

Voice



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PSEA Mission

We are members who promote, protect, and advocate for our schools, students, and professions.

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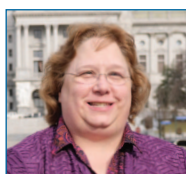
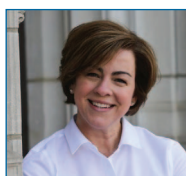
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A trying winter, a hopeful spring

It's hard to believe that I have been serving as your PSEA president for nearly four months now.

2018 was a whirlwind marked by victories, a few setbacks, and the loss of a talented leader and friend.

We achieved so much together – continued investments in our schools, a comprehensive safe-schools program, and outsourcing reforms to protect the jobs of dedicated school support professionals. We helped elect champions of public education, including Gov. Tom Wolf.

2018 also marked the sudden and unexpected passing of our PSEA president, Dolores McCracken.

This issue of *Voice* pays tribute to Dolores – a resolute leader and fierce advocate for public education and the students we serve. I counted her among my closest friends. I miss her every day.

Thankfully, I have drawn strength from so many of you, my PSEA brothers and sisters. You have been with me every step of the way through this difficult transition.

Now, as spring beckons, I look ahead with hope and optimism. It's a great feeling after a trying winter.

One reason I am hopeful is because our union is as strong as ever. PSEA members have largely rejected a billionaire-funded campaign to undermine our union. We understand the value of sticking together, and that has allowed us to be voices for change in the halls of the Capitol and at bargaining tables across the commonwealth.

When I started my career in teaching more than 30 years ago, there was never a question I would join and be an active

citizen in my union. As a matter of fact, my very first day on the job at a school in New Jersey, I walked a picket line in solidarity with striking bus drivers.

Years later, I served as president of the Harrisburg Education Association during a tumultuous time when our local was under constant scrutiny. People sometimes ask me why I did it.



2018 was a whirlwind marked by victories, a few setbacks, and the loss of a talented leader and friend.

That's an easy one. Because I believe in public education and the amazing people with whom I have worked. If I can give you and your students a voice, I'm all in.

In the coming months, lawmakers and Gov. Wolf will negotiate a budget and related education policies. PSEA members will be there, speaking up for our students and each other.

The billionaire-funded attacks on our union will continue. Be vigilant and tell your story to friends and colleagues about why you belong to PSEA and the difference it has made for your students and your profession.

And thank you for always being there for me. It's been an amazing ride so far, and I look forward to the next leg of our journey together. Please reach out to me and let me know what's on your mind. Together, there is no stopping us. 🍀

Email Rich Askey:
raskey@psea.org

Jobs at PSEA

For a list of all PSEA job vacancies, visit www.psea.org/jobs



Connect with PSEA

Do you want to learn about issues that matter to PSEA members? Share a great photo with your colleagues? Tell a story about how a student called you a hero? PSEA's Facebook page is a great place to do it.

Join our community today and connect with members just like you.

R.E.S.P.E.C.T.

In 2019, two of PSEA's top priorities are to increase Pennsylvania's minimum wage and move minimum teacher and faculty salaries to \$45,000.

These goals are part of the RESPECT – Raise Educators' Salaries Provide Economic Certainty Today – initiative, which was approved at the December 2018 House of Delegates.

Take it to \$45K

The minimum teacher salary in Pennsylvania is set by law at \$18,500 and hasn't been increased since 1988. Several thousand PSEA members earn less than \$45,000.

\$45,000 ↑
\$18,500

- Thousands of hardworking teachers in Pennsylvania are paid much less than other college-educated professionals in the state. Three out of four of them are women.
- The job of teachers has changed a lot over the past 30 years, making the profession more challenging and requiring educators to do more.
- There is a growing teacher shortage in Pennsylvania, and low wages are contributing to it.
- What it costs to raise the minimum salary to \$45,000 will be fully paid by the state. There will be no local cost.

Increasing the minimum teacher salary is an investment in our future.

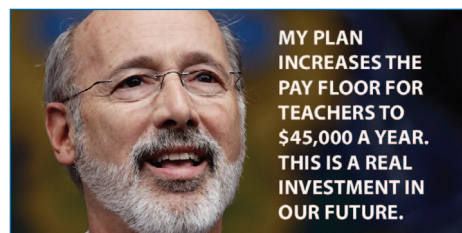


"Teachers like me want to be in our classrooms teaching the next generation, but it's so difficult to support our families on salaries that trail behind what other professionals earn. I shouldn't have to work a second job that limits the time I can spend with my children."

- Tori Koerbler, teacher and mother of three
Panther Valley School District

"Teachers just want a fair wage for the important work they do. But the law governing teacher pay hasn't been updated since the 1980s. And so our classroom teachers have been too often getting the short end of the stick."

- Gov. Tom Wolf



Raise Educators' Salaries Provide Economic Certainty Today

Gov. Tom Wolf has embraced both ideas, unveiling his minimum wage proposal on Jan. 30 and including the \$45,000 minimum salary goal as part of his FY 2019-20 budget proposal.

PSEA will work closely with Gov. Wolf and pro-public education legislators to pass both of these initiatives – and make sure that all PSEA members get the RESPECT they deserve.

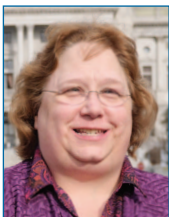
\$12 now, \$15 in 2025

Pennsylvania's minimum wage is \$7.25, hasn't been increased since 2009, and is lower than all of our surrounding states. Several thousand PSEA ESP members earn less than \$12 an hour.

\$15.00
\$12.00
\$ 7.25

- Raising the minimum wage will help education support professionals who work hard to serve students.
- At \$7.25 an hour, the current minimum wage is less than a third of the median wage.
- Nearly three in five workers who will benefit are women, and about a quarter are parents. It will lift more women and children out of poverty.
- This plan will increase the minimum wage to \$12 in 2019, with 50 cent increases every year until the minimum wage reaches \$15 in 2025.

All of Pennsylvania's neighboring states have raised the minimum wage.

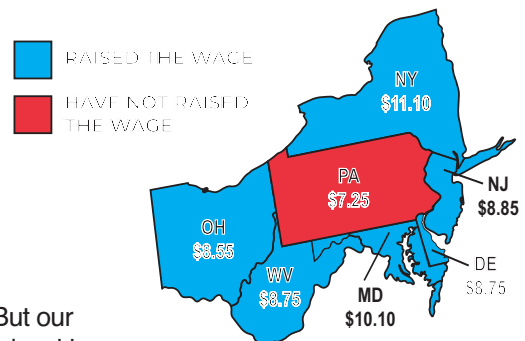


"Gov. Wolf's increase in the minimum wage is recognition that Pennsylvanians who work hard at full-time jobs should be able to afford to support themselves and their families."

- Denise Kennedy, elementary school secretary
Upper Darby School District

"Pennsylvania must be a place where hard work is rewarded. But our minimum wage hasn't changed in a decade and too many hardworking people are struggling to get by. Raising the minimum wage lets people afford the basics, like food, rent and transportation."

- Gov. Tom Wolf



Learn more at www.psea.org/RESPECT

Special ed certification changes adopted

A new state law will change state certification for special education teachers, allowing them to hold a single certificate to teach students from pre-K to 12th grade (or age 21), beginning after Dec. 31, 2021. It will also require the Pennsylvania Department of Education to improve public data available on teacher certification.

Gov. Tom Wolf signed Act 82 of 2018 into law in October, after then-state Rep. Kristin Phillips-Hill, R-York, shepherded the legislation through the General Assembly. PSEA and Phillips-Hill worked together on the legislation to address teacher shortage areas and ensure that policymakers can make data-informed decisions in the future to combat the shortages.

“This is a complex subject, but an important one, and PSEA worked hard

to improve the certification process for the betterment of our members, students, and school districts,” said PSEA Treasurer Jeff Ney.


Currently, there are two special education certificates, one to teach in pre-K through eighth grade and another for teachers in grades seven through 12 (or students up to age 21).

Under the new law, special education teachers applying for certificates after Dec. 31, 2021, will be awarded the single pre-K to grade 12 (or age 21) certificate.

After that date, teachers with pre-K to grade eight or grade seven to grade 12 certificates will be able to expand their certificates to include the grade levels they aren’t currently certified to teach. The Department of Education will design a process for teachers who want to

expand their certificates.

Act 82 also requires the education department to provide the public and education stakeholders with data on teacher certification on an annual basis. Stakeholders have complained in the past about difficulty in obtaining information about certification.

Additionally, the new law requires the education department to notify all individuals holding an early childhood certificate (pre-K-4) that they can expand their certificate to include grades 5 and 6 via a PRAXIS assessment that was made available a couple years ago. Teacher preparation programs will be required to notify future candidates for early childhood certification of this option on a form developed by the education department in the future. 

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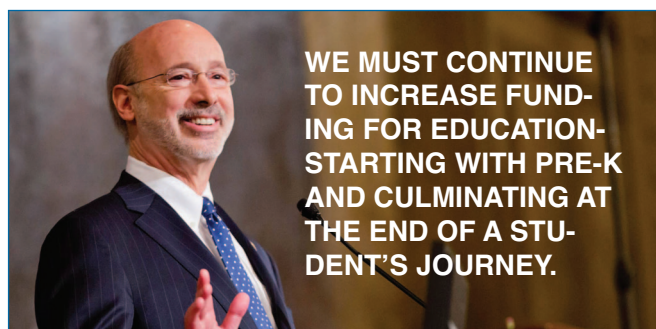
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Education top priority in Wolf budget

Gov. Tom Wolf has made public education his top priority since he took office over four years ago, and he continues to put students, educators, and support professionals first in his proposed 2019-20 state budget.

Wolf's budget plan, unveiled Feb. 5, builds on the investments he's

made in public education since taking office in 2015. In the coming months, lawmakers will review his proposal – and PSEA members will encourage them to pass it into law. 🟢



\$200 million

Basic education

\$50 million

Special education

\$40 million

Pre-K Counts

\$15 million

Early intervention

\$10 million

Career and technical education

Update on school safety program

School safety is an issue on every educator's mind these days. And rightfully so. No one can be expected to learn or teach effectively when they feel unsafe.

The question is, what can we do about it?

Act 44, which Gov. Tom Wolf signed into law this past June and which included significant input from PSEA members, goes a long way toward addressing the issue. Among other things, Act 44 allocated \$52.5 million in grant funds to address the issue, authorized the formation of a School Safety and Security Committee, and established the Safe2Say Something program.

Safe2Say, which was spearheaded by state Attorney General Josh Shapiro and developed in partnership with Sandy Hook

Promise, is an ambitious attempt to head off tragedies before they happen. The anonymous reporting system, which launched on Jan. 14, provides a way for parents, school staff, students, and community members to instantly report anything from threats to bullying behavior to serious criminal acts.

Reports can be made via a 24/7 phone hotline, a website (safe2saypa.org/tip), or a mobile app. Trained dispatch staff can then triage the reports and alert law enforcement to a serious threat. It's an idea many PSEA members supported and is modeled after successful programs in Colorado and Michigan.

If any school employee has concerns about the safety of a child or that child's propensity to harm others, PSEA would advise

the school employee to report those concerns directly to the school employer. It's also important to remember that educators have a legal obligation to report suspicions about child abuse through ChildLine, and to report instances of employee sexual misconduct, abuse, or exploitation to the Pennsylvania Department of Education, their supervisor, and their chief school administrator.

PSEA members who have questions about their reporting obligations or the Safe2Say reporting tool can contact their PSEA UniServ representative for assistance.

"No issue is more important than the safety and security of Pennsylvania's students and school employees," said PSEA President Rich Askey. "We're proud to say our members have taken a leading role in helping shape school safety policies in Pennsylvania."

See the latest information at www.psea.org/schoolsafety. 🟢



SUB-ZERO



Teacher takes classroom to Antarctica

Mike Penn planted the PSEA flag at the South Pole. Then, he ventured to another location in Antarctica where no human being had ever gone.

All along he conducted interactive lessons with his fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade gifted students in the Shaler Area School District, Allegheny County, as well as students throughout the world.

Penn was one of 11 teachers selected this year to participate in PolarTREC, an organization funded by the National Science Foundation that partners teachers with academic researchers to improve science education. He and four other teachers were assigned to an automatic weather station team from the University of Wisconsin to travel to Antarctica – the others were assigned to the Arctic.

"I wrote about 30 journals on stuff I was doing. Kids would write questions on the journal, and I would answer them," said Penn, who left the day after Thanksgiving and returned just before New Year's Day. "I also did a live event from the South Pole with 36 schools from seven different countries."

Going where no human had before

Through their interaction with Penn, the students gained insight into a real-life scientific mission in one of the world's most hostile terrains.

The mission of Penn's team was to maintain and install automatic weather stations – 12-foot high structures equipped with meteorological instruments to measure

weather and GPS equipment to monitor glacier movement.

All the data is transmitted back to the University of Wisconsin, where it is shared with climate scientists from around the world.

"One of the stations we installed was where the coldest ever record-low temperature was recorded at negative 128 degrees," Penn said. "On the day we were there, the air temperature was negative 50, and the windchill was negative 80."

Another station was installed in a location near the South Pole where no human beings had ever gone.

The crew flew into the location in a Twin Otter aircraft that Penn described as kind of like an airplane with skis.

"We taxied to a spot where the weather station was going to be installed, and I got out to check to make sure the contour was OK for the plane," Penn said. "Where I was walking it was the first time a human had set foot there."

Challenges and danger

Needless to say, this was not a trip for the faint of heart.

Penn and one of the five other teachers selected for the Antarctica leg of the PolarTREC mission were able to go. The other three failed to pass the battery of medical and other tests administered in New Zealand before the team took off for Antarctica.

"The weather overall was very bad and unpredictable; it was hard at times for the pilots to distinguish the ground

EA

from the sky,” Penn said, adding it took the team eight days to reach the South Pole after arriving on the continent.

It was also the period of 24-hour daylight in Antarctica. That, and the challenges posed by the weather, meant the team worked when it could and slept when it could.

“I wouldn’t use the word ‘fun’ to describe it,” Penn said. “It was challenging, but also very exciting and interesting.”

He did admit, however, to one event that was fun – “running a race around the world.”

Penn traversed a 2.1-mile circle around the South Pole that took him through 24 different time zones.

“You can step from today into tomorrow, and from yesterday back into today,” he said. “It’s pretty cool.”

Teaching still biggest thrill

For all the excitement and privilege of serving on the research team, the biggest thrill for Penn still boils down to being an educator.

Penn assembled strong credentials from his 27 years in the classroom, particularly regarding science. That made him eligible for such a prestigious program.

His classroom at Shaler features a spacecraft simulator – “it resembles the Starship Enterprise” – that he designed and built. There are 16 stations, which are staffed by students who must successfully collaborate or their mission fails.

Penn had his students help him with what was his second application for a PolarTREC mission. He was rejected once before, so he asked students to critique his original application and suggest areas where he could improve it.

Now back at Shaler, he has incorporated aspects of his journey into his teachings, is still writing interactive journals, and is traveling throughout the Pittsburgh area speaking at schools. He will now be a mentor for future teachers headed on PolarTREC expeditions.

Despite the landscape and sheer awesomeness of being in Antarctica, Penn said perhaps his biggest thrill was the reaction of students who interacted with him.

“As a teacher, it was so exciting to know there were kids really excited and interested,” Penn said. “The kids who were asking questions were the same kids you couldn’t get interested in the exact same things if you were teaching them out of a textbook.” 🇺🇸

*Shaler Area
School District
teacher Mike Penn
at the South Pole,
where he displays
his PSEA pride.*





Many PSEA members, like me, grieve the loss not only of a great advocate for the Association and our students, but the loss of a friend. But there is something far stronger and deeper than grief that we feel. And that is the power of Dolores' enduring legacy. All of our lives are better because Dolores McCracken was a part of us.

Rich Askey

Dolores taught me so much in a short time. I will always remember.

Jeff Ney



She inspired me to get more involved in PSEA. I'm now president of our local and fiercely campaigned for Gov. Tom Wolf because of Dolores and her passion. She will be missed but I know that her passion and service in fighting for education will not go unnoticed and will continue.

Janice Blair

Remember Her Legacy

*Dolores was committed
to the greater good.*

Andria Johnson

*I am very proud to serve in an
organization that can provide
the space and opportunity for
a person such as Dolores.*

Ben Lebofsky

*You embodied the
BEST of PSEA.*

Bob Merski

*What an inspiration she
has always been to all the
teachers and retired
teachers like myself.*

Anne Constein

*Public education
and public school
students lost a
champion with the
passing of Dolores
McCracken. My
administration had
the privilege of
working with
Dolores on a
number of issues,
from school safety
to school funding,
to developing the
state's plan under
the Every Student
Succeeds Act.
I can attest
personally that
she was tireless in
advocating on behalf
of students,
educators, and
working families.*

Gov. Tom Wolf

Tributes have been coming from many corners following the sudden and untimely passing of PSEA President Dolores McCracken late last year.

McCracken, 65, a paraprofessional in the Council Rock School District, Bucks County, passed away Nov. 13 following a brief battle with an aggressive cancer.

History maker

McCracken made PSEA history three times in recent years.

In 2011, she became the first support professional to serve as a state officer when she was elected treasurer. Her election as vice president four years later made her the first ESP to serve in that office. Then, on Sept. 1, 2017, McCracken became the first support professional to become president, ascending to that post after former president Jerry Oleksiak left PSEA to become Pennsylvania secretary of labor and industry.

The PSEA House of Delegates voted in December to rename the Association's ESP of the Year Award after McCracken.

In just 14 months as president, McCracken was instrumental in bipartisan efforts to address school safety, reduce time spent on standardized testing, and protect education support professionals from having their jobs subcontracted to for-profit companies. She also guided the Association's successful member retention efforts in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Janus v. AFSCME*.

During last fall's gubernatorial campaign, she worked for Wolf's re-election, and advocated for the election of other pro-public education candidates at the state and federal levels.

Like the governor, others noted the impact McCracken had on public education in Pennsylvania.

Tributes rolled in from state Education Secretary Pedro Rivera,

*My husband and I
are so sad to hear
the news of
Dolores' passing
so suddenly. As
two public school
teachers, we stand
by the work and
support that PSEA
has provided for us.
Dolores supported
teachers and moved
us forward.*

*Brad & Alyssa
Clemens*

Dear Dolores,
You saw things in me I didn't see in myself and you helped me bring them out. Find my voice.
I will always think to your example "What would Dolores Do?" Your legacy will live on!

Stephanie Towles

I will always remember
Dolores for her love,
encouragement, leadership,
and friendship.
She will be missed.

Korri Brown

Dolores was an
incredible leader, a
fierce advocate, and
a great friend. It
was a privilege to
work with her, and
I will never, ever
forget her.

Jim Vaughan

statewide education groups, and labor unions, among others.

Then there were the rank-and-file PSEA members, thousands of whom took the time to express their appreciation for the work McCracken had done on their behalf.

PSEA career rooted in family

Despite her deep devotion to PSEA and a demanding schedule, McCracken found time for her family.

She was married to Jack McCracken Jr. for 40 years; was a devoted mother to son, Jack McCracken III, and daughter, Kristin Ellenberger; and was a loving grandmother to Logan McCracken, and Dylan, Reese, and Paige Ellenberger. Telling stories about her four grandchildren was a daily pleasure.

It was being a mother that got her involved in public education, a commitment that led to a second family, PSEA.

When her children entered elementary school, she became president of the home and school association, and then took a job as a paraprofessional in the Council Rock School District.

That propelled her to become active in PSEA – serving as president of her local association before taking on numerous leadership positions at the region and state levels before running for and winning the treasurer's post.

As a PSEA officer, she traveled the state to meet personally with PSEA members, walked picket lines, traversed the halls of the state Capitol to advocate for public education, and did TV interviews and other media appearances.

Contributions to a fund to continue McCracken's legacy can be sent to: Dolores McCracken Memorial Education Fund, c/o First National Bank & Trust of Newtown, Attn: Kevin Dolton, 40 S. State St., Newtown PA 18940. 🇺🇸

Dolores truly
was an amazing
advocate for public
education. So very
proud that she
rose from an ESP
member, like myself,
to PSEA president!!
Amazing.

Erin Peck

I had the privilege
to be a Council
Rock employee as
was Dolores and
was honored to
watch her grow in
her Association
activities over the
years. Her leadership
says it all.

Bob Duime





Learning Lessons

Great ideas, Great schools

This story is part of a regular series, "Learning Lessons: Great ideas, Great schools," that features educators who are doing great things or conducting great programs in Pennsylvania's public schools. For other stories in the series go to www.psea.org/learninglessons.

Picture this. You're standing on the surface of a rocky, alien landscape on the edge of an enormous crater. Deposits of what look like snow and ice dot the landscape. You turn to the left to see Jupiter looming massively over distant mountains, dominating an alien sky packed with brilliant stars.

"We're standing on Metis, which is the closest of Jupiter's moons," says the disembodied voice of Daniel Woleslagle, a sixth-grade science teacher at Lycoming Valley Intermediate School and your guide on this field trip to the far reaches of the solar system.

"How many moons does Jupiter have?" Woleslagle asks. "Sixty-seven!" comes the chorus of enthusiastic replies.

This cosmic excursion is made possible thanks to a pair of cardboard goggles with an embedded iPod running Google Expeditions, one of many free virtual reality education apps that power Woleslagle's lessons.

Unlike viewing a video or slideshow, this is an immersive, 360-degree environment that each person is free to explore individually, simply by rotating their head and looking around.

"With virtual reality, we can take (students) on trips we could never take them in real life," Woleslagle said. "They're

able to make their own observations and then ask each other questions based on what they're seeing. So, there's a common experience that creates more discussion."

Today's lesson makes it clear virtual reality is a great fit for the science classroom. But what about other subjects?

For Woleslagle, the sky's the limit.



One of Daniel Woleslagle's sixth-grade students explores the solar system using virtual reality.

"We've used it in music class. We've used it to look at social studies. We've used it for language arts," he said. "We've been able to do writing prompts based on experiences we've had. Or take a virtual reality trip to Gettysburg to discuss a social studies unit. So, we are able to use it in a lot of different areas all across the curriculum."

And also, across the district. Lycoming Valley Intermediate's sister school, Curtain, recently

purchased their own virtual reality lab and have begun experimenting with it. Meanwhile, Woleslagle's lessons have caught on with other teachers in his building who have started to incorporate the technology into their daily lesson plans.

"Trying new things is never a bad idea in education," he said. "I feel like we need to keep evolving and meeting the needs of our students on their level."

Making VR a reality

In his quest for the latest teaching tech, Woleslagle stumbled upon a Google Expeditions demo at the Pennsylvania Education Technology Expo and Conference three years ago.

"I got to experience what it would be like to go on a field trip to Niagara Falls and I thought, 'What an amazing benefit!' I did a little research and found that there were a lot of people who were pioneering things in virtual reality for education."

Thanks to a grant from the Williamsport Area School District Education Foundation, the school was able to purchase 30 iPods and as many Google Cardboard Virtual Reality Viewers. In addition to being affordable, the cardboard goggles are easily repairable, or recycled into a maker-space project when they inevitably wear out.

At a cost of \$210 per student – \$10 for the viewer and \$200 for the iPod – the program's total bill came to \$8,600. All of it paid for with grant money.

Of the many free apps, Woleslagle's go-to is Google Expeditions, which he calls an "all-encompassing teaching and learning tool." But a quick search on any app store platform will uncover a host of great resources. He's also used programs that utilize MERGE Cube, an augmented reality device that can be transformed into various objects when used in conjunction with other specialized apps.

"The response from the students has been fantastic," he said. "They're really excited about it. So much so that they've asked that it be put into our schoolwide positive behavior plan. So, one of the incentives they can earn is more education through virtual reality, which is just a great thing."

Parents too. "I've had a lot of parents reach out to me and reach out to the school and talk about what a great opportunity they see this as," Woleslagle said.

At the same time, he understands that not everyone is so quick to embrace a new paradigm, especially when it involves unfamiliar technology.

"Some people are very hesitant to look at new programs, especially if that comes with a cost," he said. "We were fortunate enough to have a grant, but we really make sure that we are using these devices to their maximum capacity to illustrate their value. We use them for more than just the virtual reality, and in doing that we actually save money as opposed to buying more expensive computers for classrooms."

Williamsport EA member Daniel Woleslagle provides the following advice for creating a virtual reality program.

- **Do your homework.** A lot of people are beginning to take an interest in VR and AR, and they can be a great resource for training, app suggestions, and answers.
- **Think outside the box.** Think how you can incorporate these ideas into many different subjects that might also lead you to new and inexpensive resources.
- **Don't overspend.** Most apps are free or low cost.
- **Step outside your comfort zone.** We want our students to apply their learning and ideas to many different areas of their lives, so we should do the same.

To infinity and beyond

For Woleslagle, virtual reality is just one window into a thrilling future that fuses technology and teaching in ways we're just beginning to comprehend. And in many ways, it's the students who will determine that.

"I don't think that virtual reality is going to be the final say in their future, and I think that they're looking at technologies that we haven't even dreamed of yet," he said.

Lycoming Valley recently implemented a new incentive called co-spaces or edu-spaces, that allows students to design their own worlds in virtual reality and 3D and share those projects with their classmates.

"So instead of doing a book report, you can design a whole scene from a book and bring the whole class along as you describe it, actually being live in that scene," Woleslagle said.

By tapping into kids' comfort with new technology, Woleslagle hopes to encourage them to see these tools not just as entertainment, but as vehicles for learning.

"The one thing I really want my students to take away is that learning is an experience that happens outside of a desk," he said. "We can be lifelong learners as long as we take those moments to dig into the information that's around us and really piece together those connections beyond the textbook and beyond the teacher in the front of the room." 🍎



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Got a story? If you know about a program that would make a good feature for "Learning Lessons: Great ideas, Great schools," please email Dave Constantin at dconstantin@psea.org.



Five things I know for sure about teaching

(This article was written by Marilyn Pryle, 2019 Pennsylvania Teacher of the Year. Pryle is an English teacher in the Abington Heights School District, Lackawanna County.)

After over 20 years of teaching, I've realized a few truths not only about the craft, but about students themselves. Although many aspects of our world are rapidly changing, certain realities persist. Here are five things I know for sure about teaching:

1. Students are human beings

This is not a joke. The pressure of test scores and rankings can limit our perception of students to mere numbers. Of course, this is never true. Students enter our classrooms with talents, dreams, challenges, fears, and burdens. It is impossible to ignore, and their humanness cannot be separated from the act of learning. In fact, it is precisely because we are human that we seek growth. We are naturally curious and creative; we are hardwired to want to learn. Whether students show it or not, self-improvement is our preferred default.

2. Students want to create and have choices

As curious and creative beings, students have their own thoughts, interests, and opinions. They want to explore these, and they are most engaged when they have choices about what they learn. I teach world literature, and I am passionately attached to the content since I view it as vital in our global society. At the same time, I

build in lots of room for complete choice with other reading, writing, and projects. The choice-based activities fuel a constant sense of authenticity, ownership, voice, and agency in my classroom.

3. Students want to connect

As humans, we have a basic need to connect with each other and our world. We want to be a part of something

ing. As educators, we must try to make our classrooms places where students can explore, wonder, try, and fail without losing face – or their grade averages. High-stakes tests and all-or-nothing assignments quash initiative, creativity, and the joy of the process. We must find ways to reward students' trial runs and failed attempts at least as often as we reward their successes.

5. Students want their teachers to love their work

Students want us to love teaching and our content with a passion that borders on dorky obsession. And of course, we do – it's why we signed up in the first place! But over time, it becomes easy to relax into the same lessons year after year. It becomes easy to stay safe, but if we expect students to take risks, then we must too. This could involve not only new lessons and activities but new classroom structures. It could

mean giving students more choice – at times total choice – in their learning (the terror of which I can personally testify to). Loving teaching means that we continue to grow, wonder, create, risk, and fail right along with our students.

I remind myself of these truths almost daily as I plan classroom time and interact with students. As educators, we must focus on what will help students in our changing, global world. If students leave our classrooms with confidence in their own initiative and creativity, with an understanding of the importance of self-reflection, connection, empathy, and courage, we will have succeeded. 🍎



As educators, we must focus on what will help students in our changing, global world.

larger than ourselves. Despite their youth, students want these things, too. In our classrooms, we must make space for them to meaningfully interact with each other and their communities. When students read, write, and create for real audiences, powerful work happens. Service and activism happen. And skills? They are learned in the most memorable and authentic ways.

4. Students want a safe place to take risks

Learning cannot happen without risk and failure. For children, and especially adolescents, this can be terrifying.

Time for a brain break?

If there's one thing every educator can agree on, it's that student attention spans are in short supply.

But it's not just developing brains that have trouble staying focused for long stretches of time; it's all of us. That's


because our brains thrive on novelty.

Our attention is cyclical, and we

simply learn better when we get our information in bite-sized chunks, with

noon slump, or you notice your students losing focus, see it for what it is: an opportunity to take a much-needed brain break.

Get up and do some jumping jacks. Stretch. Do some breathing exercises, yoga, or just take a walk around the block. Whatever it takes to hit the reset button on your brain so it's ready to go another round.

For some creative ideas for bringing brain breaks into the classroom, search for "brain breaks" on YouTube, or visit www.gonoodle.com. 



enough down time to digest. So next time you're feeling that mid-after-

Teacher blends history and students into writing

Teachers inspire students in classrooms every day. Then there are times when it's the other way around.

For Matt Landis, a middle school social studies teacher in the Central Bucks School District, Bucks County, his students and school life have formed templates for characters and settings in two well-received books he has written.

Landis' current book, "The Not So Boring Letters of Private Nobody," is a Junior Literary Guild selection – the guild recommends books to schools and school librarians look to it for guidance.

The setting is a middle school history class where a male student who is a "history nerd" is teamed on a Civil War project with a quiet, introverted female student who barely gets passing grades. Neither has any friends, but they find friendship, personal growth, and acceptance through their collaboration.

"The activities in the book are similar to things we do in the classroom. Much of the stuff is inspired in class," said Lan-

dis, who has been teaching for 12 years. "It's a middle school story with a history twist."

His first book, "League of American Traitors," also has a modern setting and contemporary characters – a sixth-gener-


use all the cool stuff I'm learning and write a book," he said. "But writing a well-worded essay and writing and conceiving a book from start to finish are two different things."

Landis credits Bill Senavaitis, an English teacher and Central Bucks EA president, for encouraging his early writing, and for also encouraging the school district to support him.

Landis takes personal days, and the district also gives him unpaid days (he offsets it with speaker fees) to travel to other school districts to conduct assemblies and writers' workshops.

"The district and PSEA have really been supportive of my endeavors," he said.

With his first two books getting good reviews, and a third book on the way, Landis has found a niche that coincides nicely with his love of teaching.

"Teaching and writing have been the best of both worlds," Landis said. "They say, 'you can't have your cake and eat it, too.' Well, I have my cake and I'm eating it." 



ation descendant of Benedict Arnold is stigmatized by classmates with more illustrious ancestors – but it is geared for high school ages.

Landis, who has long loved writing, decided to try a book when he started taking night graduate school classes in 2010 to pursue a master's degree in history.

"I started to think, 'I wonder if I could

Candidates in PSEA statewide elections

PSEA statewide elections to be held at the May House of Delegates. Candidate statements appear below in alphabetical order.

President (elect 1); **Vice President** (elect 1); **Treasurer** (elect 1); **NEA State Director** (elect 3); **Pension Plan Director** (elect 1); **NEA Alternate State Director** (elect 7)

Richard W. Askey, candidate for PSEA president



Richard W. Askey

For centuries writers and philosophers and statesmen and scientists have talked about the future and weighed in on what it had in store. In

PSEA, we have an amazing history to be proud of. We fought for and gained collective bargaining rights. We stood strong against attacks on public education and public-school employees and we championed every positive change in public education for the benefit of our students, our colleagues and our communities. That

history informs our present and our future.

The key word in the above is WE. And now we must lead into an unknown future. Let me tell you what my vision is for PSEA and what I think that means for our future. With the Janus decision, we must grow, strengthen and engage our membership as never before. I see a PSEA where every member-every voice adds together in one unified call to action. Member-to member, we must work across the state to advocate for our members, our professions and our students.

My first goal is to engage our members more directly. We can do this through an increased use of social media. As our membership

evolves, so too must PSEA. We can reach our members more individually, with more focused content and more often. Meeting our members where they live and work, will become our norm. We can tailor the services we provide based upon our members' needs. We can highlight the great things our members do in every public school across Pennsylvania. Advocacy at the local, state and national level has been, and will continue to be, a main source of our collective strength.

My second goal is to work to strengthen and promote our bipartisan relationship with lawmakers and to increase the number of education

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Korri J. Brown, candidate for PSEA vice president



Korri J. Brown

"Fight for the things that you care about, but do it in a way that will lead others to join you." (Ruth Bader Ginsburg)

I am Korri Brown, and I am ready to lead, serve, and empower. I am asking for your support of my candidacy for PSEA Vice President.

As professional educators, we have committed ourselves to the students and communities we serve. There are many reasons why we have been called to a career in education. The most important one, the one that

unites and inspires us, is our students.

Prior to being appointed PSEA Vice President, it was my distinct honor to have served as an officer of my local association and as the Southeastern Region President. Together, we strived to improve the learning conditions for the students, to ensure delivery of relevant curriculum that prepares our students for the future, and to establish better working conditions for our members. We worked with our community members and encouraged them to become our partners in public education. These fights are ongoing, and we will never give up. Public education is too important for us to ever give up!

We will continue to fight for our support personnel. These are the men and women whose critical work

keeps our schools open and running smoothly, who assist our students throughout the day, who feed our students, and who safely transport them. Their contributions are imperative to the success of our students and schools. We value their jobs, and will continue to fight for our support personnel, especially against subcontracting.

What unite us are the challenges we face from those who disrespect our commitment to public education; those whose mission it is to divide and destroy what we have built together. We stand in solidarity through collective bargaining to ensure every school employee maintains the protections of their agreements,

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Tracey L. Hart, candidate for PSEA vice president



Tracey L. Hart

As I walk into my classroom each day as a teacher, mother, wife, daughter, and active PSEA member, I truly love what I do.

I knew very little about this amazing organization we call the Pennsylvania State Education Association when I first started in the classroom. As I was getting started in my new career, trusted colleagues took me under their wing and introduced me to the union.

My career began 28 years ago in a learning support classroom. I taught kindergarten through third grade learning support, as well as itinerant

emotional support across our district for kindergarten through twelfth grade. I currently teach third-grade at Central Elementary in Franklin, Pennsylvania.

I love this profession and will do everything in my power to make sure that public education remains strong in Pennsylvania.

Through my commitment to PSEA, I have worked diligently and have taken advantage of the important trainings that have been provided to me. PSEA has not only enhanced my knowledge of what it means to work together toward a common goal, but it also helped me grasp the potential of the collective power we hold as educators in Pennsylvania. That knowledge has allowed me to work to improve conditions for association members at the local, region, and state level, as well as the students we

all serve.

My commitment to Franklin Area Education Association has compelled me to serve in a variety of positions from building representative to Strike Committee Chair to vice president and ultimately, president.

As the current Northwestern Region President, I have led our members to become a powerful collective voice for our profession. We understand this process is on-going and will strive to continue to make our region a place where all voices are heard.

My passion to serve our association provided me with the honor of serving at the state level as Vice Chair of the Leadership Development Committee and co-coordinator of the Women's Leadership Cadre. As a

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Jeffery D. Ney, candidate for PSEA treasurer



Jeffery D. Ney

What a difference a year makes. The changes in all our lives from a year ago can't simply be counted or made into a list. We have all grown,

celebrated, and cried, but thankfully, we have done these things together. The main lesson I have learned over the past year is that together, we are all stronger. In the position of PSEA Treasurer, I have met incredible people, shared in wonderful events, and watched as our members continue to inspire their students and fellow members to be the absolute best they can be in the world of public education. Nothing would make me happier than if you allow me to continue this

journey as your PSEA Treasurer.

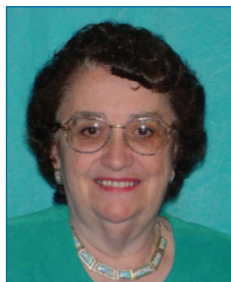
Brene Brown, a research professor at the University of Houston who has spent seven years studying courage and leadership has said, "A leader is someone who holds her- or himself accountable for finding the potential in people and processes." These leaders may not have a title or an official office within their local Association, but they are leaders because they are changing the future of public education with their ideas, lessons, and discussions with others. It's the teams they are on, the groups of people they engage with, the connections they have with others that define, form and move our Association for the betterment of public education. PSEA has leaders in a variety of roles in our schools. We have amazing leaders in our classrooms, cafeterias, busses, nurse's offices, hallways, and in every corner of our public schools.

These leaders are creating a better future for our schools by working together. This is the future I want to be a part of in PSEA.

From my very first rep council meeting, I knew there was nothing that was beyond our reach, if we worked together. I have always known that surrounding myself with great people would lead to monumental results. As I moved through the leadership roles of our union, I have met and collaborated with like-minded individuals whose goals were the betterment of the Association and to improve public education at every level. The processes that we use in our Association are a living and breathing part of what we do. Without following them, and in some cases, changing them to meet the ever-changing needs of our membership,

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Melva S. Vogler, candidate for PSEA pension plan director




Melva S. Vogler

System and has been on the PSERS Board since 1994 (25 years). During that time, she gained considerable

Melva S. Vogler seeks reelection as PSEA Pension Plan Director. Mel is chair of the Pennsylvania Public School Employees Retirement

knowledge concerning investments and pension issues. She participated in numerous educational sessions at Harvard University in Cambridge and at the University of California at Berkeley. She has been a member of the Executive Committee of the National Council of Teacher Retirement Systems and was president of NCTR in 2008. In 2008, she was also a member of the 7 person Executive Committee of NIRS (National Institute for Retirement Security) and worked to establish the research

“think tank” to promote pension issues. She was president of Northeastern Region and a member of the PSEA Board of Directors from 1988 to 2004 and served on PSEA’s Budget Committee during that time. Mel was Math Department Chair at Wallenpaupack Area High School and president of the Wallenpaupack Area Education Association. Currently, she is retired and a member of PSEA-R. 

Nancy M. Behe, candidate for NEA state director



Nancy M. Behe

employment, she led the organization of a union for her coworkers and herself. Mom held meetings in our living room, asking me to type the minutes. I watched while the group became stronger and eventually, I witnessed the birth of a strong union that still exists today. At the age of 14, I saw first hand the strength and benefits that come with the hard work involved in creating and maintaining strong Unionism. My father, a lifetime AFSCME member and leader, also embedded the strong Union voice in my soul and the passion

When I was in ninth grade I was introduced to Union Activism by my mother. Disappointed with the working conditions and pay restrictions at her place of

for the benefits of Unionism that continue to guide my career choices as an adult.

I have been a teacher for over 25 years working as a Vocational Education teacher in several schools across Pennsylvania. I teach at the Greater Johnstown School District in the Central-Western region, holding leadership positions both locally and regionally. Locally I have served as Building Representative, Head Building Representative, Grievance Chair, President, Vice-President, PACE Committee Member, and Negotiations Committee Member. My Regional involvement includes serving as Secretary, and a member of the LDC Committee and currently the PACE Chair and a member of the PSEA PACE Board. I regularly attend trainings and workshops organized by PSEA including Gettysburg’s annual conference.

A distinct honor for me was being able to serve as a local coordinator for

NEA’s Education Funding Works initiative. Our mission was to let the public know how important education funding is to the success of our students. I had many great conversations with people in my community and region about the value of education and the critical nature of state funding to support our students. As a result, local interest in education funding was a primary factor in the 2018 elections.

Maintaining my Union Activism, I am also a member of the Johnstown/Somerset Labor Council, a membership I value to continue to support my Union Brothers and Sisters outside of the PSEA and NEA organization.

I have an M.Ed in Education and an M.A. in Employment and Labor Relations from Indiana University of PA. I am a member of my county Democratic Executive team where I advocate for

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William M. Gerhauser, candidate for NEA state director



William M. Gerhauser

Colleagues, my name is Bill Gerhauser and I am running to be one of your NEA directors from Pennsylvania. When I learned that a director's seat was opening up, I felt this was an opportunity I had to take. This is an opportunity to take my knowledge and experience as a local leader and state committeeperson to represent all of PSEA at the national level and to be a voice for all members.

For the last 11 years I have been a member of the PSEA Resolutions Committee. In my time on the committee, I have had the opportunity to

work on resolutions that have addressed the most pressing issues that impact our Association. While technically I represent the Mideast Region on the committee, the reality is that all committee members represent EVERY member of PSEA. The work of your resolutions committee requires a strong sense of advocacy, knowledge of the political environment, and a deep understanding of the realities of the political world we live in. These three qualities are what make me a unique and strong candidate for NEA Director.

At the local level, I served for six years as Chief Negotiator for the Council Rock EA, working with our Executive Board to guide our local through two very difficult negotiations in the wake of the financial crisis of the early 2000's. In 2013, I was elected and currently serve as

president of CREA. For the last six years it has been my absolute pleasure and honor to lead our Association. In that time, we have successfully negotiated two more contracts which have followed my personal union motto, "respecting our past while preparing for our future." We have built a more transparent organization, one that is more adept to deal with our changing times, and one that is more inclusive.

Outside of my PSEA work, I have served as a local Democratic committeeman for my township and have developed an excellent working relationship with our local elected officials of both parties. I look forward to using that experience to represent our Association at the national level.

The relationships that exist be-

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Cheryl S. Mattern, candidate for NEA state director



Cheryl S. Mattern

In 2016, the members of PSEA honored me with the opportunity to serve as one of their NEA Directors. It has been my privilege to work side by side with you as we raise our voices in support of public education.

Although we have faced incredible obstacles over the past three years, we have risen together to meet those challenges with increased member engagement and voice. Your NEA Directors have been busy. We protested the nominations of anti-union appointees Betsy DeVos, Neil Gorsuch, and Brett Kavanaugh. We vigorously prepared ourselves for the

outcome of the Janus decision. We persisted in educating our members of Congress and our Senators regarding topics relevant to our work and our students. We supported fellow educators in West Virginia, Oklahoma, Kentucky, Arizona, Colorado, and North Carolina in their fight for better working conditions for themselves and better learning environments for their students. I was inspired to watch all of you join us in these endeavors. For these reasons and more, I am proud to have had the opportunity to serve as one of your ambassadors to the NEA.

In addition to everything that has been accomplished here in Pennsylvania and nationally, the past few years have provided me with additional experiences that have continued to broaden my worldview. Through NEA training and confronting personal bias, I amplified my

understanding of the relevance of racial and social justice in our education system. I was deployed to Puerto Rico as part of a federal disaster medical team following the devastation of Hurricane Maria, where I witnessed unspeakable devastation met with heroic resilience. A subsequent trip to Guatemala with a medical mission team reminded me of the desperate circumstances from which many flee. It is these types of experiences, along with what I learn from my brothers and sisters here in Pennsylvania, that inform the decisions I make as an NEA Director. With your support, it is my ambition to continue to cultivate my effectiveness as your representative.

My hope is that you will allow me the opportunity to continue my service alongside you for the next three

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Mollie P. Mumau, candidate for NEA state director



Mollie P. Mumau

Abigail Adams said, “Learning is not attained by chance; it must be sought for with ardor and attended to with diligence.” I hold that same passion and persistence for learning. These feelings have informed my teaching and have extended to my role as an NEA Director. I was fortunate to be appointed to fulfill a term on this year’s NEA Board of Directors, and I am eager to earn your support and your vote as I run for election. My role in the Association has been wide and varied. I served as a local president of the General McLane EA for eight years. In the

Northwestern region, I co-chaired the Communications Committee, served as region PACE director, and most recently was elected our region’s secretary. In addition, I have lobbied in Harrisburg numerous times on behalf of my students and colleagues as an ACE (Advocate for Children and Education). In these capacities, I have seen how important our voices are in keeping public education and the needs of our staff and students at the center of all conversation—from advocating for members’ rights, fair and equitable funding, and the importance of electing pro-public education lawmakers. America’s noble experiment—universal education for all citizens—is a cornerstone of our democracy. Each day in the classroom, whether teaching English or public speaking, I see the benefits and rewards of this successful experi-

ment. Students, education professionals, and education support professionals all face a constant barrage of education “reforms” from entities that have rarely or never set foot in a classroom. They all want to improve what they see as a product—the students. But those of us who are fortunate enough to work with these young people know the real success stories of our students. We see the light bulbs go off when they learn a new concept; we laugh with them as we make connections and reach goals; we witness their growth as human beings every day. We know how to foster a love of learning in our charges. We know how to teach them to discern truth from opinion and to look beyond their walls to see the possibilities before them. We teach the young

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Richard W. Askey, candidate for PSEA president, continued from page 19

friendly legislators. This starts at the local school board level and reaches both Harrisburg and Washington. By doing so, we increase the likelihood of achieving fair and equitable funding and of seeing legislation passed that supports our members and our students. We begin with a renewed effort to build strong community partnerships, where we nurture the next generation of political leaders. As a union, we have certain core principles that we follow: solidarity, improving lives, social justice, dignity, a living wage and protecting jobs through advocacy and continuing to fight for just cause language. When PSEA members stick together, we achieve

better results, better wages, better benefits, better working conditions, and better outcomes for our students and communities.

My third goal is to bring the positive message of unionism to our members. In all our publications, group meetings and in all our personal interactions with members, we should address the issue of union values. The salaries we have, the benefits we enjoy, the job protections we rely on have not been given to us. They have been won through the struggles of our union brothers and sisters who came before us. It is our responsibility to pass the message of unionism on to the next generation of

union leaders.

I know that my experience as a tested leader, and my vision for the future of PSEA has led me to this point. As your Treasurer, your Vice President, and now your President, I have seen your power and your strength and what we have accomplished as the most powerful voice for public education in Pennsylvania. There will be obstacles to overcome and challenges yet to face, but I know that our collective perseverance and resilience will lead us through both as we move forward together, I welcome the opportunity to continue to serve you and this great organization. 🍏

Join the conversation

Stay current on education news. Share what’s going on in your schools. Discuss professional issues, and weigh in on the latest state policy debates. **Join the conversation.**



Korri J. Brown, candidate for PSEA vice president, continued from page 19

which allows them to focus on what matters most, our students. We also stand collectively with our brothers and sisters in labor to ensure legislation enacted does not erode the rights of our students, our members and our communities.

The office of PSEA Vice President is an honor, and I am proud to serve in this position. The PSEA Board of Directors, after a difficult and heart-breaking loss, elected me to represent our union in this capacity as we continue to carry out the mission, vision and goals we all hold closely. Your support as I enter this new chapter in

my career has been extraordinary, and is much appreciated.

It is my goal to represent the 181,000 members of our union with the utmost integrity, passion and commitment. Anticipating and facing the numerous various attacks against public education, against public sector employees and against organized labor will continue to be arduous. I stand ready to continue the fight for what is right, along with you and other leaders from across the state. We will continue to advocate for the full funding of Pennsylvania's schools and against privatization. We

will continue to engage legislators in support of pro-public education legislation and policies. We will continue the fight to protect our pensions and to preserve collective bargaining. We will do this, side by side. By working together, anything is possible!

I am Korri Brown. Ready to lead, ready to serve, and ready to empower. Please join me in the fight for the students we all care about and the vision that unites us! I humbly ask for your support at the May PSEA House of Delegates as I seek a full term as your PSEA Vice President. Thank you. 🍎

Tracey L. Hart, candidate for PSEA vice president, continued from page 20

member of PSEA Board of Directors, I am the liaison to the Leadership Development Committee and Personnel Committee.

PSEA helped me find my voice and taught me how to use it to improve public education for our students, educators, and communities. This association has provided me the opportunity to grow as an educator and leader. PSEA doesn't owe me anything – in fact, it is quite the opposite: I owe it everything! That feeling is one of the reasons I am motivated to run for this office. PSEA

has taught me to be a leader and to advocate for all our members. I have learned our voices matter, that they can have a huge impact on the greater good, and that we must be willing to use those voices – even if what we have to say isn't what our adversaries want to hear. Leadership is both rewarding and tough at the same time, and the work is never done. I promise to put in the work that will get us through the difficult times and allow us to enjoy the rewarding times.

PSEA is strong and needs to remain strong, because public education, our

students, and our communities are depending on us.

I am asking for your trust and support as we continue to do great work together, as a team, for the good of all 181,000 PSEA members. I look forward to meeting many of you and working together to do what is best for our kids and our members. I would be honored to have your support and vote as I seek the position of Vice President of the Pennsylvania State Education Association. 🍎

Jeffery D. Ney, candidate for PSEA treasurer, continued from page 20

we would fall apart. Recognizing when change is needed and the people who represent that change is another key to leadership. Lifting people up to reach their potential and accomplish their vision helps everyone. That has always been my goal in every position I've held. No one can do it alone. We are all stronger together.

Being Treasurer is more than just numbers, budgets, and vouchers. This position is where local treasurers

go to answer questions that their members have about dues, finances and membership. It's a team effort. And that team has a goal to help the others in their local and give them the confidence and security that their dues are being used to move the Association forward for the betterment of everyone. Helping others, raising them up, answering the questions members have is truly rewarding. I would be honored to continue work with these members, PSEA's elite of-

ficer team, awe-inspiring Board of Directors, and indispensable staff to provide the resources all our members need.

I would be grateful for your support in allowing me to continue finding the potential in our membership by being your PSEA Treasurer for another two years. 🍎

Nancy M. Behe, candidate for NEA state director, continued from page 21

pro-education candidates, in a bipartisan effort. I openly advocate for educational issues, doing what is right for our students, our districts, and our colleagues.

Becoming a leader in our member-driven Organization motivates me to continue this advocacy on a National level, representing our 181,000 members in PA by reaching out to Legislators to develop policies which will improve our profession and our profes-

sional efficacy in education.

As teachers, we touch the future daily as we interact with our students; additionally, we also need to protect the future of our professions. Our Unity is our strength and our voices need to be heard, not as a single instrument, but rather collectively, as a symphony, where ideas build off of each other to form a harmony of individual voices creating a musical score that can't be ignored. I am asking for your vote in

order to bring our must-hear orchestration of concerns to the forefront.

Serving as an NEA representative for you, my Union Brothers and Sisters, is an honor I look forward to realizing. Union Advocacy is a trail that has been blazed by generations before us and continues to provide hope for our future generations. I look forward to being your voice at the National level. 🍏

William M. Gerhauser, candidate for NEA state director, continued from page 22

tween members and the state association, between the state and the national associations, between members and our elected political leaders are key to our success. I believe that I have ability to grow those relationships in a way that honors our past and protects our future. Through advocacy, knowledge and, inclusiveness, PSEA will continue to be the

preeminent voice for unions and public education across the Commonwealth.

I thank you for your time and your continued support of PSEA. And, I ask for your support for NEA Director.

In Solidarity,
Bill Gerhauser

“Unions, by and large, are democratic organizations with freely chosen leaders and policies determined by the membership. They concern themselves with individual dignity not only in their aims but in their method.” - Robert Kennedy 🍏

Cheryl S. Mattern, candidate for NEA state director, continued from page 22

years as one of your NEA Directors. I will honor my charge to advocate for our members, to promote student success, and to strengthen our Association. Together we can keep the momentum that our fierce advocacy has

created. Together we can shape the future of public education for our students and peers. I am asking for your confidence and your vote for my reelection to the position of NEA Director.

In service and solidarity,
Cheryl Mattern 🍏

Mollie P. Mumau, candidate for NEA state director, continued from page 23

people to be good listeners, good collaborators, and good citizens. All of this is possible because we, the members of PSEA and NEA support each other as we work together to achieve the core values of equal opportunity, a just society, democracy, profession-

alism, partnership, and collective action. This past year working as a team member on the NEA Board of Directors has been quite a journey. The passion, intelligence, and love for our profession that spills forth from the fellow Directors is over-

whelming and inspiring. With your support, I will continue that journey and continue to learn and advocate for our students and you, the members. 🍏

Tell Voice about it

We all know there are many good things going on in our public schools. Teachers and support professionals are doing wonderful things, both in schools and in the community. **Please pass along items to Voice Editor John Troutman at jtroutman@psea.org.**

Plan to arm Tamaqua school employees on hold

Tamaqua Area School District's policy allowing employees to carry and use firearms in a crisis situation is on hold while legal challenges from teachers and parents in the district are considered.

The Tamaqua Area Education Association filed a lawsuit in November to block the school board policy on the grounds that it violates the Pennsylvania School Code. That law permits certain law enforcement personnel, such as school police officers or school resource officers, to carry firearms in school as long as those officers complete specific law enforcement training.

The policy in the Schuylkill County school district would create a new class of public school employees allowed to carry firearms in school without the training or experience required by state law, the lawsuit alleges.

"As teachers, counselors, and other education professionals, we are trained to provide a high-quality education to our students, not to carry or

use firearms in a dangerous situation," said Frank Wenzel, president of the Tamaqua Area Education Association. "This is a bad policy for a lot of reasons, but we are challenging it in court because we believe it is illegal."

In January, the Tamaqua Citizens for Safe Schools, a group of parents and other community members, filed a separate lawsuit to stop the policy. Both cases are pending in Schuylkill County Court of Common Pleas.

The Tamaqua Area School Board unanimously adopted Policy 705 in September without any hearings.

More than 100 people, including students, teachers, and parents, packed a subsequent school board meeting to speak out against the policy. Many urged the board to find alternatives to arming employees, such as better screening of visitors, infrastructure changes, shooter detection systems, and investments in mental health support and threat assessments.

In early January, the board voted 6-1 to put the policy on hold until the litigation is resolved.

The Tamaqua Area Education Association's lawsuit asks the court to declare that the school board exceeded its authority by adopting a policy that conflicts with the state School Code and other laws and unlawfully permits school employees "to carry firearms and use deadly force without the training and experience required by the General Assembly."

"We agree with parents and the school district that student safety is paramount," Wenzel said. "There are many lawful steps the district can take to help ensure our students are protected from an active shooter and other threats."

"The Tamaqua Area Education Association does not object to the presence of firearms at school to protect students, but only a properly trained school police officer or law enforcement officer should carry a gun on school property. Our top priority is always the safety of students and staff." ■

PSEA seeks to increase minority participation

PSEA works best when all members are active in the Association. With that goal in mind, PSEA's Board of Directors approved a plan at its November meeting that outlines ideas for how to encourage more minority members to actively participate.

The plan has four main objectives:

- Seek to engage minority members by encouraging involvement in local, PSEA, and NEA activities.
- Show statewide commitment to racial and social justice in education.
- Use communications materials to show commitment to diversity.
- Encourage members to self-identify minority designation.

This plan is required by NEA Bylaw 3.1(g), which was adopted by the NEA Representative Assembly shortly after NEA's merger with the American Teacher Association in 1966. A major goal is to encourage states to send delegates to the NEA-RA who reflect the percentage of minorities in the general population of each state. PSEA is proud to have achieved this goal in 2018 and is working diligently to do so again in 2019.

A new feature for 2019 is a plan to encourage members to self-identify their minority designation, using a new handout, "Why I Identify."

Another important component of the program is PSEA's Minority

Leadership Conference and Summer Leadership Conference. Minority members are eligible for scholarships to attend the Summer Leadership Conference and the NEA Representative Assembly.

The 3.1(g) plan is updated every year. PSEA Treasurer Jeff Ney worked with a task force of members to draft the plan, and the Minority Affairs Committee works all year to help implement it. For information on NEA's and PSEA's diversity outreach efforts and conferences, see the "Why I Identify" handout, and to update your minority status, visit www.psea.org/minorityinvolvement. ■

Brown elected PSEA vice president

Korri Brown, a special education and emotional support teacher in the Kennett Consolidated School District, has been elected PSEA vice president by the Association's Board of Directors.

Brown succeeds Rich Askey, who became PSEA president in November following the death of Dolores McCracken. Jeff Ney is treasurer.

"Korri Brown is a strong leader and a good friend," Askey said. "She is committed to public schools and

passionate about students."

Brown, who has taught for 17 years at Kennett High School, Chester County, has been a member of the PSEA Board of Directors since 2011 and Southeastern Region president since 2013.

"I'm grateful and honored that my colleagues on the PSEA board have confidence in me," Brown said. "I will work as hard as I can to represent the interests of every PSEA member and every student in Pennsylvania."

Under PSEA's constitution and bylaws, the vice president becomes president in the event of a vacancy, and the board elects a vice president. The PSEA House of Delegates will elect a full officer team in May. 🇺🇸



Korri Brown

2019 Fabric of Unionism art competition

Entries are now being accepted for The Jenifer J. DuBois Fabric of Unionism Art Competition, which is held every two years to promote awareness of the historical significance of the labor movement and its importance to the future.

The competition features \$1,000, \$500, and \$250 cash prizes. Entries must be postmarked by March 29.

More information, including contest rules and entry forms, is available at www.psea.org/fou.



Audit report available

The 2017-18 PSEA financial statements audited by KPMG LLP, an independent audit firm, are available for review. For a copy, contact Joseph Howlett at (800) 944-7732, ext. 7096 or jhowlett@psea.org; or send your request to Administrative Services at P.O. Box 1724, Harrisburg PA 17105.

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Upper Darby secretary ESP of the Year

As PSEA's 2018 Education Support Professional of the Year, Denise Kennedy sees herself no differently than her fellow educators around the state.

"I don't work alone; none of us do," said Kennedy, an elementary school secretary for the past 22 years in Upper Darby School District, Delaware County. "I give it my all every day because I know all around there are other educators and support professionals giving their best, too. And together we are doing the

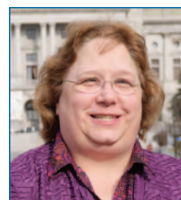
important work of shaping young lives." She calls ESPs "the glue that holds our schools together" by playing critical

...together we are doing the important work of shaping young lives.

behinds-the-scenes roles every day.

Kennedy, who is also active in her ESP local and in PSEA, was honored at the PSEA House of Delegates in Philadelphia in December.

"Denise is a tireless advocate for the public education profession," said PSEA Vice President Korri Brown. "Not only does she understand the important role ESPs play in our schools every day, she uses that opportunity to make a difference in the lives of students."



Denise Kennedy

Education support professionals include bus drivers, food service workers, clerical and secretarial staff, maintenance staff, paraeducators, and IT professionals, among others. 🌱

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Mifflin County educators aid homeless students

Educators in the Mifflin County School District were surprised to learn there were 55 homeless students in the district, but when they did they acted.

The revelation came when Michelle Siruc, a confidential secretary and the district's homeless liaison, approached the Association of Mifflin County Educators about using a dress-down day right before Thanksgiving as a means of raising funds to help homeless students – teachers were asked to contribute \$5 to wear jeans.

The dress-down day raised \$1,200, but it turned out to be much more than a one-day event. The district and the association have joined to create a pantry for homeless students stocked with toiletries, school supplies, and other items.

"It really raised awareness among our members," said Valerie Baker, the association's communications chair.

"They weren't aware there were that many homeless children in our district. And once they found out, they really got involved."

So did the community after the association got the word out via social media and other outlets, and the local newspaper ran a story about the district's and the educators' efforts. Donations are coming from parents, and local businesses and organizations.

Siruc noted homelessness often isn't thought to be a problem in a heavily rural district like Mifflin County, located in PSEA's Central Region.

She said the community's surprise to hear of the large number of homeless students "is pretty typical of rural homelessness. You don't see people on the street, or under bridges like you do in cities."

Homeless students aren't necessarily going without a roof over their heads at night, but are doing what Siruc said is called "couch surfing." Be-



Items gathered by Mifflin County educators for homeless students.

They weren't aware there were that many homeless children in our district. And once they found out, they really got involved.

cause of circumstances, they may be moving around from house to house – for example, staying at one friend's house one night, and at another the next. And some may be living in shelters.

Youth are considered homeless under state guidelines if they are lacking a fixed, regular or adequate nighttime residence. School districts are required by law to provide transportation to these students, and they can also have college

application fees waived.

In addition to the \$1,200 raised from the dress-down day, Siruc said financial donations are coming in from the community and the money is being placed in a fund to purchase items for homeless students beyond the items in the pantry – things such as eyeglasses, or athletic shoes for students who want to participate in sports.

"You can't learn academics if your life has so many things that are out of order," said Diane Shearer, association president. "If you don't know what you're going to eat or where you're going to sleep, learning history and science is not the main goal. The main goal is survival. If we can provide them with supplies needed to live normally for those seven hours that they are here, the likelihood of educating them is much better." 🌱

PSEA members honored at Penn State game

Five PSEA members were among those honored as outstanding educators during Educator Appreciation Day at Penn State's football game against Maryland last November at Beaver Stadium.

Those honored were: Mardi McDonough, Holli Jo Weber, Mary Smith, and Joe Walker, all from the State College Area School District, Centre County; and Tina Zacherl of the South Butler Area School District, Butler County.

McDonough is president of the State College Area Education Association, and Weber is a former Central Region president.

Those honored during Educator Appreciation Day were nominated by students, parents, fellow educators, and community members.



PSEA-Retired helps Erie school

Thanks to a \$310 donation from PSEA-Retired, Grover Cleveland Elementary School in the Erie City School District, Erie County, purchased nearly 100 new library books. The donation stemmed from a program at the PSEA-Retired School at the Gettysburg Summer Leadership Conference to reach out to Pennsylvania's neediest students.

Wyalusing helps put backpacks on students

Members of the Wyalusing EA, Bradford County, presented a \$3,350 check to the Helping Hands Food Bank Backpack Program as part of a Partners for Public Education project. The money is being used to purchase backpacks for Wyalusing students who are eligible to receive free or reduced price lunches.



I am a member because...



"I'm a PSEA member because **I know that through our collective action we can make sure that absolutely every student gets the best possible education and it can help shape the rest of their lives.** I'm proud to be a PSEA member."

Eric Davy, State College Area EA



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“We have brothers and sisters in Pennsylvania school districts who do not earn the compensation they deserve – teachers who are paid less than \$20,000 each year, and education service professionals who do not earn a living wage.”

“By passing this NBI and starting this initiative, we will show we believe that every one of our members should be respected for the jobs we do and the contributions and impacts these jobs have on our communities.”

These are some of the comments PSEA members made on Dec. 1, 2018, before the PSEA House of Delegates approved New Business Item #3, in support of an initiative they called “Raise Educators’ Salaries Provide Economic Certainty Today” – RESPECT. NBI #3 called on PSEA to advocate for increases in the minimum wage and the minimum salary for educators and college faculty.

Delegates noted that it has been 10 years since the minimum wage was last adjusted and 30 years since the minimum teacher salary was set at \$18,500 and said it is time to make these wages and salaries more consistent with neighboring states.

On Jan. 30, 2019, Gov. Tom Wolf called for a 65 percent increase in Pennsylvania’s minimum wage to \$12 an hour immediately, and, eventually, \$15 an hour.

On Feb. 5, Gov. Wolf presented his proposed 2019-20 spending plan and called on state legislators to increase Pennsylvania’s minimum educator salary to \$45,000.

This did not happen by accident. It was due, in significant part, to the work of PSEA staff who immediately went to work in support of the NBI. They diligently researched the issue and persuaded administration officials about the benefits of such a policy.

Research staff parsed the numbers and costed proposals, Field staff talked to members and contemplated implementation issues, Legal staff worked on legislative language, Communications staff interviewed members and wrote information to



We have brothers and sisters in Pennsylvania school districts who do not earn the compensation they deserve.

explain the issues, and Government Relations staff conveyed all this information to policymakers.

We have already spent many hours on this issue. But for certain, there is more work to do as the Legislature begins active consideration of these proposals as part of the budget debate. And we need your help.

If you’re a member who earns less than \$12 an hour or less than \$45,000, please share your story. Are you struggling to make ends meet or working

more than one job? Do you work with members who are underpaid for the work they do? Why do you support these increases?

Your voice will help demonstrate the real-world impacts of underpaying those who work in our schools. Please go to www.psea.org/respect to share your story.

Every PSEA member deserves RESPECT. 🍎

Email Jim Vaughan:
jvaughan@psea.org

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