

MEA • voice

**'Problem student'
to teacher**
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**Reimagining
education**
page 8

**In honor
of service**

Letter to Members: Dedicated to Public Service

During this season of celebration, dedication to public service is something worth honoring — especially in school employees who work with the students who will lead us to a brighter future.

From PreK-12 through higher education, the service of MEA members shines a light for young people to find their way academically and beyond the classroom. We all have this in common: our gratitude for educators who've made a difference in the lives of others.

The subject of our cover story in this issue, MEA-Retired member Jim McCloughan, affected countless students and athletes over 40 years of teaching and coaching in South Haven Public Schools — after displaying remarkable heroism on the battlefields of Vietnam as a draftee just out of college.

His story of courage and determination, which earned him a Congressional

Medal of Honor, can be a source of inspiration for us as we navigate challenges of our lives and professions.

McCloughan's story is extraordinary — but so too is the public service to students, families and communities that MEA members provide across Michigan day in and day out.

From classrooms to school buses to college campuses and beyond, educators make powerful impacts on young people and the future. Without fanfare and often in the quiet of a one-on-one conversation, MEA members help students understand the world around them and how they can use their gifts to make it a better place for everyone.

The holiday season fills our buckets with hope and good cheer, but it's the life-changing work our members perform all year long, one student at a time, that fuels our passion and drive as we move into 2026.

From all of us at MEA, we wish you happy, healthy and safe holidays! 



Chandra Madafferi,
MEA President & CEO



Brett Smith,
Vice President



Aaron Eling,
Secretary-Treasurer



REGISTER!

WINTER CONFERENCE

Feb. 4-6, Detroit

Registration is open for the 2026 MEA Winter Conference on Feb. 4-6 at Detroit's Marriott Renaissance Center. Learn more about MEA's premier professional learning event at [MEA.org/WinterConf](https://mea.org/WinterConf), including session listings, lodging information, and planned events as we head into the critical 2026 election year. The deadline to register is Jan. 9.

2026 DETROIT PISTONS EDUCATOR APPRECIATION

The Detroit Pistons are again celebrating educators and support staff with three Educator Appreciation Nights in 2026:

- ▶ **Thursday, Jan. 1** vs. Miami
- ▶ **Friday, March 13** vs. Memphis
- ▶ **Thursday, April 2** vs. Minnesota

MEA members purchasing specially priced tickets will also receive a \$10 Food & Beverage voucher plus an exclusive Educator Appreciation Night Quarter Zip. To purchase tickets, go to pistons.com/educator.



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

An annual project run by the Copper Country Education Association has been a holiday tradition for more than 30 years, featuring student artwork on notecards sold at art fairs. Read more, page 20.



On the cover: After 40 years teaching and coaching, retiree Jim McCloughan stays busy as one of 61 living recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor. Photos by Tom Gennara, story on pages 10-15.

Living proof, page 7.

Testing misses, page 19.

Leader honored, page 22.

More inside: Aspiring educators' success, page 5. Future education policy forum, page 8. What test scores really say, page 17. Free character curriculum, page 13.



MEA • VOICE

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MEA Scholarship — apply now!

The 2026 MEA Scholarship application form and eligibility requirements are now available online at mea.org/scholarship. The application deadline is Feb. 12, 2026.

Eligible students include dependents of MEA and MEA-Retired members in good standing who attend or will attend a Michigan public college, university or vocational training institution. In 2025, 24 new scholarship winners were awarded \$1,800 each, and 25 returning college students were awarded scholarships of \$900 each. For additional information, please reach out at MEAScholarship@mea.org.

Since 1997, the MEA Scholarship Fund has awarded over 800 scholarships totaling \$701,213 to graduates of Michigan public high schools.

Quotables

“They’re neglecting the basic responsibility to educate our children. It’s cruel. It’s shameful. And our students deserve so much better.”

NEA President Becky Pringle on the Trump administration’s dismantling of the U.S. Department of Education without Congressional approval. The department was created by Congress to coordinate federal programs and guarantee equal access to opportunity.

Quotables

“I want to change factors in the community that will positively affect my students, like making sure the parks are clean and the community centers have long enough hours. Winning this seat isn’t just about me — wherever I go, my students are with me.”

MEA member Clara Martinez, a ninth-year dance teacher in the Lansing School District, quoted in NEA Today on winning a seat on the Lansing City Council in the Nov. 4 election.

Clara Martinez is a Lansing public school teacher, proud union member, and passionate community leader.



Nominations sought for ESP Caucus Board

Nominations are being accepted for several positions on the MEA ESP Caucus Executive Board. Open positions are as follows:

DIRECTOR BY CLASSIFICATION

FOOD SERVICE:

1 Position – Immediate to Aug. 31, 2028

MAINTENANCE:

1 Position – Immediate to Aug. 31, 2028

OFFICE PERSONNEL:

1 Position – Sep. 1, 2026 to Aug. 31, 2029

TRANSPORTATION:

1 Position – Sep. 1, 2026 to Aug. 31, 2029

Elections to the ESP Caucus Executive Board will take place during the MEA Representative Assembly on April 17-18, 2026.

Information needed for each candidate includes: name, present occupation, home address, home and work telephone numbers, home email address, school district, name of nominee’s local ESP association and written consent of the candidate running for office.

Candidates and nominators must be members in good standing of MEA/NEA. In order to receive delegate mailing labels, information must be received no later than Feb. 17, 2026 and should be mailed to: Gezelle Oliver, MEA/ESP Department, PO Box 2573, 1216 Kendale Blvd., East Lansing, MI 48826-2573, or it can be sent via email to goliver@mea.org.

Additional nominations will be accepted from the floor at the MEA/ESP Caucus meeting on Friday, April 17, 2026 and those names will be added to the ballot. Candidates will be given up to three minutes to address delegates.

Biographical sketches can be sent to Heather Traxler, MEA staff assistant to the ESP Caucus, via email to htraxler@mea.org. She will send them collectively to all ESP RA delegates in good standing.

Questions about the elections should be directed to Jim Sparapani, ESP Caucus Elections Chairperson, at (906) 779-1984 or via email to jsparapani@att.net.

THE FUTURE IS NOW

A Master Class in AEM at SVSU

More than 200 students have joined the Saginaw Valley State University (SVSU) Aspiring Educators of Michigan (AEM) this fall – an excellent feat for leaders of the chapter who start each year building membership from scratch.

AEM is the preservice wing of MEA where college students majoring in education get connected, learn together, take on leadership positions, and complete service projects.

With no carryover from one year to the next, AEM programs on college campuses across Michigan begin every fall with zero members. The SVSU chapter of AEM has inspired others statewide with consistent and creative leadership and engagement.

Their accomplishments highlight the importance of investing in our future public educators and serve as a reminder that both our union and our profession are in safe hands.

Under the leadership of President Alexis Penney, Vice President Jessica Lask and Secretary Treasurer Kaseby McClure, the SVSU chapter creates many great opportunities for members to get connected and involved.

Event managers Jocelyn Kozminski and Chloe McMillin are sure to offer lots of variety and get help boosting turnout from social media coordinator Madolyn Glocksine.

In addition to often-themed general membership meetings every other month, featuring information on topics such as financial aid, many tabling events keep the chapter busy:

- ◆ Crafty members participated in claw clip and lanyard decorating
- ◆ Game lovers attended a trivia competition and BINGO night




Fun, themed events turn out aspiring educators at Saginaw Valley State University.

- ◆ A de-stress event gave training on self-care as part of a daily regimen
- ◆ Professional learning included a seminar on banned books
- ◆ Required CPR training and certification was delivered by MEA staff
- ◆ A Cocoa and Cram event supported members studying for exams

Each year AEM at SVSU also develops its leadership bench with a shadowing opportunity for incoming board members. The chapter maintains continuity

and builds a strong legacy with creativity and commitment.

Happy holidays from MEA to all of our aspiring and early career educators! 



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[facebook.com/mineweducators](https://www.facebook.com/mineweducators)

MESSA supports a member's full-circle moment



Seconds after Cynthia Penski gave birth to her daughter, Allison, doctors whisked the newborn away.

Allison couldn't breathe.

Her skin was blue.

Doctors had to act fast.

They tried to explain that Allison had transposition of the great arteries or TGA, a rare heart defect. But those words meant nothing at the time.

Cynthia had just given birth and her mind was in a fog. She was only concerned about one thing: saving her daughter's life. But Lansing's Sparrow Hospital wasn't equipped to handle Allison's condition.

"Doctors kept telling me, 'It will be OK,'" said Cynthia, a high school English teacher at Eaton Rapids High School. "I just kept saying, 'Why don't you put her in the ambulance and take her?' It

was survival mode. It was 'let's get her fixed.' It's hard to comprehend. You just go. You don't try to make sense of it."

After nurses let Cynthia hold her baby for a moment, they swiftly placed Allison in an air ambulance to the University of Michigan Health C.S. Mott Children's Hospital for immediate surgery. Two days and two surgeries later, doctors properly connected Allison's aorta and pulmonary arteries.

"Allison came home on feeding tubes," Cynthia said. "She needed a home health nurse and MESSA covered it all ... You need it, they took care of it."

In her early years, Allison underwent cognitive tests and visits with cardiologists to ensure proper functioning. Now, 21 years old, she must see her cardiologist annually for the rest of her life. Otherwise, she lives a perfectly normal life that has come full circle.

Studying creative writing with a Spanish minor, Allison is a senior at the U-M. And for the past three years, she's

been a volunteer for Dance Marathon at the University of Michigan (DMUM), a student-run organization that raises funds for pediatric programs at Mott Children's Hospital. Last year, the organization raised more than \$254,700.

"I love giving back," said Allison, who has self-published three books. "I love seeing the kids smile, the hospital workers smile and their parents smile. I can speak to these parents and kids and say, 'I've been through this. Don't worry. We've got you.'"

Cynthia said her family will never forget how MESSA had their back when Allison was born. She said she will always fight to keep MESSA in her district.

"We worried about nothing," Cynthia said. "And that's such a relief. MESSA didn't even flinch." **V**

Learn more about how MESSA makes a difference in members' lives at messa.org/HereForYou.

I went from problem student to teacher. The long arc of my story is a reminder for anyone who cares about public education.

Readers of the *MEA Voice* may remember me from the August–September issue, where part of my story was featured in an article about addressing educator shortages.

I was celebrated for completing my degree and certification after three years of night classes, all while working full-time as a paraeducator and co-founding a youth program in the wake of COVID. It felt good to be acknowledged — but that wasn't the whole story.

There is another part of my journey that I left out. It's harder to talk about, but more important.

It's the part that explains how I went from being considered a "troubled student" — one who disrupted class, struggled academically, and eventually dropped out at 16 — to becoming a special education teacher in the same district I once struggled in.

Growing up, school was not a place where I felt successful. I remember the frustration in my teachers' faces.



By Justin Harper
Ann Arbor Education Association

I remember the suspension slips, the office visits, the moments of anger.

In third grade, I punched the glass on a fire extinguisher case in the hallway. In fourth grade, I was standing on desks looking for the class's attention. In fifth grade, I told my teacher he was a punk and to "shut up," expecting punishment, but instead he showed up for me — literally.

He started attending all my basketball games, supporting me with the game I loved. He showed me that I mattered. That I was worth sticking with. That seed took years to grow.

There were others. After-school child-care staff encouraged me, especially one aide who trained me in basketball and made me proud of my strengths.

And Mr. Pipkin, a legendary teacher who taught African-American Studies. His class was the first place where I felt seen — where my identity was honored, where I earned an A because I cared.

Even then, I still struggled in every other class. Back then, I couldn't explain why. Now I understand: Educators plant seeds that do not always sprout right away. Sometimes the harvest comes years later, in another season entirely. But the watering matters. The tending matters.

My turning point came after a fight that nearly cost me my life. Recovery forced me to reflect — on my choices,

my influences, my future. I saw who was truly there for me. I understood what I wanted to become. The seeds planted in me finally began to grow.

I went back to school, then received my diploma. I became a lunch aide. I worked my way up to paraeducator. And eventually — with patience, mentorship, and belief — I became a teacher.

Today, I teach from a place of empathy, not judgment. I know firsthand that shame never inspired anyone to become their best self. Kids make mistakes — sometimes big ones. My job is to stay in the work with them. To help them understand themselves, regulate their emotions, and build character.

I listen. I offer choices. I hold boundaries with compassion. And I follow through.

The truth is: my students inspire me. They remind me daily that no one is fixed to their past. Growth happens quietly, slowly, and sometimes unpredictably — just like seeds.

I am living proof of what can happen when educators plant those seeds and refuse to give up.

And now, I get to plant them, too. **V**

Justin Harper is a second-year special education teacher in Ann Arbor after working as a paraeducator for 15 years. He also serves as director of CLR Academy, a youth program he co-founded.

Reimagining Schools for the Future

MEA Presidents' Academy forum brainstorms policy changes to meet student needs on high school requirements, literacy

By Chandra Madafferi

MEA President & CEO

In October, more than sixty teachers and academic leaders from across Michigan — representing every grade level and region — gathered for a dynamic discussion led by local presidents committed to reimagining the future of education. The conversation centered on two essential questions: *What should schools look like to help every student succeed and how can we strengthen literacy statewide?*

The energy in the room was unmistakable. Leaders were eager to be part of something proactive, reflective, and creative — work that moves education forward.

For many participants, this effort represents a long-awaited shift. For more than a decade, educators have said they want a real voice in shaping the future, not just responding to decisions made for them. Through this initiative, they're finally doing just that — using their collective experience, ideas, and influence to design what's next for Michigan's schools.

As one participant shared, it felt empowering to “move from fighting against to building toward.” Leaders left energized, hopeful, and ready to lead the change they've long envisioned.

I know that our members see firsthand how much student needs have changed — and we can't prepare tomorrow's learners with yesterday's

systems. That's why this work is so powerful. It brings educators together to design schools that nurture critical thinkers, problem-solvers, and compassionate citizens.

Attendees broke into grade-level groups — each charged with envisioning how learning could better serve students' needs.

Independently, three separate high school groups identified similar priorities: rethinking class schedules to allow for longer instructional blocks, flexibility, and expanded outside learning opportunities beginning as early as tenth grade.

These ideas align with the Michigan Education Guarantee (MEG) — an initiative that aims to give students more agency in designing their own futures through holistic competencies and innovative instruction. Making that vision a reality will require changes to Michigan's school structures, graduation requirements, resources to support individualized success, and a new generation of educators ready to teach skills that can't be taught by AI or a computer.

Elementary educators emphasized returning to strong foundations in reading and writing, with literacy skills intentionally embedded across science and social studies.

Across all grade levels, one shared theme emerged: students need more time for fun, creativity, and meaningful reflection away from electronics.

Educators expressed a desire for less predetermined and more unstructured time — opportunities for outdoor play, imagination, teamwork, and problem-solving. These seemingly simple experiences build essential social and emotional skills that last well beyond school.

In addition to calling for more time for discovery and play, educators in ALL grade levels emphasized the importance of meaningful field trips and community experiences — opportunities that have largely disappeared over the past decade due to deep school funding cuts, over testing, and the growing pressure of endless curriculum standards. As one educator noted, “so much of what students are tested on today, they could simply Google — but what they *can't* Google is how to explore, question, and connect.”

Yes, many schools still have the traditional end-of-year trip to the zoo or another special event, but educators were talking about something deeper — hands-on learning woven into daily instruction. Science lessons at the pond down the road, walks through the woods to make discoveries, or visits into town where students can buy lunch, practice social skills, and build community awareness.

Elementary teachers pointed out that being immersed in real places strengthens language acquisition, a key part of literacy. Many students today simply don't have access to the kinds of everyday experiences that help develop



vocabulary and comprehension. I remember in my early years of teaching we took students to a small petting zoo and realized some had never seen animals as common as chickens or goats. Experiences like that, once routine, have become rare — and educators are eager to bring them back.

It wasn't too long ago that school looked more like this — when teacher shortages were rare, and Michigan students performed among the best in the nation. Strengthening literacy remains a shared priority, and educators stressed that it must be a *team effort* involving parents, families, and communities — reading together at home, limiting screen time, and nurturing a love of books from an early age.

Regardless of how test scores are interpreted, there's critical work ahead to improve student reading outcomes. Governor Gretchen Whitmer has already indicated that literacy will be a major focus during her final year in office in 2026. Without a strong foundation and the right resources, students can struggle to *learn to read* — and without literacy, they cannot *read to learn*.

Also, in attendance to hear firsthand from educators were Michelle Richard, the Governor's senior literacy advisor, and Venessa Keesler, President & CEO of Launch Michigan, both of whom engaged deeply with participants to better understand educators' perspectives and priorities. ✓

MEA prioritizing school safety

Student learning and school safety should go hand-in-hand.

That's why educators across Michigan are deeply concerned about the rise in disruptive student behavior, which includes verbal outbursts, threats, and physical aggression. Addressing this troubling nationwide trend is critical for the future of education.

MEA is prioritizing this work and providing ways for members to engage in the conversation about solutions.

Increasing mental health challenges, constant access to smartphones, overexposure to social media, lingering effects of the pandemic, and a broader culture that promotes incivility have all contributed to a significant increase in student behavior problems.

Working together with policymakers, administration, families and students, we can develop and implement concrete solutions. That is the focus of a new MEA taskforce created by the Representative Assembly to address student behavior and school safety.

Are you interested in doing more to address student behavior issues? Here are some steps you can take at mea.org/behavior:

- 1** Share your experiences with how challenging behavior affects your students' learning conditions and your working conditions.
- 2** Propose ideas for best practices, programs, policies or legislation that can make a positive impact on student behavior and school safety.
- 3** Volunteer to serve on the MEA student behavior/school safety task force and other important work in this area.

Veteran of combat and classroom earns rare recognition

By Brenda Ortega
MEA Voice Editor

From the get-go, Jim McCloughan was competitive “with a capital C,” he says.

Small and athletic, he excelled at every sport he tried. At Bangor High School in the early 1960s McCloughan earned 11 varsity letters and all-conference honors in football, basketball, baseball and track, despite standing just 5-foot-2 and 130 pounds at graduation.

His competitive spirit also helped him overcome undiagnosed dyslexia that made reading difficult. He combined workarounds with a willingness to put in extra hours completing assignments and learning material to graduate near the top of his high school class.

He would go on to compete in football and baseball at Olivet College where he added wrestling to his repertoire. Despite inexperience in the new sport, McCloughan achieved back-to-back conference wrestling championships in his junior and senior years.

When his wrestling coach suggested McCloughan would make a good teacher and coach, his future took shape. He completed student teaching, earned a bachelor's degree in sociology, and signed a contract to work in South Haven Public Schools in May of 1968.

That summer he prepared for the job and coached wrestling until fate intervened. McCloughan received a draft notice from the Selective Service System ordering him to report for military duty at the height of the Vietnam War.

He left for basic training in September, underwent advanced training two months later, and deployed to Vietnam as a U.S. Army combat medic the following March.

McCloughan credits lessons learned from coaches, teachers and family members, along with skills and toughness developed through sports — especially football and wrestling — for his survival. In particular, he believes wrestling saved his life.

“That’s where I learned mental discipline that gave me the ability to focus on this wounded soldier in the kill zone, while my men are firing at the enemy, the enemy’s firing at my men, and me and this guy are in the middle of it,” he said in an interview.

In 1970, he returned to teaching and coaching in South Haven with a new-found mission: “I wanted to prepare my students and athletes for their own ‘Vietnam,’ because everyone will face challenges in life — whether it’s your parents divorcing, your house burning

down, losing a loved one, whatever it may be,” he said.

“I wanted to build them up and give them tools to make good decisions.”

Nearly 50 years later, McCloughan received the Congressional Medal of Honor — the military’s highest decoration for gallantry and bravery in combat at the risk of life, above and beyond the call of duty, for his life-saving actions during a fierce two-day battle in May of 1969.

“It’s what my father taught me at a young age. He told me, ‘Jim, you never do anything halfway. You do it to the best of your ability, and you do it until the job is finished.’”

IN SCHOOL

McCloughan got his first taste of teaching as a third grader attending Wood School, a one-room K-8 schoolhouse in Bangor Township still in operation today. He loved to be one of the big kids helping younger ones, and the repetition solidified his own learning, he said.

Born in South Haven, he moved at age one with his family to an old farmhouse not far from the school, with no electricity or running water, which had been owned by paternal grandparents.

His father was his hero, a jack-of-all-trades who turned the shell of a house into a home over years, he said. Both parents held jobs — dad at Everett Piano Company and mom at Bohn Aluminum — and he and two brothers built a solid work ethic helping around the house.

He has memories of his parents' dinner plates being less full to ensure the children had enough to eat, but adds, "We weren't poor; we just didn't have money. That's all there is to it. We were really rich with love."

In addition to athletic abilities, McCloughan showed a talent for singing from a young age. He made his first public appearance at age five, performing "Amazing Grace" at church, and still remembers the name of his elementary traveling music teacher, Mrs. Dykstra.

He transferred to "town school" in Bangor Township in seventh grade, into bigger classes grouped by age. "I was a boysoprano, and I was 4-foot-7, which set me up for a little bit of trouble until they heard me sing."

By high school, in addition to making his mark in four sports, McCloughan held leading roles each year in school musical productions.

Returning to South Haven to teach and coach in the schools where his father grew up and graduated was a dream come true, he said. McCloughan taught psychology and sociology at South Haven High School, retiring after 40 years of service in 2008.

Former students quoted in news accounts after his retirement remembered McCloughan as genuine, caring, inspirational — "a true gem" known for his humor, engaging style, and the life relevance he brought to lessons.

He also coached high school football and baseball for 38 years, coached high school wrestling for 22 years, served as a wrestling official for 25 years (selected to officiate 18 wrestling state finals), and coached American Legion baseball in summers.

He says one of his greatest blessings, outside of coming home alive from

Free! K-12 Medal of Honor Character Development Program

One of the missions that MEA-Retired member James McCloughan enjoys the most these days is serving as chair of the Medal of Honor Character Development Program.

The program provides free training and curriculum for educators in grades K-5 and 6-12 to teach students core values. Lessons are designed by educators and built around the stories of recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor.

The program highlights six core values — **courage, commitment, sacrifice, integrity, citizenship, and patriotism** — in action at important moments in history.

Lessons are inclusive of all students and feature real-world examples designed to prompt critical thinking, collaboration, self-reflection and hands-on problem-solving. They can be used as standalones for military holidays or as part of an ongoing values program or anti-bullying initiative.

The program is NOT a military recruitment tool, glorification or glamorization of war, or political in nature.

Educators can access and download all of the program's lesson plans, documents, videos and resources by registering and creating a free account at cmohs.org/register. The website includes a dashboard to save favorite lessons.

Free online training is available or educators can sign up for a free in-person training session. Travel costs are not included. The program is operated by the nonprofit Congressional Medal of Honor Society and funded by donations.

Learn more at cmohs.org/lessons/overview.

Vietnam, was coaching his own two sons who were excellent athletes and have become excellent men.

Among other honors, McCloughan has been inducted into the Michigan High School Baseball Coaches Hall of Fame, the Michigan High School Football Coaches Hall of Fame, the Michigan High School Coaches Hall of Fame, and the National Wrestling Hall of Fame.

A former player from one of his football teams, C.A. Cunningham Sr., described McCloughan as "selfless" and "charismatic" in a television news interview recalling an undefeated season in 1989. "He taught you to not quit and never surrender, never retreat," Cunningham said.

Cunningham became a science teacher and assistant coach in South Haven, working alongside McCloughan. Now an MEA-Retired member who owns a Kalamazoo-area lawncare and

landscaping business, Cunningham described his mentor as "a builder of men."

However, it wasn't until McCloughan finally slowed down in retirement that he realized the busy schedule of teaching and coaching for decades had served another purpose — to keep his memories of Vietnam at bay.

Suffering from symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), including nightmares, he was steered into help by a benefits advisor at the Veterans Administration (VA) who noticed a change in him, McCloughan said.

Eventually he sought help from a VA counselor, a paraplegic Marine combat veteran who "walked me through my war experience."

Despite having earned a master's degree in guidance and counseling at Western Michigan University back in



Advice from Jim McCloughan for
educators facing their 'Vietnam'

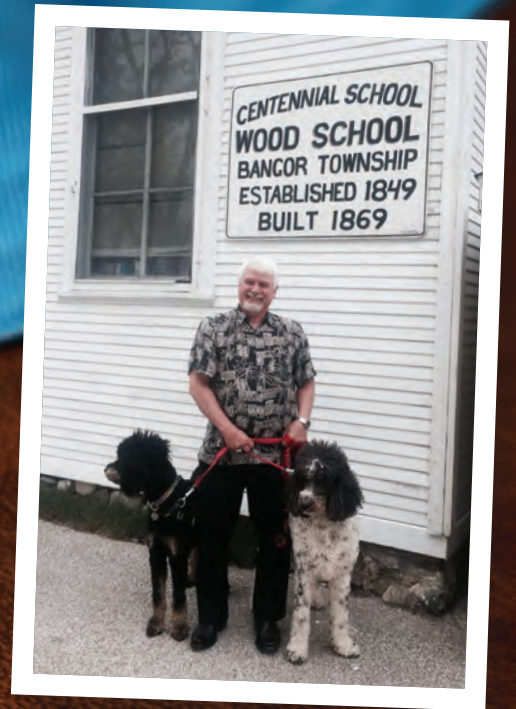
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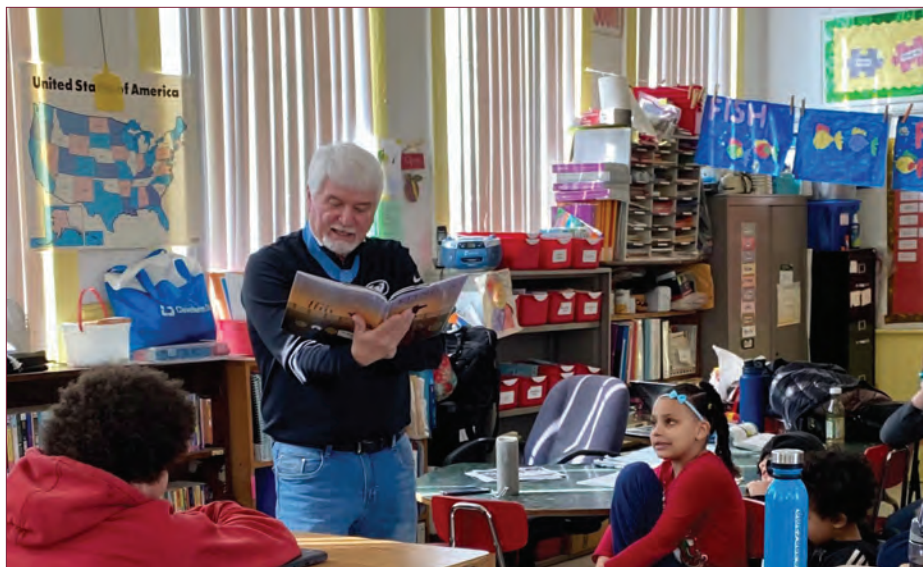
- Focus on what matters >
students, colleagues, community
- Bring forward what you love >
interests and connection
- Create joy on hard days >
sing, joke, smile, laugh
- Remember who you are >
a superhero to students
- Speak with a collective voice >
don't be silent

ADMINISTRATORS —

- Think like a coach > players determine outcome
- Empower the players > ask what they need
- Provide equipment > they win the game







1972, McCloughan discovered, “You can’t counsel yourself.”

IN BATTLE

His grandfather fought in World War I, his father in World War II, his uncle in the Korean War. Drafted at age 22, McCloughan figured his time to serve had arrived, yet it still came as a big shock when he finally got the frontline assignment.

At one time he thought he might get an Army teaching job after training. But college classes he’d taken to complete a physical education minor — in physiology, anatomy and first aid — made him a fit as a combat medic.

He admits to taking a walk to process the news, sitting at a playground, and crying. Then he gave himself a pep talk. “I said, ‘Jim, you better change your attitude or you will die in Vietnam and you will not be a teacher. You better get ready to be the best soldier that you can be.’”

He was assigned to Company C, 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry, 196th Light Infantry Brigade, Americal Division. Stepping off the helicopter in Vietnam, he was met by two sergeants. Both were machine gunners who would protect McCloughan when he worked under fire.

One was Sgt. Joe Middendorf, “an excellent shooter, and we wouldn’t be telling this story if it wasn’t for Joe,” he said.

And Sgt. Doug Hatten, who was missing a tooth, wore a crooked helmet, and spoke in a slow drawl, saved McCloughan’s life in combat on that first day, he said. Two men from the unit were wounded, two were killed, and McCloughan killed an enemy combatant for the first time.

“I was stunned, and that guy with the missing tooth and crooked helmet slapped me. He said, ‘Doc, that’s the way it’s going to be. Do you understand? It’s you or him.’”

All medics were called Doc, and that’s the name McCloughan became known by. During his time in the unit, he was involved in several major battles, but on May 13 a bloody clash began to control Nui Yon Hill in Quang Tin province which would change and define his life.

McCloughan is credited with saving 11 lives, including 10 fellow soldiers and a Vietnamese interpreter, by venturing into the line of fire multiple times over 48 hours of fighting that concluded on May 15.

He was injured three times by shrapnel and gunfire during the struggle but refused orders to evacuate. “I said, ‘You’re going to need me. I’d rather be dead in a rice paddy than alive in a hospital knowing one of my men died because Jim McCloughan wasn’t there to do his part on the team.’”

A second medic assigned to the company, Private First Class Daniel Shea,

performed similar life-saving actions in the battle and was killed in action, leaving McCloughan as the only medic on the ground. Shea was awarded a posthumous Medal of Honor.

“I held 18-, 19- and 20-year-olds in my arms, heard their last words,” McCloughan said. “Some of them were talking to God, and some didn’t believe in God until it was right there, time to cross over. Some were calling me Mom. Then I saw the last breath of life come out of their body.”

“I know that the price of freedom has been paid for in full.”

Heavily outnumbered, the unit saw 14 soldiers killed and 43 wounded of 89 total. McCloughan didn’t expect to survive. At one point, crouched in a trench, applying pressure bandages to a man with a serious abdominal wound, he wondered how to carry the soldier to safety.

He couldn’t sling him over his shoulder. He decided he would hold the wounded man against his chest, get low to the ground, and race through the crossfire.

Suddenly a thought occurred: “It had been since I was a little boy that I told my father that I loved him.”

He made a pact with God. “I said, ‘Lord, if you get me out of this hell on earth so I can look my father in the face one more time and tell him that I love him, I’ll be the best coach, I’ll be the best teacher, and I’ll be the best dad that I can be.’”

McCloughan did his best to keep his word, he says.

IN MEMORY

One of the ways McCloughan tried to heal old traumas after his retirement from teaching was to seek out his old Company C comrades. In some cases, it took internet sleuthing. Finding Sgt. Hatten required more than 80 phone calls because he wasn’t sure how to spell the last name.

He was able to reconnect with 23 people from his unit, including Hatten, who had returned to his childhood home in a rural town in Eastern Washington. McCloughan later spoke at his funeral.

He also found Sgt. Middendorf, who's become "my closest Vietnam Blood Brother," he said.

Some of the most meaningful moments came from contacting family members of those who didn't make it home.

One of the men killed on McCloughan's first day in country had been proudly showing a photo he'd just received of his newborn son hours before he died. "He'd only been there a couple weeks."

McCloughan tracked down the son from the photo, grown and married, and called him in Arizona. "He never got to know his dad, but I got to tell that man, 'The last thing your father did was to brag about you and show everybody in his unit your picture.'"

And in 2019, McCloughan heard from a descendant of the first man he saved in the Nui Yon Hill battle. He had run 100 yards under fire to carry the injured soldier to safety.

"This letter said, 'You don't know me, and I don't know you, but you saved my grandpa in 1969. My mom was born when Grandpa came home in 1970. I was born in 1991. Last week, my wife and I had a baby boy, and this Sunday I get to celebrate Father's Day because of you.'"

McCloughan received two Bronze Stars and three Purple Hearts in the battle's aftermath, but his road to receiving a Congressional Medal of Honor took 48 years and bipartisan action from former U.S. Reps. Fred Upton and Carl Levin, Sen. Debbie Stabenow, Congress, and two U.S. presidents.

In 2009 a lieutenant from Company C revived efforts to award a Distinguished Service Cross to McCloughan, who still gets emotional listening to a saved voicemail from 2016 in which Stabenow reports that Defense Secretary Ash Carter upgraded it to a Medal of Honor.

Stabenow helped pass a bill waiving a five-year limit for granting the Medal. President Barack Obama signed the bill in December 2016, and President Donald Trump presented the Medal of Honor to McCloughan in July 2017.

Only 3,528 Medals of Honor have been awarded in all of U.S. military history,

MEA helps veteran win court battle

When Jim McCloughan retired from teaching in South Haven Public Schools in 2008, MEA helped him fight a battle he hadn't seen coming.

While the school district credited McCloughan for 40 years of service, the Michigan Public School Employees' Retirement System (MPERS) denied two years of time he spent serving as a combat medic in the Vietnam War.

"The MEA gave me a lawyer, and we spent four years fighting it in court," McCloughan said.

McCloughan signed a contract in May 1968 to teach and coach for the 1968-69 school year. He coached that summer but reported for military duty in August before the school year started.

State law requires public school employees to earn retirement credit for up to six years of "intervening" military service if they return to public school employment within 24 months of discharge, said attorney Karen Schneider, who represented McCloughan on behalf of MEA.

The state argued McCloughan's military service was "non-intervening," because he hadn't started the job when he was ordered to report for duty, Schneider said. The case went to the Michigan Court of Appeals, which ruled in McCloughan's favor.

"This is an American hero who performed service for his country and again for his colleagues in public education," Schneider said. "He took a stand and enforced rights for himself and others who are similarly situated."

McCloughan said it was a matter of principle. "I wasn't fighting for big dollars. I was fighting for the kid that was going to come back from Afghanistan or somewhere and not get what is due."

and just 61 living Medal awardees remain as of this writing. McCloughan insists the Medal is not his but belongs to the unit's 89 soldiers who fought bravely, especially those who gave their lives.

The Medal's significance means McCloughan is in demand at age 79. He spends many weeks every year traveling the country speaking to veterans' groups, non-profit organizations, students and others. He raises money for veterans and their families, along with related causes.

His busy time of year is the fall when he is often away from home for more than half the days between Sept. 1–Nov. 30, according to his wife Chérie, a retired English teacher from South Haven, who is his scheduler and travel arranger.

He writes his own speeches, tailored to groups he addresses. He makes a point with veterans to discuss mental health

and to reframe the Vietnam War through the lenses of those who lived it.

With students, he focuses on character development, continuing the mission that began with his battlefield vow long ago. McCloughan is chair of the Character Development Program, a free K-12 curriculum offered by the Congressional Medal of Honor Society. (Read more, page 11)

He ends his speeches by giving audiences an assignment he's handed to thousands of students, athletes and coaches since he returned from war: Tell a special person you love them.

"There must be someone you haven't been able to say those three words to," he says. "Not on purpose; life got busy. Look them in the eye and tell them, 'I love you.' If you can't look them in the eye, use your phone. And there's a Part B to this homework: Tell them why." **V**

Facts v Fallacy

PART I: School Performance

By Brenda Ortega
MEA Voice Editor

MEA Labor Economist Tanner Delpier tells stories with data. The tale he tells of public education in Michigan runs counter to the message heard far too often in sound bites on the news.

We continually hear that public schools are “failing,” despite “record” state funding, because educators lack “accountability.”

“None of that is true,” Delpier says.

Yet former Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder announced last June he plans to spend his time and millions of dollars to pound the message of school failure into voters’ minds between now and the next statewide elections in November 2026.

This is the same Rick Snyder who presided over a steep, years-long decline in the state education budget, which hit bottom under his leadership in 2013. At the time, the goal of Snyder and others was shifting dwindling public resources to private, religious and for-profit charter schools — something we must remain vigilant against.

Pundits and influencers who want to perpetuate falsehoods know if they repeat a lie often enough, then eventually people will believe it. Here is the truth.

Our schools are not failing, though educators face significant challenges.

Education funding in Michigan still has not returned to peak levels reached in the early 2000s.

Accountability has been the focus ever since President George W. Bush made standardized test scores both the goal and the yardstick in 2002.

Framework

The education statistic most tossed-about lately is a ranking of Michigan compared to other states in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) — often referred to as The Nation’s Report Card.

Within this framework, Michigan ranked 44th among states in fourth-grade reading scores in 2024.

Michigan students performed at the national average on three of four NAEP measures that year except fourth-grade reading, which fell below average. Because the NAEP only tests a small random sample of students from each state, the standard error rate centers at 1.5 points, Delpier said. [\[Fig. 1\]](#)

Score differences within the error rate are not statistically meaningful, but news media and politicians use them to rank states and speculate about causes — even though the maker of the assessment (the National Center for Education Statistics or NCES) cautions against it.

In the case of fourth-grade reading, 31 states scored higher than Michigan which was statistically tied with 18 other states. In general, NAEP scores are tightly distributed — meaning a tiny increase can move up a state by many places in the rankings, Delpier notes. [\[Fig. 2\]](#)

Certainly there is room to improve “average” scores, but it’s inaccurate to depict student performance that is mostly on par with other states as a dire crisis unique to Michigan. What’s more, improved math scores in Michigan and the nation in 2022 and 2024 garnered little attention.

“There’s an asymmetry to how scores are discussed in the media which has little to do with the actual learning

that’s happening in schools and more to do with incendiary headlines that grab attention or try to place blame,” Delpier said.

Another way in which NAEP scores have been twisted to fit a political message is in the definition of “proficient.” In NAEP terms, proficient is a high bar and does not correlate to grade-level achievement.

Nevertheless, both news outlets and politicians from both parties misinterpret NAEP fourth-grade reading scores, for example, to say that only 25% of Michigan students are reading at “grade level” because that is the figure reported as reaching “At or Above Proficient.”

In fact, all but two states set their individual proficiency standards lower than the national test does — closer to the NAEP’s “Basic” standard, Delpier said, noting: “If you read the (NAEP) definition of ‘Basic,’ it involves pretty sophisticated reading skills.” [\[Fig. 3\]](#)

In Michigan, 55% reached “At or Above Basic” level compared to 59% nationally. “That’s not where we want to be as a state or as a country, but it’s better achievement than what is being reported,” Delpier said.

Instead of ranking states in a competition, the NCES recommends more broadly examining scores over time and breaking down data by subgroups — also combining the data with other information — to inform policy and instructional improvements.

The fact is nationwide scores remain below pre-pandemic levels in all tested grades and subjects, according to an NCES analysis. Moreover, the gap between the highest- and lowest-performing students is large and growing across the country — a trend seen for more than a decade.

Fig. 1

Michigan Compared to the National Average NAEP Scaled Scores, 2024

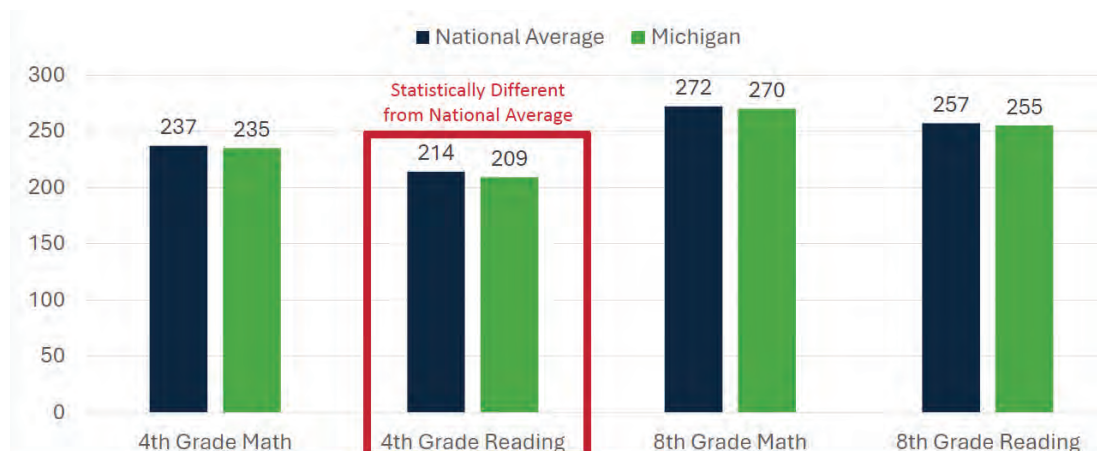


Fig. 2

NAEP equivalent scores of state grade 4 reading standards for proficient performance, by state: 2019

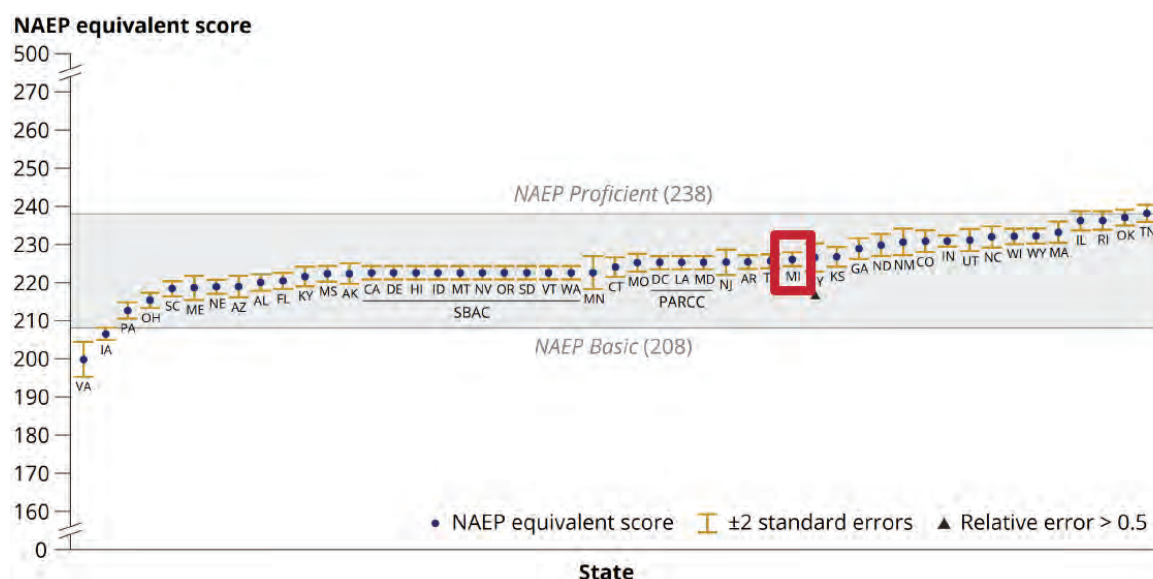


Fig. 3

NAEP 4th Grade Reading Standards: BASIC

- ✓ determine meaning of familiar words using context
- ✓ identify detail to make a simple inference
- ✓ sequence or categorize events from the story
- ✓ make reference to an appropriate section of the text
- ✓ Provide evidence from one of the texts when making a comparison
- ✓ identify explicit details from the text
- ✓ state an opinion with general support from the text
- ✓ restate a problem or solution presented in a single section of the text
- ✓ provide a description of a text feature or author's craft using a general reference to the text
- ✓ provide an opinion using a general reference to the text

For related information and source information, visit mea.org/facts.

The NCES analysis asked and answered a key question: “Just how big is this gap? On a 500-point scale, the lowest-performing students generally scored about 100 points below the highest-performing students in 2024.”

Challenges

According to the *2025 Kids Count in Michigan Data Book & Profiles*, which released the latest information on child well-being in September, nearly one-in-five Michigan children were living in poverty, and food insecurity was on the rise in 61 counties.

- Fully fund access to early childhood care and education
- Improve access to mental health services in public schools
- Increase resources to schools and students with higher needs
- Adopt universal free community college

One of the struggles for educators is the expectation that they can solve all of society’s problems without adequate resources or proper training, says MEA member Amy Urbanowski-Nowak, an English teacher in Birch Run and president of the local union.

Meanwhile, Dick and Betsy DeVos have launched a new nonprofit organization, the Michigan Forward Network, to push their longstanding anti-public education messages.

Over the years, the DeVos family has spent millions of dollars funding right-wing political candidates and causes, including school voucher schemes.

According to Bridge Michigan, the DeVoses’ new group will operate as a 501(c)(4) — a “dark money” nonprofit that will not have to disclose its donors and can spend unlimited amounts to influence elections but cannot directly coordinate with candidates or campaigns.

That is a big part of the problem faced by Michigan schools, says Steven Norton, a public policy analyst and executive director of Michigan Parents for Schools, a nonprofit advocacy group working to support community-governed schools in the state.

“Over the last two decades, Michigan public schools have suffered a blizzard of ideologically driven ‘reform’ attempts,” Norton wrote in a recent op-ed in Bridge. “Nearly all of these focused on punishing what the sponsors saw as ‘failure’ and reshaping schools to fit their ideologies favoring privatization.

“They were not designed to help our local public schools, but to drive parents to other alternatives, weakening public schools in the process. How can we possibly be surprised at the result?” **V**

“Teachers feel like the weight of the world is on their shoulders.”

— Birch Run English teacher Amy Urbanowski-Nowak

“Many families in Michigan are still struggling to make ends meet on a daily basis, which will only be exacerbated by recent federal cuts to social safety net programs,” a summary of the report’s findings noted.

The Kids Count Data Book provides an evidence-based list of policy proposals to boost child well-being for state leaders to consider, including a few education-related proposals:

“I can’t solve students’ anxiety and depression, address special education needs, establish relationships, and teach English all at the same time,” Urbanowski-Nowak said. “Teachers feel like the weight of the world is on their shoulders.”

(Read more of Amy’s thoughts about this topic on the next page.)

Facts v Fallacy

mea.org/facts

Watch for the rest of our three-part *Facts v Fallacy* series in upcoming issues of MEA Voice, including “School Funding” in February-March and “School Policy” in April-May. Then stay tuned for a retrospective on the legacy of the Snyder years in the August-September edition.

Listen to educators for a change

*By Amy Urbanowski-Nowak
Birch Run Education Association*

When I was a young child, I often dreamt of being a teacher... and a horse trainer, but that's a story for another day. I would ask my sisters to play the role of the student, or set up my stuffed animals if my sisters grew tired of it.

Back then I was inspired to become a teacher, and when I made my dream come true, I was equally excited. I never expected testing to be the huge factor it has become in the life of my classroom.

A few years into my career, the emphasis on standardized assessments grew exponentially, and it saddened me. I never imagined when I was lining my stuffed animals into neat little rows that they

would be focused on test taking and surpassing the state and national average scores.

Over time the emphasis on testing grew, and as I sit here contemplating this ordeal today, high-stakes testing remains exactly as it sounds: high-stakes. Yet I know when we turn test scores into the goal, instead of one measure among many, real learning gets lost.

As an educator who has been in the field for 20-plus years, I've found that I must approach this subject in different ways with my students because they often seem confused as to why standardized testing is so important.

Some of them wonder why the SAT really matters or if scoring lower on one of our yearly assessments will make them look unintelligent. A few do not take the test seriously at all, while others stress over the assessments and let their anxiety get the best of them.

To them I say, "You are more than a test score."

We have students sitting in classrooms everyday who excel in many ways that a standardized test can't measure and

the news reports and charts and graphs will never convey.

Some are learning skills to fix automobiles and build homes at the career center. Others are involved in the Early College Program exploring what it's like to be a college student.

Students are learning valuable communication skills in Speech or how to envelop a character in Drama.

They're figuring out how to dissect sources for credibility in English class, a skill they will carry into the real world.

I have seen students compete in public speaking in the forensic circuit, among peers from all around the state, and do so with confidence and eloquence.

I have seen some gather the courage to perform in front of their community during drama productions and wow audiences.

I have seen students motivating their fellow classmates to succeed and helping those in need.

But test scores cannot show any of this.

Educators have been saying the same thing for years. We can't keep shouldering more of society's problems while resources and services are cut. Still we get policymakers touting more "competition," private schools and voucher schemes. Where has that gotten us?

It's time to re-evaluate. Students are more than a test score. Teachers are more than a test score. Schools are more than a test score. Let's put the emphasis where it belongs — on helping students succeed and teachers teach. **V**

Amy Urbanowski teaches high school English, speech, drama and forensics and serves as president of the Birch Run Education Association. She has also coached high school forensics for more than 20 years.



Cards with student art a tradition

An annual project run by the Copper Country Education Association has become a holiday tradition, giving student artists from all grade levels the chance to see their artwork displayed and sold at an art fair alongside professionals.

For more than 30 years, the Public Relations Committee of MEA Region 18-A in the western Upper Peninsula has printed blank-inside notecards with envelopes for purchase in the community, featuring student art on front and the artist's name, school and grade on back.

The PR committee meets each fall to select 12 artworks to feature, and students are delighted to be chosen, said MEA-Retired member Kris Raisanen Schourek, the longtime chair of the committee who retired in 2013 from a 40-year career teaching biology and art at the Hancock Public Schools.

Schourek, who helped start the program, said 250 packets of notecards were printed this year. "For the past three or four years, we've sold every packet we've brought to the Poor Artists Sale. Some people come to us looking for the cards every year."

The notecards are sold for \$5 per 12-pack at that area art fair in December and at the MEA office in Hancock. The 12 students who have their work chosen for the project receive a 12-pack of cards with their art, a multi-pack of cards, and a \$20 cash award that can be used to buy art supplies.

"This is an art-rich community, so students are excited to have their work selected," Schourek added. "For most, it's their first time seeing their art displayed and sold."

Students whose artwork is chosen are asked to spend an hour selling cards at



The notecards project in MEA Region 18-A in the western Upper Peninsula is a source of pride for students and a reminder to the community of the value of public education.

Sophie Heinonen
Grade 7
Hancock Middle School
sponsored by
The Copper Country Education Association

the art fair. One elementary student she described as "the greatest salesman" had so much fun working the crowd a few years ago that he returned again even when his art wasn't featured, Schourek said.

The community loves to support students in this way, says Morgan Raether, a 12th-year teacher at Jeffers High School in Painesdale who is president of the region's coordinating council and a member of the PR committee.

She often hears kids giving kudos to each other for being selected, Raether said. "I have one student who has submitted art the past four years, and this year hers was one that got chosen. She was so excited and thankful. It was really heartwarming to see."

Artwork has to be of general interest and able to reproduce well in black and white. The committee tries to choose

art from every grade level and district that submits. The notecards are printed at the intermediate school district at cost. Proceeds help fund the program and student awards.

A longtime local and state union leader now serving on the MEA-Retired board of directors, Schourek said the notecards project began as part of a larger outreach effort which included public service announcements and a biweekly talk show on local radio.

"It's important to promote positive school news as a reminder of the value of public education to the community," Schourek said.

Other committee members include Beth Bertucci of Houghton High School, Melissa Hronkin of Houghton Elementary School, and Karen Scholie of Hancock Elementary School. ✓

Thank you for your dedication to our schools

As we enter the holiday season, we at MESSA want to say thank you to all of you working in our public schools.

Thank you for driving our children to school safely. Thank you for providing comfort to students when they need it most. And thank you for the lessons you teach every single day. You prepare our children today to take on the world tomorrow. Your job isn't easy.

Our public schools are the cornerstone of strong communities. Whether it's home football games, school plays, science fairs or AP history tests — our schools are where students grow and communities gather.

And it all happens because of you.

We also know that MESSA is here because of you and those who came before you. Thank you for choosing MESSA. You and your loved ones deserve reliable, exceptional health coverage and unmatched personal service you can trust. We've got your back.

Your work is immeasurable. Your impact is lasting. And all of us at MESSA are proud to stand by your side, providing the coverage and care you deserve.

Wishing you and your loved ones health and happiness this holiday season. ✓



*By Ross Wilson,
MESSA Executive Director*



Educators support families this holiday season



At Churchill High School, the holidays begin with an unmistakable sound: the clatter of cans piling higher and higher by students and educators. Churchill's annual canned food drive draws tens of thousands of donations — a lifeline for the local food bank.

This year, a truck of 50 boxes (pictured) went to Gleaners Food Bank, who

reported it was the largest fulfillment they've seen from a school.

That effort is one of many that show how educators' dedication to students and families often goes beyond the school walls, especially during the holiday season.

Guiding Churchill's effort is Paul Mercier, a Livonia Education Association member and former student who took part in the annual drive. Today, as the school's Activities Director, he is the heart and architect of the operation. The drive has grown beyond a seasonal activity; it's become a defining piece of Churchill's identity, teaching students that giving is not a gesture — it's a responsibility, a joy, and a powerful way to strengthen the community they call home.

That spirit of giving can be felt statewide.

In Lansing, uncertainty for food security programs during this fall's government shutdown prompted a mid-Michigan

"We Care" drive for food and toiletry items during November. Care packages were delivered to help almost 100 individuals before Thanksgiving.

In West Michigan, the Godfrey-Lee Education Association funded 16 Thanksgiving baskets, each equipped with a full holiday meal. "We thought, 'Now is the time to really consider what we can do to support our students,'" said GLEA President Katherine Merriott.

MEA staff and retirees do their part as well, raising nearly \$20,000 per year to support families in need around the state. In the 36 years since its inception, MEA's Holiday Raffle has raised nearly \$550,000 to support various charities and organizations across Michigan, including adopting families for the holidays through Volunteers of America.

Read more at mea.org/educators-support-families. ✓

Longtime LCC union leader honored

It seemed fitting that Eva Menefee was texting a student when she received MEA's James Davenport Award of Merit for significant service to higher education statewide and nationally.

An academic advisor at Lansing Community College (LCC) for 31 years, Menefee has long been passionate about guiding young people to find their personal pathway and success in college and beyond. From the start, she has also devoted herself to serving in numerous union roles.

"Her advocacy has created an outsized impact on the lives of her colleagues, union brothers and sisters, and students," said Alec Thomson, a professor at Schoolcraft College in Livonia and president of the National Council of Higher Education (NCHE), who presented the award at the MEA Higher Education Conference in October.

The award came as a "huge surprise," Menefee told the crowd. "Build our bench. Keep it going. We cannot let this stop because there's so much work to be done. Thank you so much; I am forever touched."

Menefee has said as a first-generation college student, she planned to study accounting but shifted after a bad experience with an advisor. "He said, 'People like you don't become accountants.'"

"I thought, You mean people like me who are Native? People like me because I'm a woman? People like me that are first-generation college students? What does that mean? I never asked him. I walked over to the college of education and found a home."

She earned a teaching degree and worked at Michigan State University in admissions and advising before going to LCC to better focus on her community, she said in a 2022 interview.

"I do my best advising in the aisles at Meijer, or in the check-out lanes, where I see students everywhere. That's my passion. I love helping students learn and find their path."

After joining the union, Menefee was convinced to attend a local meeting with the promise of a free dinner, she quipped in her acceptance speech. Next she was invited to a region meeting by another member of MEA's Michigan Association of Higher Education (MAHE).

"What'd he say? They had free dinner. Yes, there is a theme."

Menefee would go on to serve as local secretary and president, MAHE Executive Committee member, MEA and NEA Representative Assembly delegate, local bargainer and chief bargainer, and member of the MEA Board of Directors and Executive Committee.

She belonged to the MEA Social Justice Committee, served as secretary for the 3-1G Caucus striving for minority representation within MEA, and is active in the Democratic party, including as bookkeeper for the Anishinaabek Caucus — the first Native American caucus in Michigan.

Menefee credits union mentoring and training for helping her realize her leadership potential. She has paid



Eva Menefee, a longtime union leader and academic advisor at Lansing Community College, was honored at the MEA Higher Education Conference.

it forward by presenting at MEA and NEA conferences and leadership summits, said Marcia Mackey, a Central Michigan University professor and award nominator.

"She works to bring the newer and younger employees into the union. For those in the union, she strives to further their engagement and prepare them for leadership roles," Mackey, who is president of MAHE (Michigan Association for Higher Education) wrote in the nomination.

She retired at the end of October and looked forward to spending more time working on the Native American food truck and catering business that she and her husband have owned and operated for 40 years, Anishnabe Meejim.

But she will miss the union, she said. "I've always loved being involved and having friends from all over the state and all over the country. We hold each other up. The union shows us what our power is and where our strength is when we come together — and that's what we need to do." **V**

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