privilege to have your support and your vote for NEA Director.

Candidate for NEA Director

Roger W. Rothe

Roger W. Rothe has been a member of the MEA since 2001. In his many years in the MEA, he has served as a local leader where he is the current treasurer of the Birch Run Education Association, and the treasurer of Region 11. His other MEA positions include serving as a Political Action Leader and a member of several Leg Councils. As a teacher and graduate of Central Michigan University in 2000, he studied Political Science and currently teaches middle school social studies. Roger looks forward to serving in this position and supporting educational staff across Michigan.



Campaign Statement:

I would like to thank all of the public education employees across the state of Michigan that have welcomed me into their Region meetings over the last three months. If elected, I pledge to represent Michigan and the MEA in Washington D.C. to the best of my ability. The MEA is a critical part of preserving and improving the educational system across our state. Growing up in the thumb, it was my public education background that helped me get into college and helped shape the educator I am today. I understand how hard it is for people that work in the public school system to fulfill their dream of helping students and put food on their tables. I have worked two jobs my entire career as an educator. That is a common theme across our state for all our membership, and it is the norm even in my district. I will be a voice for all regions and all demographics across our state. The MEA means family to me, and it would be an honor to serve the members of the Michigan Education Association as your next MEA/NEA director.

te NEA Director

Candidate for Alternate NEA Director

Dr. Anthony Pennock

Dr. Anthony Pennock is an alternative high school special education teacher in Battle Creek Public Schools and serves as the president of the Battle Creek Education Association. He has served on the bargaining team for his local since 2017. Anthony is currently the MEA Region 4 President and is also a delegate to the South Central Education Association coordinating council. Anthony has served on the Screening and Recommendation committee for Region 4 and is a founding member of the MEA LGBTQ+ Caucus where he serves as the Male/Non-Binary Co-Chair. Anthony served as NEA State Director from 2021-2023.



Campaign Statement:

There are a number of reasons an Alternate may be needed to step in: illness, schedule conflicts, family emergencies, and even when an additional director may be added when membership increases. For this reason, Alternate NEA State Directors need to be ready to step in to the shoes of a Director at a moment's notice if called upon to do so.

Having served as an NEA State Director from 2021-2023, I know the policies, procedures, and duties of serving on the NEA Board. I have had the opportunity to develop relationships with members of Congress and their staff as well as Directors from across the country for the betterment of all of our students and members. This experience will be invaluable in the event an Alternate is called to support.

I have been a member of MEA and NEA since before I signed my first contract, joining the Students of Michigan Education Association (now AEM) in college. After securing my first contract, the first question I asked was, "Where is my union rep?" and I signed up that day for active membership.

In 2017, I got a job in Battle Creek Public Schools and jumped into leadership quickly, becoming a bargaining team member, building representative, District Collaboration Team member, and eventually, president of the BCEA in 2019. Since becoming president, I have worked to lift the voices of all educators and bring together the leadership of the ESP groups in the district to work collaboratively for the benefit of all members and students. This has recently expanded to presenting our story of collaboration at MEA and NEA conferences to help others plan for collaboration as well.

I am also a founding member and the Male/Non-Binary Co-Chair of the MEA LGBTQ+ Caucus to help provide support and resources for members to better the educational experience for LGBTQ+ staff and students statewide.

I ask for your support at the 2024 MEA RA to serve as Alternate NEA State Director to ensure the voices of all of our members and students can continue to be presented at the national level.

Candidate for Alternate NEA Director

Paulette Pepin

Paulette Pepin is a second grade teacher in the Gladstone Area Public Schools. A member of the Gladstone Education Association, Paulette is very active in her local and region. Since 2018 she has proudly served as local President, and was elected as their MEA RA Representative, and representative to the regional council. In addition to local offices, she is Region 17 Vice President and Elections Chair, and EA NEA RA Cluster Delegate. At the MEA level, she is a member of the Local Affiliates Commission, and a Michigan member of the NEA Leaders for Just Schools.



Campaign Statement:

As an educator, I have taught students at all levels, from Head Start to high school, general and special education. I've been a substitute teacher, a paraprofessional, taught in both general and special education classrooms, and in charter and public schools. This varied experience has given me a unique perspective.

As a member of the MEA and NEA since becoming a full time public school teacher in 1999, I have seen the pendulum swing from one side to the other and back again. I have picketed with my union brothers and sisters and worked on crisis teams. Just like you, I've seen our state and federal governments make decisions and pass laws about OUR profession, take away rights while adding more and more responsibilities, and perpetuate an environment that has resulted in too few new teachers entering and remaining in the field.

Coming from a proud union home, I joined the union to have a voice, and now more than ever we need that voice, for ourselves, our peers, our students. The MEA and NEA are our collective voice, and we are being heard!

Through membership, participation, and leadership roles I have learned a great deal and a eager to learn and do more. I ask for your support with the promise that I will be prepared and ready as an Alternate NEA Director, to step in if and when I am called upon to do so.

Elections for these positions and others will be held at the MEA Representative Assembly on April 19-20 in East Lansing. For more information, contact the MEA Executive Office at 800-292-1934.

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*By Ross Wilson,
MESSA Executive Director*



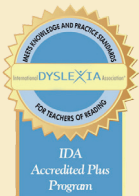
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We need paid parental leave

By Shana Saddler

While on maternity leave, I heard from a number of my colleagues with well wishes and congratulations: “I am so happy for you!” and “I am so proud of you.” However, the one that stood out most in the very forefront of my mind ended with the words, “I will see you in six weeks.”

SIX WEEKS! That is when it dawns on me — I only have six weeks with my new baby boy? But I am in pain. I had pregnancy complications. I was admitted to the hospital for the last three weeks of my pregnancy. I need time to bond with my child. Where will this extra bonding time come from?

Who can I trust with my newborn child, to watch over him, to protect him, to pick him up when he is crying, to feed him without delay, to hug him and hold him close to their bosom the way his mother does it when I return in less than two months?

I look out the window, nursing my newborn and thinking of all I must do to prepare my return to the classroom. I have given over 20 years to many students in different capacities. I’ve listened, counseled, mentored, and touched lives in ways that can’t be described, but for my own son I get six weeks.

Many less experienced teachers can cobble together even less paid leave from sick days, often choosing unpaid leaves and returning to work with a depleted sick bank. I think of mothers elsewhere. How do other countries support citizens during this delicate and precious phase of life?

The United Kingdom gives mothers 39 weeks, Greece 43 weeks. Our neighbor to the north, Canada — 15 weeks. France gives mothers from six weeks before birth to 10 weeks after birth. In fact, the U.S. is the only high-income country in the world without such a policy.

Research shows paid parental leave benefits short- and long-term health of

families and children, while improving employee satisfaction and retention. Yet we as a country operate like the Ford assembly line: a well-oiled machine with no breaks, no pauses; expediency is the top priority.

With no policy at the federal level, states have begun to make needed change happen. Last year, Minnesota joined 12 other states that have adopted paid family medical leave programs, which operate similar to unemployment or workers’ compensation insurance.

Minnesota’s program will guarantee up to 12 weeks of leave for covered employees to care for a newborn or seriously ill family member and receive a portion of their weekly pay, starting in 2026, with contributions split equally between employer and employee.

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has pushed for a similar program in Michigan. In 2020 she extended a 12-week family medical leave program for all state employees, and last year bills were introduced in the state House and Senate to create a 15-week program statewide.

However, the proposals have not passed here, despite polls that show a huge majority of Michiganders from across the political spectrum — 86% — support the idea, just as 80% of all Americans do.

As my precious baby boy now sleeps in my arms and I look at him ever so lovingly, I am reminded of the Why I pondered many years ago.

For me and for many other educators holiday and summer breaks tilted the scale in favor of a career in teaching, hands down. Why? I always knew I wanted to be a mom and teaching provided the perfect schedule, where I would be at home with my child or children.

That is when reality comes back into view. Six weeks — six weeks — six weeks. It is time for Michigan to revamp its policies. ♥

Shana Saddler is a veteran Farmington Hills teacher. For comments or questions, reach her at shana.saddler@fjpsk12.net.

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