

RAISING OUR VOICES:

STORIES OF SUCCESS





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INTRODUCTION

With the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015, critical decision-making related to education policy has shifted away from the federal government and back to states and local districts.

This means that the voices of educators and community stakeholders are more important than ever. Thanks to the advocacy efforts of members of the National Education Association (NEA), this landmark federal education legislation offers unprecedented opportunities for educators to get involved in ways that haven't existed before. Through NEA's strategic priority work to lift and amplify educator voice, state and local affiliates are driving efforts to increase engagement and ensure stakeholders have a seat at the table.

Educators across the country are embracing this opportunity. They are taking action to improve schools and ensure all students have access to equitable public education.



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LOCAL ENGAGEMENT

BUILDING SPACES FOR EDUCATORS TO LEAD

Several local affiliates of the National Education Association (NEA) have partnered with NEA Education Policy & Practice to leverage educator voice and build opportunities for student success.

Through the creation and implementation of local plans, members have been working hard to achieve the goals that were identified through collaborative and collective efforts to ensure that equitable learning opportunities exist for all students.

Although the priorities and needs of each local affiliate vary, they all have one connecting thread: The engagement of educators, parents, and community members is of utmost importance when making decisions that affect their school, their district, and their students.

DRIVING ENGAGEMENT WITH PARENTS AND THE COMMUNITY

CAMDEN, NEW JERSEY

The Camden Education Association (CEA) is working to build strong parent-teacher organizations across the district and elect public-school-friendly board members. The CEA utilized its own members to educate the community and identify board candidates who understand how to leverage the Every Student Succeeds Act on behalf of students.

With support from NEA Education Policy & Practice, the association won one of three seats on the Board of Education in 2019, and they have started the process of finding another three candidates for 2020. In addition, the CEA is using the NEA Opportunity Checklist to collect feedback from staff and parents in 19 schools and from students in high schools through June 2020.

But the work doesn't stop there. The CEA has also been implementing evidence-based strategies in an effort to improve schools, including the adoption of five community schools, increased family and community engagement, and labor-management collaboration.

The CEA has courted families and the community through two programs, in particular: PRIDE in Public Education and FAST, or Families and Schools Together. PRIDE is a campaign that shares the successes of New Jersey's public schools while building community support and involvement. FAST helps parents and families get involved in their children's education through various programs and events in an effort to make families feel welcome and connected to their schools.



Photo Credit: GettyImages.com

Just a few examples of how the CEA is successfully engaging with families and the community include:

- ☆ Helping those who are experiencing food shortages;
- ☆ Providing 360 eye exams and glasses to those in need through a partnership with Optical Academy; this program has been in effect for the past four years; and
- ☆ Supporting a team-building program for eighth-grade students, where they spend a year building a boat in conjunction with local boat builders; upon completion, students act as skippers of the vessels for a day on the river.

The CEA has gained great momentum and will continue its legislative and programmatic work to drive support for the students, educators, families, and communities of Camden.

ADDRESSING STUDENT, EDUCATOR, AND COMMUNITY NEEDS

DES MOINES, IOWA

With support from NEA Education Policy & Practice, the Des Moines Education Association organized and participated in dozens of events at schools and throughout the community to discuss priorities with regard to student needs. To help connect educators and the communities in which they taught, President Joshua Brown and Vice President Sara Earleywine reached out directly to various stakeholders throughout the community to have critical conversations about how to best support students, families, educators, and schools.

The association also engaged with a variety of groups, including Iowans for Public Education, the Latino Political Network, the Asian Latino Coalition, and the South Central Federation of Labor; they facilitated meaningful conversations with each group that led to the establishment of a new educator committee. Using data from the NEA Opportunity Checklist and one-on-one conversations, the DMEA designed and hosted professional learning opportunities that catered to early career educator needs.

The DMEA also hosted a community conversation that included community members, parents, teachers, a school board member, the district superintendent, and a state senator. To begin the discussion, the DMEA discussed the issues that were identified through the NEA Opportunity Checklist. As a result of this increased communication between the association and community organizations, like Interfaith Alliance, the DMEA was able to engage in future discussions on how to address community issues, such as child hunger.

The DMEA has also increased contact with members of the state legislature to weigh in on how they can work together to maximize opportunities for schools, students, and educators under the Every Student Succeeds Act. One DMEA member even became a leader of the Asian and Latino Coalition, which allows the organization to participate even more meaningfully in collaborative efforts.

Since beginning the grant work in 2018, the DMEA has become not only more visible but also more authentically engaged in the Des Moines community.



Photo Credit: Joshua Brown

USING THE OPPORTUNITY CHECKLIST TO IDENTIFY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

FAIRBANKS, ALASKA

The Fairbanks Education Association (FEA) has been working diligently to engage members and potential members around the importance of the Alaska Education Challenge—an effort that focuses on the unique nature of the state—and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA); they also highlighted the benefits of union membership. Beginning this quest for engagement in March 2019, the FEA has also been working with members to identify their professional development needs and how they can partner with their school district to ensure that all professional development is member-informed.

The FEA began by securing a Memorandum of Understanding with the district to use on-site staff meetings—at least two over the course of the year—to introduce the Alaska Education Challenge and provide members with a space to complete the NEA Opportunity Checklist. There was a noticeable increase in Opportunity Checklist responses as these efforts continued.

Through the collection of this data, the FEA was able to see a pattern that led to the examination of what meaningful professional development looked like in the district and how to best provide these learning opportunities. Due to the geographic nature of the district, the association had to think a bit more creatively on how they could best provide members with quality professional learning opportunities.

The FEA, in partnership with the district, decided it would be best to explore the various MicroCredentials offered through the National Education Association (NEA) to ensure all members were able to secure appropriate learning opportunities. Providing a space where members could complete the Opportunity Checklist, the on-site meetings further supported the FEA's efforts to work with the district and provide tailored professional development.

These efforts are ongoing and have successfully morphed into a larger initiative district-wide.

Finally, the FEA has developed a First Responders training specifically designed for elementary school counselors, administrative secretaries, behavioral aides, and special education teachers. The training was developed to support school personnel who interact with students in most need of trauma-informed attention.

The FEA sees this campaign as a great success. Although the original goal was to provide members with an opportunity to

learn more about the Alaska Education Challenge and ESSA, this process has focused more on educator needs and how the FEA can partner with the district and other membership groups to provide educators with the training they actually want and need.



Photo Credit: Sandi Ryan

INCREASING LOCAL STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

FORSYTH COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

During the 2018–2019 school year, the Forsyth County Association of Educators (FCAE)—with support from NEA Education Policy & Practice—began to work to increase stakeholder engagement at the local level. Recognizing the important role of family and community in successful schools, the FCAE team focused its efforts on engagement and implementation with not just educators but also parents and community members to leverage a collective voice and make meaningful change.

“Parents need to know that they have an opportunity to be part of decision-making, and they need the association’s help in knowing how to become part of the process,” Ronda Mays, immediate past president of FCAE, noted.

Three Forsyth County elementary schools were selected, with each presenting its own set of challenges. Also of note, two of the three schools had already been identified for school improvement by the State of North Carolina.

The first step for the FCAE was to create a strong foundation of communication with key educators and administrators within each school. These site-based partners helped reinforce the importance of supporting student needs and identified school events at which to share this message.

One of the greatest obstacles the FCAE had to overcome was the reluctance of educators to make their voice heard. “Educators want to be able to speak up, but [they] fear repercussions,” Mays said. To ease educator concerns, the data from the NEA Opportunity Checklist was a way for stakeholders to identify and address specific issues through a collective voice. At school events, the FCAE began gathering baseline data using this resource. This helped the team engage administrators, community leaders, school leaders, parent groups, and educators.

The FCAE team had to employ different strategies at each school and find opportunities to bring stakeholders together to further discuss issues of interest. They worked with educators, administrators, community leaders, school leaders, and family members to create a comprehensive inventory of strengths and needs within each school using the NEA Opportunity Audit.

All three schools completed the audit. “A big part of our success in completing the audits was in teaching our educators, families, and community leaders how to become involved and help them realize how their voice can spark meaningful change within their school,” Mays said.

The FCAE team is proud to bring family and community members together to work directly with educators. This engagement will help to make improvements for each school and its students. “The willingness and support of our educators, families, and community members are resources that we must continue to utilize, not only in identifying issues but also seeking solutions and taking actions that make a difference for our students,” Mays concluded.

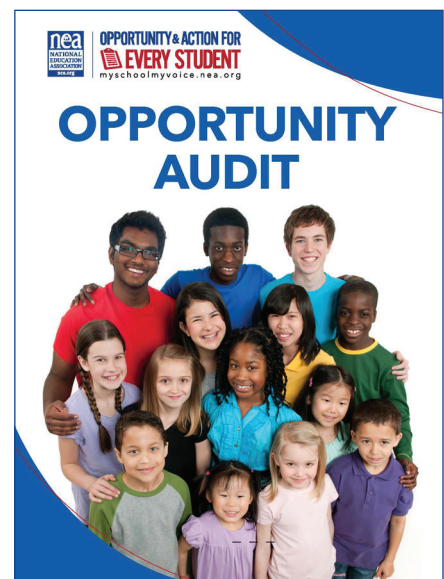


Photo Credit: NEA Education Policy & Practice



COLLABORATING FOR SUCCESS

HALE COUNTY, ALABAMA

Following a tristate training in summer 2018, the Perry County Education Association (PCEA) formed an ESSA team comprised of a diverse group of stakeholders in Perry County, Alabama. The team began studying the district data and recognized that there was a disproportionately high out-of-school suspension rate for the small student population. Through a grant from the NEA Center for Organizing, the Perry County ESSA team mobilized to engage educators, families, and community members to discuss the issue. The team worked collaboratively with the district superintendent and invited a representative from the NEA Human and Civil Rights (HCR) Department to address the entire school staff on the school-to-prison pipeline and I-can-do-it classroom management practices.

The neighboring Hale County school district was experiencing issues similar to those in Perry County. Encouraged by their successes, the Hale County Education Association (HCEA) staff formed an ESSA team in their district. The first step was to raise awareness around the power of educator voice within the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Before the 2019–2020 school year, the superintendent allotted time during an all-staff meeting for the association to talk about educator voice and how data from the NEA Opportunity Checklist could be used to identify their concerns; every educator in Hale County was then given the Opportunity Checklist. This team also discussed with the superintendent how they could work together to involve family and community members to address their concerns.

TO DATE, THE HALE COUNTY EDUCATION ASSOCIATION HAS ENGAGED MORE THAN 500 EDUCATORS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS.

In partnership with NEA Education Policy & Practice, the Hale County ESSA team used checklist data to identify priorities, which included increasing family and community involvement, improving attendance, decreasing discipline referrals, and improving school climate within the district schools. As the data indicated, family and community involvement was the foundation to addressing the challenges that face the students of Hale County. The team reached out to the sheriff's and fire departments, the Department of Juvenile Probation, the local Boys and Girls Club, local churches, and businesses in an effort to involve the community in their advocacy efforts.

ESSA team members have been working collaboratively with the superintendent to gather and identify issues within each of the schools. To date, the Hale County Education Association has engaged more than 500 educators and community members, and individual teams are working to prioritize issues and identify solutions for action.

The team has also elevated the need to raise awareness on policies and practices that create conditions for the school-to-prison pipeline. In October 2019, the NEA HCR Department presented at an all-staff gathering to talk about implicit bias—information that was enthusiastically received and proved there is much work to be done to address inequities in Hale County.

The National Education Association and the Hale County Education Association are continuing this collaborative work with the Hale County school district.

FIGHTING FOR A NEW POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

MANCHESTER, NEW HAMPSHIRE

The Manchester Education Association (MEA) is the largest local in the State of New Hampshire, with nearly 1,100 members; it is also the only urban local in the state. Manchester, the largest public school district in the state, serves 13 percent of all students.

Recently, the MEA has been engaged in the Manchester Students Deserve campaigns to advocate for smaller class sizes, lower caseloads, a dynamic school district with shared power and adequate resources, and increased educator voice in decision-making. Because the MEA is currently without a successor collective bargaining agreement, it is in status quo. The contract fight has been difficult and contentious primarily due to a school board negotiating team that refuses to actually negotiate. Achieving the goals set forth will require a new political landscape and intentional conversations with members.

To that end, with the support of NEA Education Policy & Practice, the MEA helped flip nine seats on the school board, moving it to a more public-education-friendly body; retained a public-education-friendly mayor; and retained many aldermen that are equally pro-public education.

The MEA also elevated educator voice in regard to hiring decisions for several district positions, administrative teams, and safety programs. They met with a district administrative team to develop protocols around sharing power and ensuring adequate resources.



Photo Credit: GettyImages.com

GARNERING SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

PUEBLO, COLORADO

With the support of NEA Education Policy & Practice, the Pueblo Education Association (PEA) hosted monthly community forums with a variety of community partners, families, and students. These monthly gatherings were meant to build engagement and support for the implementation of the community schools model at Risley International Academy of Innovation.



Photo Credit: GettyImages.com

The forums resulted in identification of potential partners to help meet the funding needs of a community schools coordinator at Risley and garnered support for the community schools model among several members of the District 60 Board of Education. In addition to the monthly community forums, the PEA used grant funds to complete a community mural project to build positive relationships and a welcoming environment for families and students at Risley.

Following the mural project, the PEA secured a community schools task force—composed of union leaders, district administration, and community members—that is using a labor management approach to exploring the community schools model for implementation in the district.

INCREASING REA MEMBERSHIP AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

RACINE, WISCONSIN

To guide the need for increased organizational capacity and broader community participation, the Racine Education Association (REA) established a My School, My Voice community coalition organizing committee that included a diverse cross-section of more than 70 educators, parents, students, community stakeholders, community representatives, and government officials. So far, the coalition has worked to draft and prepare a formal complaint for submission to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction for violations of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) that address the district's development of a local education association (LEA) plan that lacked input from educators and community stakeholders.

From October 2019 to January 2020, the REA held three community listening sessions throughout Racine and heard from more than 70 stakeholders to help inform the drafting of the complaint. These events captured crucial educator voice and stakeholder feedback and earned local media coverage that drove activity to the community coalition's Facebook page, which has more than 300 followers to date. The REA has also engaged a broad group of community partners in this campaign, including the League of United Latin American Citizens local chapter, the Racine Interfaith Coalition, the American Association of University Women local branch, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

In addition to the REA finalizing their complaint to be filed with the state education agency, the association developed a strategy to engage with the Racine Unified School District superintendent. Their goal was to provide recommendations for an alternate LEA plan based on stakeholder input. The association hopes that, given this opportunity, they will no longer need to file the formal complaint and ensure educator voice and stakeholder feedback is included in the new plan.

Throughout this campaign, the REA has also focused their attention on recruiting and retaining members. The association had 81 percent of members vote "yes" on

recertifying its bargaining unit, surpassing its goal of 75 percent. Additionally, they far exceeded their goal of recruiting 15 members; 52 new members joined the association between October 2019 and February 2020.

As the campaign progresses, the REA continues to engage the community, educators, and education officials to ensure educator voice is at the forefront when key decisions are being made.



Photo Credit: Angelina Cruz



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STATE ENGAGEMENT

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR EDUCATORS TO COLLABORATE

In tandem with the National Education Association (NEA), many state affiliates are working with educators on how to use opportunities within the Every Student Succeeds Act to build teams of activists and use educator voice to foster equitable teaching and learning opportunities in their states.

State affiliates have partnered with NEA Education Policy & Practice to engage members around the power of collective educator voice to impact education policy on the state and local levels. Member leaders have been encouraged to think outside the box to investigate and create learning opportunities for affiliates to determine what works and how successful programs can be replicated by other interested affiliates.

GROWING A REGIONAL NETWORK OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES TO ADDRESS NEEDS

ALABAMA

NEA Education Policy & Practice worked with key contacts in Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia to plan a tristate convening focused on raising awareness around educator voice and deploying the NEA Opportunity Checklist to gather input from educators. In August 2018, 75 participants from all three states came together in Opelika, Alabama, to learn about opportunities for educator voice within the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA); their state plans and accountability systems; how to explore issues within their own schools and districts; and how using the Opportunity Checklist could help bring educators together to advocate for what their students need.

At the close of the training, participants created action plans on how they could use their learnings to advocate for their students. One Alabama Education Association (AEA) member tweeted, "Some might be amazed at what educators are able to accomplish when assigned the task to develop goals to realize opportunities within the Every Student Succeeds Act." And, amazing work has continued as a result of this training.

In Hale County, the AEA staff have engaged more than 500 educators, administrators, families, and community members around opportunities for collective voice in ESSA. The Hale County Education Association collaborated with district administration to ensure that the Opportunity Checklist was given to every educator within the school district. The Hale County ESSA team then used the checklist information to develop a plan to identify the most critical issues within the district.

Educator voice was also resonating in Mississippi as a result of the tristate training. Air quality was the third-most-identified issue in the state. In the Leland School District, air quality equated to the lack of heating and air conditioning in the district schools. By using the power of educator voice, Leland County Schools secured funding to fix air quality problems in their schools.



Photo Credit: NEA Education Policy & Practice

BUILDING EDUCATOR VOICE

ACROSS THE MAE

MISSISSIPPI

NEA Education Policy & Practice (EPP) has been working with the Mississippi Association of Educators (MAE) in an effort to build educator voice across the state's five UniServ Units. The initial goal: Raise awareness around educator voice and opportunities for action using the NEA Opportunity Checklist. EPP worked directly with MAE UniServ directors to align the grant work with existing demands.

To accomplish this, the UniServ directors stratified engagement opportunities by identifying five regional captains, who in turn identified site-level activists. In May 2019, 43 UniServ directors and captains attended a training in Jackson, Mississippi, to learn more about the opportunities around educator voice within the Every Student Succeeds Act and how the NEA Opportunity Checklist could help to identify these opportunities at the local level.

The first phase of this work—engaging educators around the Opportunity Checklist—began following this training. Captains identified activists within their individual districts and trained them on how to engage others using this resource. Captains and activists alike were the driving force behind the distribution and completion of checklist, with more than 1,200 responses within this phase of the work.

EDUCATORS TOOK TO SOCIAL MEDIA TO RAISE AWARENESS AROUND THEIR STUDENTS' NEEDS.

In the second phase of this work, captains examined their school and district data to prioritize the most critical issues facing their students. They committed to monthly actions that would enable them to continue engaging others around the issues and building teams to identify solutions.

Two of the captains put their voices into action at the NEA Representative Assembly, spreading the news about the power of educator voice. To date, more than 2,000 Mississippi educators and community stakeholders have completed the NEA Opportunity Checklist.

Here is an example of how collective educator voice helped to address Mississippi's issues:

In fall 2019, the Leland School District put forth a bond referendum to address infrastructure issues that affected teaching and learning conditions of the nearly 900 students and educators in the district. Some of the issues facing the schools included leaky roofs, lack of heating and/or air conditioning, bathrooms in need of repair, and lack of specialized learning spaces. Sadly, the bond issue did not pass on its first attempt.

"Why didn't they vote for us?" one student asked his teacher.

Eligible for a second pass, the bond issue was put forth again. This time, Leland educators stepped in to speak up for their students. They took to social media, had one-on-one conversations, and made calls to raise awareness around their students' needs.

In November 2019, the bond issue was back on the ballot, and thanks to the efforts of these educators and students, it passed. Repair efforts kicked off in December 2019: Heating and air conditioning units were replaced in the high school and the roof on the elementary school was fixed. The remaining funds will be used to build science labs for the elementary and middle schools, replace windows, repair floors, and renovate other areas within the schools.

ADVOCATING FOR EQUITY IN THE CLASSROOM

NORTH CAROLINA

In 2015, the North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE) began work to create an opportunity for members to gain both professional knowledge and policy advocacy skills. As a result of this work, the Instructional Leadership Institute (ILI) was born.

The ILI—a three-year program funded through a partnership with NEA Education Policy & Practice—supports teaching and learning through college- and career-ready standards. Participants of the program learn how to incorporate equity into their instructional practice and engage other educators and community stakeholders in these efforts. To date, this program has graduated nearly 100 participants.

The NCAE hosts multiple professional learning opportunities for ILI participants to learn how to bring about change in their locals. In 2019, more than 20 program alumni took action in their communities, which included advocating for restorative practices to replace existing disciplinary policies.

In addition to advocating for policy changes, graduates are starting conversations with members of their community, and these conversations have had ripple effects. Here are just a few examples:

- ★ A discussion between an ILI alum and their colleague about the school-to-prison pipeline and research on the push-out of African American girls led the colleague to investigate organizing a club for African American girls that addresses push-out factors;
- ★ An ILI graduate presented on resilience training and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs); an administrator who attended the training used funding from a professional development award to then attend a resilience conference;
- ★ An ILI alum who organized 10-minute meetings on legislative updates has seen increased participation in Red4Ed Wednesdays; and
- ★ A conversation between an ILI graduate with a colleague about a bulletin board display led to the display being redesigned to incorporate greater diversity.

To provide additional learning opportunities, the NCAE continues to plan and implement leadership trainings that focus on lifting and amplifying educator voice and building equitable learning opportunities for all.



Photo Credit: NEA Education Policy & Practice

TRAINING ACTIVISTS IN EDUCATOR VOICE

OHIO

In partnership with the Ohio Education Association (OEA), NEA Education Policy & Practice facilitated a full-day Educator Voice Training of Activists for representatives from the OEA's Instructional and Professional Development Committee across Ohio's districts in October 2018.

Through this training, participants learned how to:

- ☆ Define educator voice and identify opportunities to empower educators to advocate for local policies and agreements that support a student-centered, pro-public-education agenda;
- ☆ Build capacity across OEA to promote member and stakeholder engagement in local implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA); and
- ☆ Use tools, such as the NEA Opportunity Checklist and NEA Opportunity Audit, to support engagement of local educators and stakeholders.

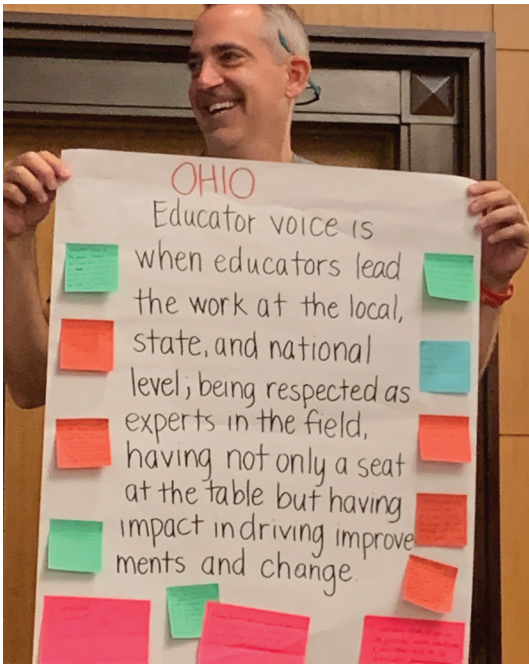


Photo Credit: NEA Education Policy & Practice

Participants also reviewed existing Opportunity Checklist data and created plans on how to encourage educators and community stakeholders to complete the checklist. This data is critical in understanding and addressing the needs of Ohio students.

Upon returning to their school communities, participants began to engage colleagues in conversations around equitable learning opportunities and how to use the Opportunity Checklist to advocate for student needs.

In a continued effort to amplify educator voices, members of the Ohio Education Association attended the NEA Educator Voice Academy, where they developed a plan to engage members in advocating for a more accurate state report card and opportunity indicators in their state ESSA plan.

TEACHING MEMBERS ABOUT THE POWER OF EDUCATOR VOICE

SOUTH CAROLINA

In October 2018, President Sherry East of the South Carolina Education Association (SCEA) invited NEA Education Policy & Practice to conduct a Training of Activists in Columbia, South Carolina. At this training, participants learned about South Carolina's state ESSA plan and how to identify opportunities for increased educator participation in critical decisions with regard to school improvement throughout the state.

Upon returning home, a member of the Beaufort Education Association took the initiative to track and weigh in on her own district's ESSA plan; she even led the charge to establish a committee with the superintendent's office to discuss and evaluate local ESSA implementation. This member has also been instrumental in identifying opportunities for association members and other stakeholders to weigh in on comprehensive support and improvement planning in her district. This is only one member's experience.

In summer 2019, a team from The SCEA attended the NEA Educator Voice Academy, where they had the opportunity to engage meaningfully and contribute to the decision-making process regarding essential components of education. The SCEA team decided to focus their attention on reducing unnecessary assessments and increasing parent and family engagement in education issues. They also had the opportunity to critically review their state ESSA plan and assess the effects of various provisions on students and schools.

The SCEA secured a big win in the 2020 legislative session: Through an Ed Reform bill, two state-mandated tests have been removed from the curriculum. The SCEA garnered strong member support for eliminating assessments not required by federal law. The Ed Reform bill is currently in holding; however, The SCEA anticipates the passage of the assessments provision as of the date of this writing.



Photo Credit: Sherry East



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EDUCATOR VOICE ACADEMIES

ENSURING KNOWLEDGE AND TOOLS FOR PROFESSIONAL AUTHORITY

Since the Every Student Succeeds Act was signed into law, much has changed in the landscape of public education and within affiliates of the National Education Association (NEA).

NEA Education Policy & Practice—in partnership with the NEA's Center for Organizing, Center for Social Justice, Center for Advocacy, Center for Great Public Schools, and Center for Governance—created the Educator Voice Academy, a learning opportunity for state and local affiliate leaders. This training helped new member leaders understand the opportunities within the Every Student Succeeds Act and the power of lifting and amplifying educator voice; it was also an opportunity to re-engage member leaders who have long been leading this important work.

State teams came together to participate, brainstorm, and create plans of action to continue this work in their local districts and states.



SUPPORTING TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES IN THE CLASSROOM

DELAWARE

Following the NEA Educator Voice Academy in summer 2019, members of the Delaware State Education Association (DSEA) who were in attendance identified three priorities around educator voice:

- ☆ Taking concrete steps to increase member understanding of opportunities within the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the Delaware state ESSA plan;
- ☆ Building and maintaining strong community partnerships; and
- ☆ Improving the collection and analysis of NEA Opportunity Checklist responses throughout the state and creating action plans around needs identified.

In addition to an information campaign to educate members on how to advocate for students and educators statewide, the DSEA had led the way in trauma-informed practices, social-emotional learning, and support for the mental health of students and educators. The state association has supported events including the Trauma Awareness Symposium and the Whole Child Support: Building a Community of Practice.

"OUR EDUCATORS KNOW FIRSTHAND THAT FACTORS OUTSIDE OF THE CLASSROOM IMPACT HOW THEIR STUDENTS LEARN INSIDE THE CLASSROOM."

In addition, the DSEA hosted an event—in collaboration with Delaware First Lady Tracey Quillin Carney—to announce the launch of a statewide partnership: Trauma-Informed Delaware, an effort that ensures the voices of leaders in trauma-informed practices are heard throughout the state. This partnership spanned the governor's office, the DSEA, the Delaware Department of Education, the Office of Child Advocacy, and Children and Families First.

"Our educators know firsthand that factors outside of the classroom impact how their students learn inside the classroom," said DSEA President Stephanie Ingram. "We have been hearing this for years. The creation of this statewide partnership and Trauma Awareness Month are important steps toward making Delaware trauma-informed. We are thankful to have the support of Governor Carney and Secretary Bunting in facing these challenges and helping our students find pathways to resilience."

COLLABORATING ACROSS THE STATE TO DRIVE ACTION

MARYLAND

Members of the Maryland State Education Association (MSEA) participated in the NEA Educator Voice Academy in summer 2019; this included member leaders from the Prince George's County Education Association and Teachers Association of Anne Arundel County as well as leadership from the Baltimore Teachers Union, an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers.

All three locals—Prince George's County, Anne Arundel County, and Baltimore—include sites that have been identified as both Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) and Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI) under the Every Student Succeeds Act.

Through collaborative work at the Educator Voice Academy, the team determined the top three action items that need to be addressed:

- ☆ The MSEA to consistently distribute pertinent data, timelines, and deadlines to local leaders tied to community schools;
- ☆ Local leaders to meet with superintendents or CEOs to collect CSI/TSI details and provide input that represents a collective educator voice; and
- ☆ All CSI/TSI schools to be assigned a union representative—if they don't already have one—and provide resources and training to empower that individual in their role.

Collectively, these MSEA member leaders decided to lead these efforts through instruction and professional development, strategic planning, and communications, addressing the lack of resources and leaning into community schools as an intervention.

The MSEA has also engaged its members in all 23 local education agencies through the Kirwan Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education, which was a multiyear initiative to research and develop major funding and policy reforms to ensure that Maryland's 790,000 public education students were equitably served. The MSEA's engagement ensured that educator voice was present in all its decision-making processes.

On March 16, 2020, the Kirwan Commission's Blueprint for Maryland's Future—legislation that will lead to expanding career and technical education, hiring more educators and increasing their pay, providing additional support to struggling learners, and creating lasting educational equity—was passed in the Maryland Senate by an overwhelming margin.



Photo Credit: GettyImages.com

ENGAGING LOCAL LEADERS AND STAKEHOLDERS IN ORGANIZING EFFORTS

TENNESSEE

The Tennessee Education Association (TEA) brought an enthusiastic team of more than a dozen members to the NEA Educator Voice Academy in summer 2019. They worked together to identify and prioritize issues in Tennessee schools, which included the need for increased per pupil funding and the elimination of high-stakes testing.

Throughout January 2020, the TEA traveled to five of the largest locals in the state to hold community conversations and engage local leaders in organizing efforts around educator voice. At present, more than 2,000 stakeholders have completed the NEA Opportunity Checklist since this summer training.

Over the next year, the state goal is to engage a variety of stakeholders, including members, in this work toward creating great public schools. Because of the current state of affairs, the TEA is conducting a survey of educators online to solicit input and organize around the issues identified in the midst of school closures. The state president and executive director have been actively involved at every stage of this process.



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PROMOTING EDUCATOR VOICE AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT TO IMPROVE VERMONT'S SCHOOLS

VERMONT

The Vermont-NEA (VT-NEA) is working to ensure that the voices of educators throughout the state are represented in the decision-making process. To accomplish this, the VT-NEA has solicited feedback at several meetings and events throughout the 2018–2019 school year, including fall district meetings that were attended by local leaders across the state, a spring summit on safe and compassionate schools, and the Educator Voice Academy—hosted by NEA Education Policy & Practice (EPP)—in Washington, DC, that took place during the summer of 2019.

Upon review of this feedback, the association identified the following issues as priority:

- ☆ A lack of resources to meet the social-emotional needs of students;
- ☆ A need for relevant and timely professional development in areas of restorative justice practices and other trauma-informed approaches; and
- ☆ The developmentally inappropriate standards in primary grades and overemphasis on testing.

Already in the outreach phase, the VT-NEA is working to address these issues through member participation and representation on school improvement teams in each local affiliate. The association has utilized the state ESSA plan one-pager that was initially created by EPP and further customized by the state association to emphasize the importance of educator voice in the school improvement process and to support this work moving forward. The one-pager has been distributed to all local leaders accompanied by a request to have all members complete the NEA Opportunity Checklist.

In addition to the checklist, the VT-NEA has promoted the use of other NEA tools and resources—including the Opportunity Audit, Advocating for Great Public Schools, ESSA Guidelines for Families, and the Family and Community Engagement Kit, among others—to help locals in their outreach and engagement efforts.

The VT-NEA has made great strides to highlight the importance of educator voice and promote community involvement to improve schools throughout the state. They plan to continue leading this work at both local and state levels.



Photo Credit: NEA Education Policy & Practice

DRIVING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TO ADDRESS ISSUES AND BENEFIT STUDENTS ACROSS THE STATE

MONTANA

In summer 2019, the Montana Federation of Public Employees (MFPE) explored opportunities to promote educator voice and learn about education equity at two convenings led by NEA Education Policy & Practice: the Educator Voice Academy and Leaders for Just Schools. Those who were chosen to attend these events were brought back together in January 2020 with other MFPE member leaders to discuss how they can use the knowledge gained to benefit students statewide.

Thirteen MFPE member leaders were in attendance at the Educator Voice Academy, which focused on the opportunities within the Every Student Succeeds Act and how participants can leverage it to promote educator voice in their schools. During this training, the MFPE team identified four issues that they would like to prioritize: the need for outreach and education for local affiliates that have been identified on the state improvement list; the need for tools to help members with civic engagement; issues related to early childhood education; and absenteeism.

At Leaders for Just Schools, 11 MFPE members deepened their understanding of education equity and how bias and oppression hinder the ability to achieve it. Members were able to bring what they learned back to their local and pay it forward, sharing their knowledge within the community, the district, and the state. For example, a member returned home to Great Falls, Montana, and decided to offer a training to her colleagues on a voluntary basis. Following a report by the American Civil Liberties Union that identified Montana for great disparities in school dropout and incarceration for students of color and students with disabilities, this training was recognized

as both timely and relevant. The district superintendent decided to adopt this training as a district initiative.

MFPE President Eric Feaver also acknowledges the importance of these trainings, noting they are opportunities to develop leaders who can provide professional development to educators across the state at Montana's annual educator conference. In a conversation between the president and member leaders, he praised the team and noted that they "are the best advocates around for urging other members—and even nonmembers—to attend." This conference brings educators throughout the state together to engage in member-led professional development in areas that include the curricula from both the Educator Voice Academy and Leaders for Just Schools.



Photo Credit: Eric Feaver



RAISING OUR VOICES: STORIES OF SUCCESS

LEADERS FOR JUST SCHOOLS

FOSTERING EQUITABLE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS FOR EVERY STUDENT

NEA Education Policy & Practice partnered with NEA Human and Civil Rights to create a learning opportunity to help member leaders broaden understanding, strengthen leadership competencies, and take action to improve learning conditions for all students.

Thanks to the generosity of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Leaders for Just Schools was born. This program was developed and led by six educators from across the country who were chosen by the National Education Association. This leadership team worked with partners at the Arizona K12 Center to create the first two years of the three-year curriculum.

Each year of the program expands on the previous year: Year 1 focuses on the impacts of self; Year 2 on other stakeholders, such as families and communities; and Year 3 on institutions, including schools, school districts, and unions in the spaces of education equity and racial and social justice.

Following the training, member leaders met with their state affiliate president to discuss their work and ensure it was in line with affiliate goals. Many have already begun implementing learning opportunities in their school communities in an effort to create more equitable and just environments for students.

EMPOWERING MEMBER LEADERS TO TAKE ACTION

IDAHO

Following the training, Leaders for Just Schools participants from Idaho came together in an effort to create opportunities—including professional development trainings and the establishment of equity committees—to push for equity in their schools throughout the state. In collaboration with the state affiliate, the state Human and Civil Rights Committee, and the University of Washington, members have successfully facilitated the Leaders for Just Schools curricula across the state.

Member Leona Alexander described the impact that this training had on her: “If I had to describe the Leaders for Just Schools training in one word, I would say ‘empowerment.’ It’s given me resources that are presentable to people new to this work, and it makes me feel empowered to help people understand why this work is so important.”

Providing members at the training with information about and access to NEA resources has helped those in Idaho to collect essential data to make district-wide policy changes. Based on the inequitable outcomes that one member demonstrated, school administration supported the creation of an equity committee at Livingston High School.

Another member proposed the addition of a district equity coach position and a district equity committee to administration in Boise. Administration has been receptive to these ideas: The equity committee—which has already been implemented—has begun work to make the district reading curriculum more diverse and culturally relevant, and the coach position is at the forefront of conversations to see how this might be implemented

in the future. These positive changes will go far to help create equitable learning environments for the approximately 26,000 students of Boise.

The momentum has been strong, and members from Idaho feel that they are making great strides in using collective educator voice to improve equity in their schools. As participants conduct trainings statewide, they continue to receive positive feedback; they look forward to continuing this work.



Photo Credit: Leona Alexander

BRINGING EQUITY TRAINING BACK TO THEIR LOCALS

ILLINOIS

Members of the Illinois Education Association (IEA) who participated in the Leaders for Just Schools training returned home with a plan of action. So far, they have created three cohorts of 25 members each; each cohort meets on a quarterly basis in three separate locations throughout northern Illinois, where they are taught the Leaders for Just Schools curriculum. Members of each cohort will go back to their local to implement and facilitate the training in their own communities.

The team of national cohort participants are leading a year-long training program that uses the Leaders for Just Schools curriculum. The team built their cohort using the Action Network tool and also created a course CANVAS page to help everyone stay connected. Additionally, the IEA members who attended the NEA Leaders for Just Schools training convened an Illinois Equity Meeting in fall 2019, brought together by IEA Vice President Al Llorens.

Participants are working with their school-based administrations around growing equity teams in their school communities and infusing the Leaders for Just Schools curriculum in moving the work of an equity team forward and are serving on their district's equity committees as well. Program participants also facilitated training from the Leaders for Just Schools curriculum at IEA's Ethnic Minority Leadership Conference in fall 2019, which included educators from four different NEA state affiliates.



Photo Credit: GettyImages.com

ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS TO PROMOTE EDUCATION EQUITY

IOWA

Iowa State Education Association (ISEA) member leaders who participated in the national cohort of Leaders for Just Schools shared their appreciation for open discussions on the topic of education equity. They were excited to see that the National Education Association (NEA) is taking the critical steps to address this issue through formal training, which has been requested by Iowa educators at the district level but not yet received.

As these member leaders returned home, they continued this work in their own communities. In fall 2019, they raised the NEA Opportunity Checklist as a priority at a school board forum hosted by a local affiliate; they were able to collect responses from those in attendance. As a follow-up to this meeting, all four recommended school board candidates were elected, shifting the board to 100 percent union-endorsed.

Throughout the state, member leaders are engaging in calls and virtual meetings to organize training opportunities that use the Leaders for Just Schools curriculum. These efforts are meant to provide learning opportunities for educators who teach at schools that are not yet involved in this work. Program participants shared the curriculum with state and local affiliate staff, leaders, and district administrators; training for local educators, including the local affiliate's multicultural committee, is already in progress. In addition, these ISEA member leaders have been engaging with state legislators to round out this work, discussing opportunities within the Every Student Succeeds Act and its potential impact on local and state policies, procedures, and legislation.



Photo Credit: GettyImages.com

INCREASING AWARENESS OF EDUCATION EQUITY

MAINE

Leaders for Just Schools participants have had great success in the state of Maine, creating opportunities to host workshops and share valuable information about education equity. Members of the Maine Education Association (MEA) have also presented on the topic at notable events, including the MEA's fall conferences, Maine's School Management fall conference, and Bates College's annual Martin Luther King, Jr., Day Celebration; presenting at local colleges, such as Bates, has helped the association extend their reach and build relationships with other educators in the state.

MEA members have also conducted training sessions in various districts, such as Lewiston Public Schools, where the presentation was weaved into their Winter Professional Development Day.

Attending Leaders for Just Schools has been a gamechanger for those in Maine. MEA members have continued this work in the state and locals through presentations and trainings, conversations with fellow educators, and their efforts in spaces such as social-emotional learning and restorative practices.

Member Highlights

A member of the MEA has been appointed to her local's new social-emotional learning team, which is planned to launch in the fall of the 2020–2021 school year. This new team will address needs in an effort to increase academic success and prevent and reduce behaviors and patterns that are not in the best interest of students and educators. In this role, she will help introduce practices that will benefit students who are sometimes the furthest from opportunity.

Another MEA member has also been doing work around social-emotional learning in his role as a restorative practices coordinator. His work in restorative practices has been beneficial to the district and has been life-changing for his students; for example, understanding how suspending students of color has a lasting effect on those young people's lives.



Photo Credit: GettyImages.com



ADDRESSING RACE AND EQUITY ISSUES TO CLOSE OPPORTUNITY GAPS

MARYLAND

Though Maryland has always had large numbers of students of color and diversity, conversations around race and equity issues have not always been at the forefront of districts in the state. In just recent years, these issues have become a priority, with many educators stepping up to the plate to do the work required to create more equitable spaces in schools.

Upon returning from the Leaders for Just Schools training, members of the Maryland State Education Association (MSEA) created an educator plan that included an “increased focus on equity of opportunities to learn” in an effort to close opportunity gaps. Under federal law, state accountability plans must now incorporate both academic indicators as well as school quality indicators; for example, supportive school climates.

MSEA MEMBERS HAVE USED THE LEADERS FOR JUST SCHOOLS EXPERIENCE TO CREATE AND IMPLEMENT EQUITY TRAINING THAT IS ACCESSIBLE THROUGHOUT THE STATE.

Leaders for Just Schools participants from Maryland have embarked on various projects in their home state: they were awarded a Uniserve grant to continue the work of racial equity within Maryland; they have led successful Zoom trainings on education equity issues for several schools; they helped organize and promote the inaugural Racial and Social Justice Conference; and, in collaboration with the Teachers Association of Baltimore County (TABCO), they helped organize the first Black Lives Matter Week in Baltimore.

MSEA members have used the Leaders for Just Schools experience to create and implement equity training that is accessible throughout the state. The focus over the last year has been providing sufficient training and professional development, including workshops on equity and restorative practices, the creation of local equity committees to examine discipline and restorative practices, and training sessions on how to create equitable classrooms at the annual Teach Maryland conference.

Leaders for Just Schools participants in Maryland plan to increase awareness around the NEA Opportunity Checklist, encouraging all stakeholders to respond, and create coalitions to truly address the opportunity gaps present in many schools within the state today. They hope their continued work will reflect their commitment to creating spaces for ideal school climates.

COLLABORATING WITH A NATIONWIDE NETWORK

NEW HAMPSHIRE

NEA-NH members left the Leaders for Just Schools training feeling energized to return to New Hampshire and begin the work that can have positive impacts on educators, students, and families alike. Participants from New Hampshire have not only collaborated and worked with other participants within their state, but they have also consistently worked and collaborated with participants throughout the country, forming bonds with fellow educators who are also invested in this work. To continue their efforts, NEA-NH members have used strategies informed by the Leaders for Just Schools training to begin the necessary work to improve school environments for their students and create equitable school environments throughout the state.

The Leaders for Just Schools network that spans the country has helped participants from New Hampshire determine how to properly respond to changes in demographics within the state. NEA-NH members have delivered workshops and presentations on education equity that were based on the Leaders for Just Schools curriculum; this has led members to serve on local human and civil rights committees and hold various leadership positions in their schools, districts, and associations.

One NEA-NH member has been awarded a yearlong sabbatical from the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation to further promote the work of Leaders for Just Schools. Recipients of the award are required to design a project that will enhance classroom teaching; this member used the Leaders for Just Schools curriculum to design her project.

NEA-NH members have embraced this work, and they continue to promote the importance of and implement racial and social justice training opportunities throughout the state.



Photo Credit: GettyImages.com

CREATING MORE WELCOMING LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS FOR STUDENTS AND PARENTS

NEW JERSEY

In New Jersey, Leaders for Just Schools participants are already seeing the positive impact of this equity training program in their schools and districts; improvements include increased attendance and academic success, particularly in students of color.

The New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) team who attended the training discovered that there were many small changes they can easily implement in their schools to create more welcoming learning environments for parents and students. For example, creating a welcoming front office and leaning in to work with parent teacher organizations. One member noted, "The PTO has been a crucial element to our community-building."



Photo Credit: GettyImages.com

At one New Jersey school, teachers have introduced a program called Mindful Mondays, which is a restorative practice in which students are able to develop compassion, focus, and resilience; this has noticeably benefited both students and teachers. NJEA members have also offered Restorative Justice Circle training in an effort to bring staff and students together to build a stronger community within New Jersey schools.

Local leadership is acknowledging this work too. Recognizing the impact this training has already had on students spurred one school to send its school counselor to a training at the New Jersey Learning Assessments Resource Center to speak about the relationship between racial and social justice and testing in New Jersey. This is an opportunity that benefits not only one school but also other schools throughout the district.

Other opportunities to demonstrate the impact of Leaders for Just Schools in New Jersey include:

- ☆ More schools celebrating and promoting Black History Month events;
- ☆ School librarians introducing multicultural activities and a diverse selection of books and authors;
- ☆ Staff training on positive behavioral supports and bullying prevention; and
- ☆ Bilingual resources for families and members of the community.

The NJEA doesn't plan to slow down either. They are dedicated to not only creating safe and respectful learning environments for all educators and students, but also continuing their work to create just and equitable schools for every public school student in New Jersey.

BUILDING INCLUSIVE LEARNING SPACES

NORTH CAROLINA

Members of the North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE) who attended Leaders for Just Schools have embraced the curriculum, seeing it as a learning opportunity that can have major impacts on school communities across the state. Participants are using their newfound knowledge to affect change in their learning spaces through various efforts, including engagement of early career educators through NCAE conferences and the establishment of school-based organizations, such as Males of Color and Color Me Pretty—a group for young women in the North Carolina foothills.

Several member leaders have worked directly with their school and district administrators to create professional development opportunities for fellow educators; using the program curriculum, they have hosted trainings, information sessions, and book studies in their school communities, and they even presented at NCAE's Educators of Color conferences.

In December 2019, the DRIVE (Developing a Representative and Inclusive Vision for Education) Summit was held at UNC Asheville. Hosted by the Office of the Governor, the North Carolina Business Committee for Education, and the Hunt Institute, this event brought a variety of stakeholders together, including policy-makers, school district leaders, educators, superintendents, and other resource experts to engage in critical conversations that addressed the need to increase racial and ethnic diversity in the workforce. One member leader was able to share out how the Leaders for Just Schools program has potential to play an integral role in bridging the gap through future training opportunities that will positively impact educators and students in the classroom.



Photo Credit: North Carolina Association of Educators

EXPANDING EQUITY TRAINING ACROSS THE STATE

WISCONSIN

Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC) members who participated in Leaders for Just Schools left the training ready to begin equity work. Upon returning to their affiliate and local communities, they identified opportunities to pass what they had learned to their fellow educators.

To kick off this process, these member leaders met with site-based administrators to share the curriculum and discuss how they could lead professional development at their own school sites. Training began in fall 2019. So far, they have used the curriculum to present at WEAC's Summer Leadership Academy, Board of Director meetings, and the WEAC Professional Issues Conference.



Photo Credit: NEA Education Policy & Practice

The WEAC has collaborated directly with national participants to grow a state-based cohort of educators who are currently moving through the curriculum with the goal of expanding equity training across the state of Wisconsin. Those who participated were eager to continue this work. They have already met to discuss challenges, barriers, and ways to continue their efforts as part of a professional learning community.

National cohort participants are also making an impact on the local level, working to create local coalitions for public education. One such effort took place in Racine, and it has been instrumental in engaging community members around equity work. They have made noticeable progress helping families and communities understand the opportunities that are available within the Every Student Succeeds Act.



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