

something better

MISSOURI NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION | FALL 2023



2024 Missouri Teacher of the Year Greg Kester

Democracy
through ballot
measures

Legislative
preview

Advice for
Blue Ribbon
Commission



A year of growth and progress

BY PHIL MURRAY, MNEA PRESIDENT

This past year has been a monumental one for Missouri NEA. Meramec Valley NEA, Kirkwood NEA and Northwest NEA have made significant strides, earning recognition as the exclusive representatives in

their respective districts. This achievement underscores the strength of our collective voice and the trust our communities place in us.

2023 marked MNEA's 50th anniversary, a milestone that has given us the opportunity to reflect, celebrate and look forward. We remain the largest public sector union in Missouri, a testament to our ongoing commitment to educators and the importance of our work.

We've seen encouraging membership growth this year, a clear sign that our mission resonates with more educators every day. We are thrilled to welcome and represent these new members as we all work together to advance public education in Missouri.

We are pleased to announce that Dr. Patrick Layden has joined our leadership team as MNEA's new executive director. His expertise and dedication will undoubtedly drive our mission forward.

Our MNEA Board of Directors continually strives to innovate and examine how we can best advocate for our members and students. Our effort to reimagine the MNEA Representative Assembly to create a more dynamic event is one such initiative. This reimaged event will not only involve crucial decision making but will also include opportunities for learning and leadership development.

Looking ahead, we're excited to announce the MNEA Collective Bargaining Conference will be an annual event. This training opportunity is aimed at locals that are actively involved in collective bargaining on behalf of their members, as well as those locals that are interested in doing so in the future. This conference will offer focused training for beginners and advanced-tactics training and resources for those who have been bargaining for a while. We see this as a crucial step in empowering our locals to negotiate effectively on behalf of their members.

As we move forward, we remain committed to making our union more inclusive, innovative and agile. Our goal is to continue being the preeminent advocate for educators, always seeking ways to better serve our members and the students they teach.

In the words of Ryunosuke Satoro, "Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean." As we reflect on our achievements and look forward to our future, we are reminded that our strength lies in our unity. Let us continue to grow, innovate and advocate together to ensure the best possible future for public education in Missouri. ❖

something better

Fall 2023
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Something better is possible in Missouri—something better for teachers, for parents and, most importantly, for students.

President	Phil Murray
Vice President	Rebeka McIntosh
NEA Directors	Andy Slaughter Dennis Tabb (At-Large)
Executive Director	Patrick Layden
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on the cover

Teacher of the Year

Social studies teacher Greg Kester, Potosi NEA, is the 2024 Missouri Teacher of the Year. Learn more about Kester and what keeps him motivated on page 2.

Photos by Mark Jones, MNEA Communications Director

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Learn what drives Teacher of the Year Greg Kester

BY MARK JONES, MNEA COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

At 7 a.m. high school social studies teacher and Potosi NEA member Greg Kester meets with a small group of students in his classroom on the second floor of Potosi High School.

Students and Kester, 2024 Missouri Teacher of the Year, huddle around a single laptop as one of them pages through a draft of an essay that one of the students plans to submit for a scholarship competition. Instead of suggesting edits, Kester asks the students questions: “Why was this an obstacle?” “How can you help the reader understand your perspective?” The students continue to work even as Kester pulls himself away and heads to his post in the school’s main hallway before the day’s first class begins.

The bustle of students increases as the first bell approaches. Students from Kester’s psychology class stop to talk to him about the previous day’s assignment about the psychology of hypnosis. “I talked to my mom about it all night,” one student says with enthusiasm.

Kester comes alive during these student exchanges.

“Relationships are my greatest accomplishments as an educator,” Kester says. “I would gladly give back all of the accolades and awards I have won if I had to choose between them or the connection I have with my present and former students.”

“Who here has the best British accent?” Kester asks his first period history class, which is studying the end of the American Revolutionary War. In less than a minute, the class agrees one student’s accent is clearly superior. The student then reads aloud from a primary source document detailing British Prime Minister

Frederick North’s reaction, “Oh God! It’s all over!” upon learning of the British Army’s surrender at Yorktown.

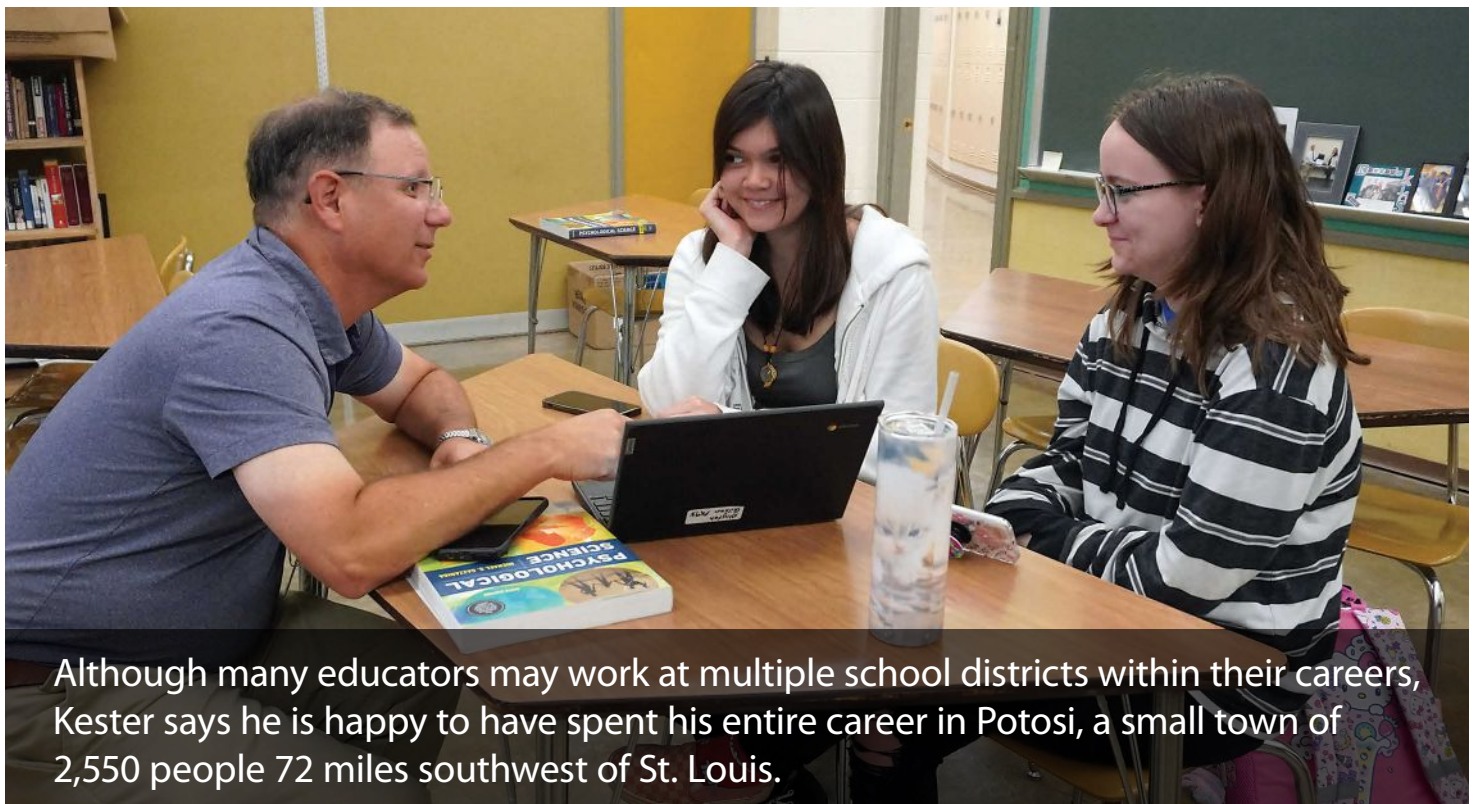
Although many educators may work at multiple school districts within their careers, Kester says he is happy to have spent his entire career in Potosi, a small town of 2,550 people 72 miles southwest of St. Louis.

“In August 1995, I was at home, and the phone rang,” he says. “It was the Potosi school district, about two hours away from where I was living, and I drove all the way up here, and I managed not to get lost. That was the time before Google Maps. I really felt like I had the worst job interview ever in the history of job interviews. But everything just clicked. You go where you’re called in life, and this is where I’ve been called to be.”

In the following interview, Kester reflects on his career and the teaching profession.

Was there one special educator who made a difference in your life?

Yes. Her name is Donna Thomas, and I have not seen her in a long time. She was an incredible and vibrant high school educator who was tremendously gifted. She could take a group of freshmen and make Shakespeare meaningful and interesting to them. I’ve had exceptional instructors throughout my whole life, individuals who are great human beings, role models, and highly respected, particularly in social studies, language arts, sciences, and foreign language.



Although many educators may work at multiple school districts within their careers, Kester says he is happy to have spent his entire career in Potosi, a small town of 2,550 people 72 miles southwest of St. Louis.

“Relationships are my greatest accomplishments as an educator,” Kester says. “I would gladly give back all of the accolades and awards I have won if I had to choose between them or the connection I have with my present and former students.”

They significantly impacted me. As young men getting ready to graduate high school, we thought about all the career choices. There was a lot of money that could be made in various fields. I remember having a friend whose mother was an English teacher. He questioned the financial viability of being a teacher. Now, I’m not wealthy and receive a paycheck that’s supposed to last a month, but it’s gone in about two weeks. I don’t have a lot of financial resources, but I feel very wealthy as a human being, filled with warmth, relationships, and people I’ve gotten to know over 29 years, and young people I’m getting to know now. Maybe in 15 or 20 years, if not sooner, I’ll encounter them again. It’s a different measure of success, which might not appeal to everyone. But when you have an opportunity to look at your favorite piece of sculpture, mine being by Michelangelo, and share how that piece of sculpture creates an emotional reaction within you and another viewer, and they have a similar or a completely different reaction, you realize that such experiences can’t be monetized.

How have you managed to maintain the passion and energy for teaching throughout your career?

I’ve often said that I teach for free. They pay me for restroom duty, bus duty and attending meetings. However, when I get with a group of young people and share things that I enjoy or am excited about, and they get excited, or they’re at least interested, or they’re sharing with me how it relates to their lives, I would do that part for free. I wouldn’t want this to reach the administrators, but if it did, they might feel like they don’t even need to give me a contract anymore. I get physically tired because I wake up every morning at 4:45 a.m., and sometimes I’m here for 14 or 15 hours a day. But the best part of the day is being in the room with kids I genuinely care about and want to help succeed.

How do you help students engage with their community and world outside the classroom?

There are many moments where you see a young person and someone many years older than they are come together, creating a relationship and building knowledge that binds them. You then see a deep, impactful relationship, often characterized by appreciation for our veterans and, in our young people, a newfound awareness that there are bigger things in life to be part of and experience.

When teaching history, if you can make the subject come alive, it becomes much more impactful. There are many things like that. For instance, I’ve taken students to the Holocaust Museum in St. Louis, and we met Holocaust survivors. These are very profound, impactful moments in a young person’s life.

I try to find a connection between the people I have in front of me and historical figures. For example, Pres. Truman was from Lamar, which is a small, very rural community. He moved to Independence, which was a much smaller community than it is now. His parents weren’t particularly highly educated but worked hard. Truman grew up working on the farm and didn’t have the money to go to law school. He served his country, came back and worked



“All my interactions with the Missouri NEA have been positive,” says 2024 Teacher of the Year Greg Kester. “They take things seriously, they are there to help, and they give it 100%. They strive to do what’s best for the teachers who are part of the organization and care about the well-being of students across the state. I believe their efforts are light years beyond other organizations a new teacher might join. I think it’s important to have national representation. When the policymakers in Washington D.C. come up with the next big idea to improve education, you’re going to want someone who can represent views from educators across the United States.”

really hard. But sometimes people work really hard, and they don’t end up being successful financially. Many of my students can relate to that because their parents are working two or three jobs, and they still don’t have enough. Sometimes circumstances get away from you, but, as my mom always encouraged, you don’t quit. You keep working. You keep trying, and if something doesn’t work, you can always try something else. When we think of a historical figure, we might imagine they lived a charmed life—but not necessarily. Many people face adversity. I’m constantly trying to encourage those kids to take their obstacles and try to surmount them because greatness lies in achieving things despite the obstacles.

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Navigating legislative session 2024

BY OTTO FAJEN, MNEA LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

Education topics occupied a central focus during the 2023 legislative session. However, every priority bill became a hostage to another priority bill, and legislators approved few new education policies. The legislature appears poised to pick up where it left off with renewed attention to education topics in the 2024 session.

In the waning weeks of the 2023 session, the Senate focused on creating an omnibus education bill that addressed three main topics: restoring local control of schools, expanding school choice, and increasing funding for schools.

The House approved bills addressing school choice and funding and voted a local control bill out of committee. Both chambers are expected to return to work on a similar omnibus package addressing those three topics.

Restoring local control of schools

The legislature will continue to work on positive bills seeking to reduce the negative effects of the misuse and overuse of standardized testing. Examples from 2023 include House Bill 49 and Senate Bill 85. Both bills contained related provisions to address this issue, and both bills were voted out of committee with strong committee support. Missouri NEA supported both bills throughout the session. This issue will be a key factor in education discussions in the next session.

Expanding school choice

Bills to create public school open enrollment and expand tax-credit vouchers and charter schools will be priorities again in the 2024 session.

MNEA leaders believe that public school choice plans with state funding may harm students and public schools unless essential criteria are in place for implementing, monitoring and evaluating their effectiveness. Public school open enrollment is now a common state policy, although the details vary widely among all the programs. However, the overall experience in many states has been that interdistrict choice tends to increase racial, ethnic and socioeconomic segregation of school communities. MNEA will oppose open enrollment bills that lack essential criteria regarding program implementation and operation.

The legislature passed a tax-credit voucher in 2021. Numerous bills will be filed to create or expand tax-credit vouchers and other schemes to move public money to private schools that are not subject to the same standards of accountability, transparency, and respect for the rights of students, staff and parents as apply to public schools. MNEA will continue to oppose these bills.

Meanwhile, charter expansion advocates will seek to expand the portion of the state where they can create and impose charter schools without local school board approval. MNEA leaders believe that local school boards should sponsor charter schools and that



Members play a critical role every year in educating legislators about what students and educators need in Missouri's public schools. Check out this year's legislative advocacy events at mnea.org/edadvocates.

those schools should be accountable to the local community through the elected school board and approved only after school district administrators conduct an impact study to consider the proposal.

Funding increases for K-12 and higher education

The most significant legislation that passed in 2023 was the state budget. The legislature took advantage of unprecedented state revenues and balances and made significant increases in education funding this session. However, the legislature has enacted many tax cuts, some of which have yet to take effect. These cuts will reduce the fiscal capacity of the state in the coming years and will affect the budget process and school funding.

The school funding formula has been nearly flat for many years and is not keeping up with the cost of education. In 2023, the House approved several provisions seeking to increase the base formula funding amount in future years, but the bills did not pass. Meanwhile, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has revised the Missouri School Improvement Program. The new version, MSIP 6, will raise the base formula funding level (State Adequacy Target) by changing the “performance districts” identified to set this funding level. Even absent legislation, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education estimates that the cost of full formula funding will grow by more than \$400 million over the next two years.

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New education laws as of Aug. 28

Although many education provisions failed to pass in 2023, important provisions were enacted in two areas: school employee retirement and tax reductions for seniors.

School employee retirement provisions

The following school retirement changes were enacted last session (S.B. 20 and S.B. 75) and went into effect Aug. 28, 2023.

1. Restoration of the 2.55% benefit factor for 32 or more years of Public School Retirement System service credit for people retiring on or after the effective date.
2. Increase of the earnings limit for PSRS retirees working part time in Public Education Employee Retirement System positions to 133% of the Social Security earnings limit (currently amounting to \$28,249) for the next five years and then 100% of the earnings limit (currently \$21,240) thereafter. In practice, this provision will be available for this school year since retirees will not have exceeded the existing \$15,000 earnings limit before the higher limit took effect Aug. 28.
3. Extension of the critical-shortage employment option from two years to four years and an increase in the allowed number of critical shortage teaching positions in a district to the greater of five or one percent of the total number of teaching and non-certified staff positions in the district. PSRS implementation allows existing critical-shortage staff to use the extended authorization for this school year if needed.
4. Preservation of the PSRS-eligible status for speech implementers employed before Aug. 1, 2022, who are employed on or after Aug. 28, as a speech-language pathology assistant.
5. Institution of a same-sex domestic partner pop-up provision for retirees with similar documentation requirements to the divorce pop-up provision in current law.

MNEA supported the enactment of these improvements to the Missouri public school retirement systems.

Reduction of retirement income taxes

S.B. 190 went into effect Aug. 28 and increases the eligibility for deduction of certain Social Security income and retirement income, including PSRS and PEERS pension income, by removing the income limitations on this deduction. Public pension income in Missouri, including PSRS and PEERS pensions, that does not exceed the maximum allowed amount (currently \$36,976), will be exempt from state income tax without an income or filing status restriction on eligibility.

Homestead property taxes

S.B. 190 also allows a county to grant a homestead property tax credit to Social Security-eligible homeowners residing in the county. The credit will be the increase in homestead property tax liability from the year the taxpayer became eligible. The language has been interpreted to eliminate future increases in school property tax liability for those taxpayers affected. The actual impact on school revenues is difficult to assess, but districts in affected counties are likely to see reductions in future revenue increases.

Defending democracy through Missouri's ballot-measure process

BY ELIZABETH ZERR, MNEA POLITICAL DIRECTOR

Ballot measures serve as powerful tools for taking issues directly to the voters. Many of these ballot measures have led to significant victories for public school students, their families and educators. In today's climate of political polarization, voters still unite around common values and priorities. In Missouri and several other states across the nation, when the state legislature fails to act on these shared values, citizens have the invaluable opportunity to circumvent bureaucratic roadblocks and wield their collective voice through statewide ballot measures. In Missouri, this tradition of direct democracy is under attack.

For well over a century, Missourians have held the right to propose new laws and confront critical issues head on with the state's voters. This cornerstone of Missouri's civic process emerged during an era when political machines run by party bosses influenced already corrupt, weak legislatures. Its proponents envisioned a mechanism where individual voters could counteract the pervasive influence of greedy corporations, entrenched political machines, and corrupted legislatures. In the 1920s, two separate ballot measures allocated funding and bonding for the state's burgeoning highway systems. Between the years 1910 and 2022, Missouri voters saw 95 ballot initiatives, with 43 successfully enacted and 52 falling short. Missouri's current ballot measure process encounters multiple levels of scrutiny from multiple elected officials and requires hundreds of thousands of signatures before a measure is placed on the ballot. Groups across the political spectrum have used the process for more than a century to give voters a direct voice in their democracy and help direct the legislature.

At the national level, voters have approved countless measures to uplift students and families. In 2020, Arizona voters

resoundingly passed Proposition 208, a groundbreaking ballot measure that reinstated nearly \$1 billion in funding for K-12 schools. Across the country, Massachusetts enacted a constitutional amendment that not only made its tax system more fair but also increased annual state funding for education and transportation by nearly \$2 billion. In the wake of voters using direct democracy to pass laws based on common priorities and values, however, state legislatures across the country are trying to cap voters' influence.

Missouri is no different. Following the passage of ballot measures including minimum wage increases and Medicaid expansion, the Missouri legislature launched an aggressive assault on the ballot-measure process in an attempt to rewrite the rules. Over the past several years, members of MNEA have joined forces with other advocacy groups to protect the enduring tradition of direct democracy through ballot initiatives in Missouri. During the most recent legislative session, extremist politicians put forth more than 25 pieces of legislation designed to raise the bar for passing citizen-initiated ballot measures in Missouri. On the session's final day, the proposed bill failed to make its way to the governor's desk.

"As MNEA leaders look ahead to the upcoming legislative session, they must remain steadfast in their commitment to keeping members well-informed as they work to preserve direct democracy," says MNEA Pres. Phil Murray.

MNEA members can join others at Capitol Action Days and participate in local meetings where, together, they can advocate for every citizen's right to influence the democratic process. By safeguarding the institution of direct democracy, members ensure that the voices of citizens continue to echo through the ballot box and shape the future. ❖



Pattonville leader Alex Buerck and NEA Director Andy Slaughter (left) and MNEA Vice Pres. Rebeka McIntosh and UniServ Director Alice Floros (right) canvas for Sen. Tracy McCreery in St. Louis County.

Political battles ahead

BY ELIZABETH ZERR, MNEA POLITICAL DIRECTOR

In a world where the future for students, members and colleagues hangs in the balance of political decisions, it is time to flex the political muscle of the largest union in the state. It's time to rid our schools of east-coast think tanks, extreme politicians, and media pundits who seek to divide communities rather than prepare students for their future—a future of promise, possibility and belonging. The path to achieving Missouri NEA's vision begins with a wholehearted investment in elections and voluntary member contributions to MNEA's Political Action Committee.

Understanding PAC

PACs are a powerful tool for members to collectively channel their voices and resources to support policies and candidates who prioritize public education and the 91% of Missouri students who attend public schools. All MNEA PAC contributions remain within the state. Half of each contribution is focused on support for school board candidates, bonds and levies.

The elected MNEA PAC board recommends candidates and allocates campaign investments following thorough candidate screenings. These screening committees recommend individuals whose values align with MNEA's principles and resolutions, which include protecting the rights of students and teachers; ensuring every student is surrounded by caring, qualified educators; and investing in public education to ensure every student has the resources they need to pursue their dreams. Because MNEA members are Democrats, Republicans and Independents, united by the goal of improving the daily lives of members and the students, MNEA PAC endorsements are not linked to party affiliation.

For years, educators across the nation have been bombarded with the notion that political activity is to be avoided. This narrative has been perpetuated by organizations and individuals who, ironically, benefit from keeping teachers and their voices out of campaigns, elections, and local, state, and federal government. These interests, while discouraging educators from engaging in politics, are more than willing to insert themselves into your classrooms, schools, and even your paychecks. Last election cycle, organizations looking to siphon resources away from students

“As the largest union in the Missouri, MNEA members cannot afford to be passive bystanders in the political process,” says MNEA Pres. Phil Murray. “Instead, they must embrace the power of political involvement as a means to effect positive change in our schools and communities.... It’s time to invest in our students’ future by investing in our own political power.”

in neighborhood public schools spent more than \$3 million in Missouri to influence the outcome of state legislative campaigns.

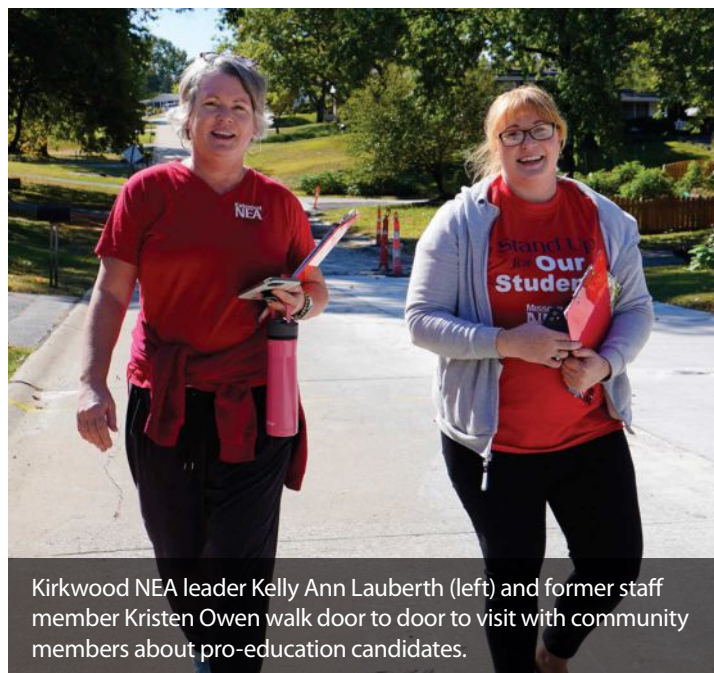
The growing need for political engagement

“Missouri’s laws regarding public education are at a crossroads,” says MNEA Legislative Director Otto Fajen. “In 2017, 21 of 34 senators favored funding public education over unaccountable charters or voucher programs. Now, only half of the Missouri Senate supports public education, and only 11 of the 34 senators support public sector unions.”

With members giving \$20 a year to MNEA PAC or volunteering time working with MNEA-endorsed candidates and MNEA PAC, they can help build a Missouri House and Senate that supports public education and students.

The significance of giving to PAC extends beyond partisan politics. It transcends party lines and ideology. What it represents is a commitment to the future of education in Missouri. It’s a statement that educators refuse to let outside interests dictate the course of their classrooms and schools. Instead, educators take responsibility for shaping the educational landscape that students deserve.

“As the largest union in the Missouri, MNEA members cannot afford to be passive bystanders in the political process,” says MNEA Pres. Phil Murray. “Instead, they must embrace the power of political involvement as a means to effect positive change in our schools and communities. By doing so, we can combat the influence of out-of-state interest groups, extreme politicians, and media pundits, and champion a future where every student and educator has the opportunity to thrive, achieve and belong. It’s time to invest in our students’ future by investing in our own political power.” ❖



Kirkwood NEA leader Kelly Ann Lauberth (left) and former staff member Kristen Owen walk door to door to visit with community members about pro-education candidates.

MNEA locals bring energy, excitement back to school

STORY AND PHOTOS BY MARK JONES, MNEA COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

Earlier this fall Missouri NEA locals held back-to-school events across Missouri as neighborhood schools welcomed teachers and students back for a new school year. MNEA Pres. Phil Murray and Vice Pres. Rebeka McIntosh crossed the state to introduce themselves to members and support local affiliates.

“From Hazelwood to North Kansas City, educators have been excited to see their students and colleagues,” Murray says. “I always feel a sense of excitement for a new school year as I attend these, and I think most educators share the sentiment.”

Back-to-school events allow local affiliates to welcome MNEA members back and inform newly hired educators about the benefits of MNEA membership and the local affiliate’s advocacy efforts.

“North Kansas City NEA, the exclusive representative for teachers in the North Kansas City School District, uses back-to-school events to explain NKC NEA’s role to new hires.

“Back to school events are a chance for the union to welcome new educators and staff to the district,” says Amanda Bearden, North Kansas City NEA president. “It’s important for us to introduce ourselves to educators who may be unfamiliar with the role of an exclusive representative in bargaining. The event also provides an opportunity to answer questions and recruit new members to the union.”

Local leaders tailor back-to-school events for their respective districts and often combine fun contests, MNEA-branded school supplies, and lunch with important information for educators.

After attending numerous events, McIntosh observed that every local contributes passion and innovation to its gatherings. Interacting with educators just starting out and bonding with seasoned members fosters a sense of unity and excitement for the upcoming year.

Local leaders detected an increased interest among members and potential members toward MNEA.

“For many educators, the back-to-school events are the first introduction to MNEA where they can ask questions and learn how educators working together can support students and colleagues,” McIntosh says. “As always, we saw a lot of interest from new hires and veteran educators about how MNEA advocates for educators, students, and local public schools.”

“Traveling around Missouri and meeting our educators is one of the best parts of my job,” Murray says. “It’s all about showing them how MNEA can help and seeing the amazing things our members do every day.”

MNEA offers assistance in planning local events, materials to help expand association visibility and opportunities to bring in MNEA state leaders as guest speakers. Get started toward upping your game at your next event by contacting your UniServ director or Roxane Bly at roxane.bly@mnea.org or (573) 644-9606. ❖



Always full of energy and hope for a new academic year, educators gather at district events each fall to kick off the beginning of everyone returning to schools. Here, Park Hill NEA members visit with new educators about how the local union supports members and students each year.



Fort Zumalt E.A.



Hickman Mills NEA



North Kansas City NEA



Odessa NEA



Raytown NEA



Troy NEA

MNEA advises Missouri Blue Ribbon Commission

BY SAMANTHA HAYES, DIRECTOR OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

In June 2022, the Missouri State Board of Education tasked its Blue Ribbon Commission to focus on teacher recruitment and retention in the state of Missouri. The commission's primary charge was to research current teacher recruitment and retention, make recommendations to solve challenges, and summarize action steps and measurable strategies for the legislature and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as they shape law and policy.

The commission's work fell into two phases. The first focused on teacher pay, and the second, which is the current phase, focuses on culture and climate for teachers. The first phase produced a list of immediate, short-, and long-term priorities to address teacher pay. The commission presented these priorities to the State Board of Education in October 2022 and presented them to Missouri legislators at the beginning of the 2023 legislative session. Phase two, which started in April 2023, comprises four commission sessions: two two-hour Zoom sessions and two eight-hour in-person sessions, before the group presented another set of recommendations, specifically focused on culture and climate in schools, to the State Board of Education in August 2023.

MNEA, present at each of these virtual and in-person meetings, provided resources to members of the commission when appropriate. MNEA leaders' primary concern regarding the BRC lies in the makeup of the members on the commission and the lack of teacher voices present at a decision-making table for a challenge that primarily affects Missouri educators. Work on the commission is for educators, not with educators—an age-old problem in the sphere of education. The commission comprises 22 members: five to 10 business leaders, four legislators, three state board members,

one governor's staff member, one DESE staff member, two educators and one school leader.

With phase two focused on culture and climate for teachers, MNEA leaders believe that the BRC must hear educator voices—especially since the commission would not include the teachers they are trying to help in the decisions being made. After the April 4, 2023, virtual BRC meeting, the next step was for the BRC to seek practitioner input via panels at the May 19 meeting. This was the time when MNEA staff found the opportunity to bring more teacher input to the commission.

With the goal to bring more teacher voices to the table, MNEA staff created a survey, distributed it during the Spring Representative Assembly, collected responses until May 5, and created a report to deliver to the BRC on the week of May 19.

BRC recommendations to the State Board of Education

BRC Chairperson Mark Walker presented the BRC recommendations to the State Board of Education in August 2023. The final recommendations are as follows:

- **Immediate classroom support:** Redesign the Culture and Climate Survey of MSIP 6 to be a Working Condition Survey and create a recommendation that addresses the training and funding of the implementation of the Social Emotional Learning component of the Missouri Learning Standards.
- **Evidence-based models for reorganizing schools:** Create awareness of the susceptibilities of this model and protection against pay-for-performance strategies that weaken student achievement and public education as a whole.

State and district levers

The following data reflects practitioner perspectives on the current state and district levers that are in place to determine culture and climate.

State levers

Which of the following existing levers would HELP culture and climate in your school building/district?

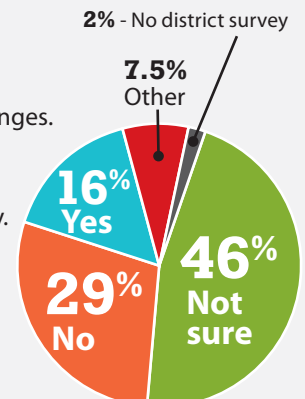
- 88%** Not sure how any of these options would help culture and climate at our district/school
- 65%** Recruitment and retention grants
- 60%** Funding to districts that include requirements for measuring/improving school climate and culture
- 45%** Changing policy in Missouri statute, regulations and DESE protocols
- 30%** Grow Your Own programs

District levers

Is the culture and climate survey that your district distributes to all stakeholders helpful?

Themes from other responses

- **Lack of change**
Data should drive decisions about changes.
- **Lack of trust**
Fear of retaliation may cause employees not to take survey seriously.
- **Skewed results**
Results may not be accurate because only angry people may take time to complete survey.



- **Master teaching certificate:** Support teachers involved in leadership opportunities that allow them to be situated at decision-making tables.
- **School and district leadership:** Support the investment in the Missouri Leadership Development System and support attention to diversity in hiring administrators.

Overall, the recommendations from phase two of the BRC held a mix of agreement, promise, cautions, and room for improvement. None of the recommendations gave true relief or support for teachers in the near future. MNEA's response to these recommendations is grounded in evidence from practitioner input data from April 2023, best-practice research, and collaboration with NEA state affiliates from the models that the BRC used to craft its recommendations.

MNEA leaders gave the following recommendations based on the data that emerged from 1,976 survey results.

- **Measure working conditions.** If Missouri is serious about solving teacher recruitment and retention, the state board must create standards for working conditions in Missouri schools so that culture and climate can be prioritized and tracked just as closely as any other metric. High-quality culture, climate and working conditions recruit and retain the highest quality educators. Similar to the North Carolina Working Condition Survey, started in 2000, Missouri needs to develop working-condition standards for Missouri schools, create a survey with public results, and, most importantly, ensure action comes from what the data reveals.
- **Include teacher voice and leadership.** Teachers need to be included in decisions that influence students and working conditions. Without a teacher's voice and leadership at the table, decisions are being made for educators rather than with educators. Teachers' pragmatic perspective is vital to more effective implementation of any program, system, or initiative in a school building.
- **Promote shared leadership models in Missouri schools** so that teachers and administration are working together in sync, rather than in structures that promote hierarchies among school personnel.
- **Ensure high-quality administrators.** Just as teachers foster student learning environments, administrators foster teachers' working environments. High quality administrators are responsible for the top four working standards that practitioners rated in MNEA's survey. Administrator mobility, turnover and poor performance are disruptive to students' education and overall school improvement efforts and, as research shows, damaging to teacher retention and student achievement. Missouri needs to invest more in the Missouri Leadership Development System to ensure high-quality professional learning, mentoring and coaching for Missouri school administrators.

For any further questions, concerns or suggestions about the BRC or MNEA's report, please contact Samantha Hayes at samantha.hayes@mnea.org. ❖

Working conditions

The standards presented in the survey mirror those from the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Standards.

Educators who took the survey were instructed to select the top three standards they believe have the greatest impact on culture and climate.

These are standards in addition to increasing teacher salary and compensation, which is an area where Missouri falls short. According to NEA educator-pay data for 2023, Missouri is 50th in the nation for starting teacher salary (\$34,052) and 47th in the nation for average teacher salary (\$52,481).

The following are the working conditions that educators feel have the most impact on school culture and climate. The percentages below indicate how many educators selected that standard.

- 66%** Protect teachers' time to plan, collaborate and provide effective instruction.
- 63%** Implement policies and practices that address student conduct issues and ensure safe school environments.
- 60%** Involve teachers in decisions that impact classroom and school practices.
- 46%** District and school leadership maintain trusting and supportive environments that advance teaching and learning.
- 27%** Parents, guardians and community members engage in ways that support and influence the school.
- 23%** Facilities and resources are provided for teachers to deliver quality instruction.
- 5%** Schools receive funding support for data analysis and teacher collaboration.
- 4%** Quality learning opportunities are available for teachers.

If you would like to learn more about the BRC and documentation from their meetings, visit https://bit.ly/MO_BRC.

To access the full MNEA practitioner-input report to the BRC, scan QR code or visit https://bit.ly/MNEA_MO_BRC.



Meet MNEA's new executive director

DR. PATRICK LAYDEN FOCUSES ON ELEVATING THE VOICE OF MISSOURI EDUCATORS.

BY MARK JONES, MNEA COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

Education leadership is a field where firsthand experience truly counts. Patrick Layden, EdD, Missouri NEA's new executive director, embodies this principle. With experiences spanning roles as a classroom teacher, MNEA local president, high school principal and union staff member, Layden brings a depth of understanding to his new position. In the following paragraphs, Layden, who assumed his new role July 1, discusses his background and priorities for MNEA.

Where did you grow up?

I was born and raised in Independence, MO, and attended Independence public schools from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade. During my junior year of high school, I spent time as an American Field Service foreign exchange student in the Netherlands, just outside of Rotterdam. After high school, I attended Park University. It was there that I discovered my passion for history and politics, which ultimately led me to become a high school teacher at my alma mater, William Chrisman High School.

Why did you decide to become a teacher?

After realizing I wanted a career in history or politics, I explored opportunities in those fields. I was steered toward education and undertook a practicum in a reading lab at my former high school. There, I assisted students who had difficulties with reading. One memory stands out. I spent days in the hallway with a student, guiding him through reading exercises. The moment he successfully read an entire page and comprehended its content, I saw tears in his eyes, reflecting his joy over an achievement he never thought possible.

What was the best moment for you as a classroom teacher with a student?

Honestly, there are too many moments to single out just one. Every year, witnessing students I had the privilege of teaching walk across the stage at graduation was profoundly rewarding. Encouraging a student to recognize their potential and see the boundless possibilities ahead felt like reciprocating the kindness many of my own teachers showed me. The students at William Chrisman and Van Horn High Schools imparted more wisdom to me than I could have possibly given them. I owe them an immeasurable debt.

What is your top priority for MNEA?

To work with our high-quality staff to uphold the mission and vision of MNEA. Our focus is on establishing strong local associations that champion and safeguard the working conditions of K-12 public educators, higher-ed faculty and support staff, and on ensuring students are learning in safe, welcoming and well-resourced spaces.

What do you see as MNEA's greatest strength?

Members are MNEA's greatest strength. With the collective power of more than 30,000 educators, support staff, retired members, and student members, we have the strongest voice in Missouri advocating for well-resourced public schools and the importance of public sector unions.



Missouri NEA Executive Director Patrick Layden brings to his leadership role a long history as a Missouri educator, local leader, administrator and MNEA staff member. Advocacy for education employees and the students they serve is the one common thread that brings him to his newest challenge in union work.

What message would you like to send to beginning educators, veteran teachers and ESPs?

Your union is here to ensure your voice is heard by leaders at the local, state and national levels. MNEA works to support beginning educators with professional development geared to the first few years in the classroom and fights for better starting wages, allowing our new educators a chance to build a solid foundation in the profession. MNEA continues to support veteran teachers by advocating for good working conditions through our collective bargaining actions in districts across the state. We are also actively working to strengthen both retirement systems—PSRS and PEERS—to ensure that those who have given so much to the students of Missouri are supported in retirement and to help recruit and retain a strong teacher corps. We are also dedicated to supporting one of the most under-appreciated groups: our educational support professionals. In collaboration with our ESP locals across the state, we are organizing to secure living wages for all support staff and ensure their voices are heard.

What do you see as the greatest challenge for public education in Missouri?

Rebuilding public respect and trust in the public education system is one of the most critical issues we face. After years of attacks from those who would like to privatize public schools, the very institution that has served as the foundation of our democracy is at risk. We must rebuild public trust and move public education away from partisan politics. This challenge also presents an opportunity. By restoring trust and respect, we can encourage those considering careers in public education.

How do you see MNEA responding to those challenges and influencing change?

MNEA can best influence change in our state by building strong local associations and developing capable, supported local leaders who can effect change at the grassroots level. In addition, we should collaborate with our legislature, governor, and department of education to ensure they recognize the vital work our members do daily.

What are your thoughts on partnerships with other educational organizations or unions to further the goals of the union?

Our true strength lies in our ability to effect positive change. This is best achieved by uniting educational groups in Missouri to champion public education and by working to safeguard public sector unions in collaboration with our labor allies throughout the state.

How can our union foster increased collaboration among the diverse members of the union?

MNEA must work both internally and externally to remove barriers preventing our diverse members from having a voice in their union and workplace. All members, as well as the students they serve, should have the right to participate equally in our society without fear of intimidation or harassment. Our union must persistently address both overt and subtle barriers that favor some while sidelining others.



Patrick Layden speaks at the 2003 Kids First Rally at the Missouri State Capitol to build support for fully funding the foundation formula.

Dr. Patrick Layden's dedication to students, public schools and the labor movement has steered his professional journey. From his beginnings as a social studies teacher in Independence, he advanced to leadership roles, most notably as principal of Van Horn High School. Throughout his career, Layden has championed the integration of technology and data-driven approaches to enhance student outcomes and the educator work environment.

A staunch advocate for educators and students alike, Layden has contributed significantly to the advancement of Missouri NEA. He also served for a year and a half as a field manager with the Colorado Education Association.

In Missouri, through his work as a field manager, he mentored local leaders and guided Aspiring Educators in honing their skills, as well as nurtured a genuine enthusiasm for learning. His work as a local leader in Independence NEA led to the historic Missouri Supreme Court decision in 2007 that guaranteed the right of public employees to bargain collectively and organize unions.

With a bachelor's degree in history from Park University and a doctorate in educational leadership from St. Louis University, Layden received recognition in his school district as the Independence School District Teacher of the Year.

As MNEA executive director, Layden remains dedicated to supporting students, uplifting educators, advancing public education in the state, and furthering the cause of public sector unions across Missouri. ❖

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Learn what drives Teacher of the Year Greg Kester

continued from page 3

What advice would you give to those new to the profession or considering getting into teaching?

Any new teacher will have questions. Am I doing this correctly? How do I manage all these different things? I try to be positive, reassuring them that they're doing a great job, even when they might not feel like it. If they're positively influencing a young person, they are doing a great job. They shouldn't fret over certain things. Others can handle those.

A question I often pose is, "Who are you working for?" If you take it seriously and work for the students' betterment, giving them your 100%, you'll feel a lot better at the end of the year. You'll feel fulfilled if you work as hard as you can for your students.

As an educator, I find it crucial to always reflect on my practices. Look at what worked and what didn't, and strive for improvement. The second year will be easier than the first. By the time you get to your fifth year, you'll be a lot better than you were in your first year. And, yet, you might still think, "I thought I would be better than this." By the time you reach your 11th year, you'll think, "I think I finally got it." And then you'll realize, "Wait! I still have a lot to learn." So it becomes a progression of trying to get better and better every year.

Two MNEA members receive honors as Teacher of the Year finalists

In addition to naming Potosi NEA member Greg Kester 2024 Missouri Teacher of the Year, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education honored two other MNEA members as finalists in this year's state teacher-of-the-year competition.

Lafayette High School language arts teacher David Choate, Rockwood NEA, and Belton High School Teaching-English-to-Speakers-of-Other-Languages teacher Maria Derner, Belton NEA, were two of seven educators from around the state receiving finalist recognition.

David Choate, Rockwood NEA

Choate, in his 20th year of teaching, received the Rockwood school district teacher-of-the-year honor in May. Choate began his career as a Lafayette language arts teacher in 2004, and in 2018, he earned National Board Certification.



Maria F. Derner, Belton NEA

Derner, also a National Board Certified teacher, is in her third year in the Belton school district. She also taught in the Harrisonville and Blue Valley school districts. She earned her undergraduate degrees in biochemistry and environmental education from Universidad Santiago de Cali in Cali, Colombia. Her master's degree in TESOL is from Webster University. ❖



Navigating legislative session 2024

continued from page 5

Election year influence

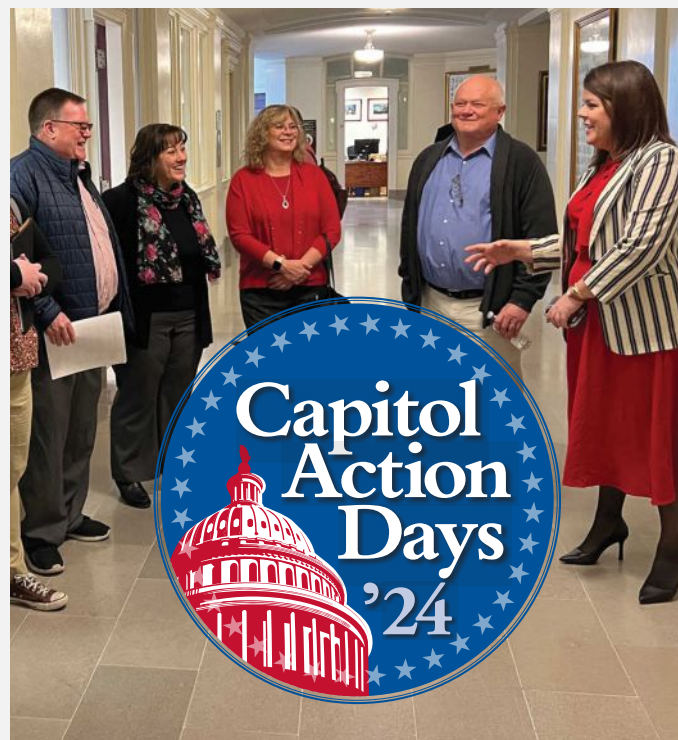
Legislative sessions in election years are often strong on rhetoric and weak on producing new policy. Legislators are showing interest in education and in crafting an omnibus bill addressing local control, school choice and funding. A wide range of opinions exist, however, on how to address these topics. Any package addressing those topics is likely to leave most advocates with mixed feelings about the various components and about the viability of the bill. The most likely outcomes are passage of very little education policy or a lot of new policy, depending solely on the success of an omnibus, compromise bill.

MNEA's critical role

MNEA will continue to engage in legislative advocacy in positive ways. MNEA will hold Capitol Action Days throughout the months of February through early May. Members from around the state are asked to send postcards to legislators to share positive messages on basic policy topics. MNEA members can play a key role by making sure legislators understand how their actions affect students and schools and by educating legislators on the great things going on in public schools.

Please support MNEA's continuing advocacy this year. Establishing new relationships and maintaining existing relationships will increase legislators' awareness of MNEA's concerns and suggestions on these key issues to improve public education for all students.

For more information, visit mnea.org/edadvocates. ❖



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Missouri NEA members join UAW workers on strike in Wentzville

BY MARK JONES, MNEA COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

On a hot September day as temperatures rose past 90 degrees, Missouri NEA members joined a picket line with United Auto Workers striking at the General Motors plant in Wentzville.

MNEA members joined the protest just outside the gate of the Wentzville plant to demonstrate their commitment to supporting the striking UAW workers in their efforts to negotiate a fair contract.

UAW members had been stationed on concrete islands outside five sets of gates that enclose a sprawling General Motors assembly plant in Wentzville, 40 miles west of St. Louis. Their demands included higher pay and benefits, an end to a tiered system of employment and better treatment for temporary workers. Recognizing the importance of these issues, MNEA members decided to stand in solidarity with UAW workers, actively participating in the strike efforts at the Wentzville plant.

MNEA Pres. Phil Murray joined local presidents Jamie Buckner (Fort Zumwalt E.A.), Brendan Kearns (St. Charles E.A.), and Anita Kuehner (Francis Howell E.A.), Treena Murray (MNEA-R) and Francis Howell E.A. Political Director Julie McDonald. MNEA Executive Director Patrick Layden, along with UniServ Directors Lisa Blaha and Scott Kiehl, also participated in the demonstration.

“Just as we advocate for fair compensation, safe working environments and respect for our profession as educators, we stand

with UAW workers who are taking action for the same principles,” Murray said.

In addition to joining the picket lines, MNEA members brought supplies to the striking workers.

Leaders of UAW local 2250 later posted pictures of the MNEA members on the picket line and expressed gratitude for the support.

“This is what unionism is all about—other unions asking to help, showing up with supplies, water, food, and standing with our members,” says Fredrick Jamison, UAW. “High five to Missouri NEA.”

“We are committed to upholding the rights of all workers to bargain for fair wages, safe working conditions, and the dignity of all professions,” Layden says. “Standing with UAW workers at the Wentzville plant, we are reinforcing these principles.”

MNEA’s participation in the UAW strike exemplifies the organization’s dedication to labor rights. By standing with UAW workers, MNEA demonstrates the universal nature of the fight for fair labor practices.

“MNEA’s involvement in the UAW strike is a powerful example of solidarity in action,” Murray says. “It underscores the organization’s commitment to broader labor rights. The fight for fair labor practices is a universal struggle that connects all workers, and MNEA’s support for the UAW strike is a testament to this shared journey toward workplace justice.” ♦



In September, Missouri NEA members and staff supported United Auto Workers striking at a plant in Wentzville by joining the picket line and donating supplies to the striking workers.

MNEA Human Rights Committee sponsors MLK essay-poster contest

The Missouri NEA Human Rights Committee is sponsoring the 2024 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Essay/Poster Contest for K-12 public school students.

MNEA will award winners in four grade-level categories: K-2, 3-5, 6-8 and 9-12. Each first-place (\$75), second-place (\$50), and third-place (\$25) winner receives a certificate and a gift card in the four categories. Teachers of winning students will receive a \$30 gift card.

An MNEA-affiliated local association must host the initial contest and submit first-, second-, and third-place winning posters in any or all of the four grade levels. MNEA must receive all final entries no later than Jan. 15. Late entries will not be judged.

Contest winners will be announced at the Spring MNEA Representative Assembly. Questions? Contact Roxane Bly at roxane.bly@mnea.org or (573) 644-9606.

Entries achieving finalist status should be mailed or hand-delivered to MNEA headquarters, Attn: Roxane Bly, 1810 E Elm Street, Jefferson City, MO 65101. ❖



Find details and contest materials at mnea.org/mlkcontest.

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Protections for pregnant, lactating workers

BY DAN BRYAR, MNEA GENERAL COUNSEL AND CHIEF HUMAN RESOURCE OFFICER

In December 2022, two pieces of legislation became federal law: the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act and the Providing Urgent Maternal Protections for Nursing Act. Both Acts are presently enforceable and expand rights for pregnant and nursing workers. Missouri NEA supported both measures. However, for Missouri public school employees, the PUMP Act duplicates a guaranteed lactation accommodation right that the Missouri legislature enacted in 2021. The Missouri state law passed with the help of MNEA's lobbying efforts. Since the law passed, school districts have adopted policies on employees' rights to lactation accommodations.

Modeled after ADA

The Americans with Disabilities Act does not deem or presume that pregnancy is a covered disability entitling an individual to a workplace accommodation. Typically, symptoms or limitations associated with a normal pregnancy are not covered by the ADA and do not entitle an employee to workplace accommodations because the ADA only covers conditions that substantially limit a major life activity. Some pregnancy-related conditions, however, may rise to the level of an ADA "disability" entitling a worker to some reasonable accommodation (for example, gestational diabetes, preeclampsia or sciatica). The PWFA is modeled after the ADA although it is more specific and permissive for securing pregnancy-related accommodations.

Accommodations

The PWFA permits workers to obtain reasonable work accommodations for "known limitations" related to, affected by, or arising out of pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions. The law applies to employers with 15 or more employees and encourages engaging in an interactive process to determine if reasonable accommodations are necessary for covered workers with eligible known limitations.

For accommodations that are obviously related to pregnancy and that the employer can adopt without undue hardship, there may not be any need to engage in any interactive process or seek medical certifications before granting the worker's request. The law charges the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission with writing rules to implement the PWFA. The EEOC opines that accommodation requests that may be summarily granted by an employer without medical certification or interactive process might include when an obviously pregnant worker requests a different uniform size/gear, additional restroom breaks, ability to drink water throughout the day, or modifications to sitting/standing policies.

Further, a worker can be "qualified" under the PWFA to receive an accommodation even when their known limitation prohibits them from performing an essential job function for a "temporary period," which could be resumed "in the near future," and such limitation can be reasonably accommodated. The law is saying that if a pregnancy-related condition prohibits a worker from performing some essential job function, though an employer could reasonably excuse the performance of that function until after the pregnancy, then that could be a reasonable accommodation.

The PWFA uses the ADA definitions for determining whether a requested accommodation is a "reasonable accommodation" and whether it constitutes "undue hardship." However, the relevant congressional record and present EEOC fact sheet on the PWFA lists some accommodations that may be available (i.e., reasonable) to a covered worker, including but not limited to:

- Allowing light duty or help with manual labor and lifting
- Temporarily transferring to a less physically demanding or safer position
- Providing additional, longer, or more flexible breaks to drink water, eat, rest or use the bathroom
- Changing food or drink policies to allow a worker to have a water bottle or food
- Changing equipment, devices, or workstation, such as providing a stool to sit on or adding a lock to a clean meeting room to turn it into a temporary lactation space
- Making existing facilities easier to use (for example, relocating a workstation closer to the restroom)
- Changing a uniform or dress code (for example, allowing an employee to wear maternity pants)
- Changing a work schedule (for example, having shorter work hours or a later start time to accommodate morning sickness)
- Providing breaks, private space (not in a bathroom), and other accommodations for lactation needs
- Providing flexible scheduling for prenatal or postnatal appointments
- Time off for bedrest, recovery from childbirth, mastitis

PWFA protections

The law prohibits employers from terminating, discriminating, or retaliating against workers for needing, requesting, or using an accommodation. The law also prohibits employers from requiring a worker to accept the employer's suggested accommodation or to take leave if there is another reasonable accommodation that permits the employee to continue working.

Limitations

The employer is also not required to grant the worker's desired accommodation if that accommodation would impose an undue hardship on the employer's business operations. This frequently comes up, for instance, with workers insisting they be permitted to work remotely. For some employers, such accommodation may be reasonable. For educators providing in-class instruction, remote work may be a difficult request for administrators to approve.

Securing a PWFA accommodation requires that the worker communicate with the employer about their known limitation and request for accommodation.

The EEOC's promulgated rules to carry out the PWFA are not final and are subject to change. If you need assistance in requesting a PWFA accommodation, reach out to your local leader, UniServ director, or school district human resource person. ❖

Is a smart home a dumb idea?

BY MARK JONES, MNEA COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

The concept of a smart home is enticing: a space that anticipates your needs and allows you to control your environment seamlessly. Setting up a smart home, however, isn't always straightforward. With a plethora of ecosystems, standards and devices to choose from, the journey to a smart home can be both exciting and daunting.

Pros of a smart home

A well-integrated smart home can significantly enhance convenience. You can control devices using voice commands, and with the right setup, your home can anticipate and cater to your needs. For example, your smart system might detect when you leave the house and turn everything off or react to your arrival by turning on lights and playing your favorite music. You can set up automated routines, such as scheduling robot vacuums or making coffee with a simple "Good morning" command to your voice assistant.

Cons of a smart home

Despite the allure, smart features do pose some challenges. The smart home landscape is vast, with multiple ecosystems like Google Home, Amazon Alexa, and Apple HomeKit to navigate. Each has its strengths and limitations. For example, while Apple's HomeKit is the most secure, it's also the most restrictive. Setting up devices often requires third-party apps, and there's the potential confusion for guests or children who might not be familiar with voice or app controls. Moreover, there's always a risk of security breaches, especially with devices that have microphones and cameras.



Key considerations for a smart home

Ecosystem options

The three main ecosystems are Google Home, Amazon Alexa and Apple HomeKit. Google Home boasts a conversational style voice assistant, Amazon Alexa offers a wide range of compatible products, and Apple HomeKit provides enhanced security and smooth operation for iPhone users.

Wi-Fi and connectivity

A reliable Wi-Fi connection is crucial. Most smart devices operate on the 2.4-GHz frequency, but newer protocols like Wi-Fi 6E are emerging. Don't forget to ensure that your router can handle the number of devices you plan to connect.

Security

With the increasing number of smart devices, security concerns rise. It's vital to read manufacturers' privacy policies, ensure devices support multi-factor authentication, and be wary of devices with unnecessary cameras.

Ease of installation and use

Although big brands offer easy compatibility with major ecosystems, many devices require third-party apps for setup and configuration. Consistently naming devices is essential for precise voice commands, and considering device placement is important for optimal functionality.

Comparative cost

Costs can vary widely. Although some ecosystems offer affordable entry points, like Google's Nest Mini, others might be pricier. The choice of devices, from lighting to security systems, can significantly affect the overall cost.

Security

Security is paramount. Devices with cameras and microphones can pose privacy risks. It's crucial to understand how manufacturers use your data and to take precautions, such as using multi-factor authentication and keeping devices updated.

To learn more about the benefits and challenges of creating a smart home, check out popular YouTuber Linus Sebastian's series about installing smart home technology while remodeling a home on his YouTube channel [Linus Tech Tips](#). ❖

UPCOMING

MNEA EVENTS AND DEADLINES

DEC.
9

I Can Do It classroom management program

Saturday, Dec. 9, St. Louis

All teachers with a Missouri Initial Professional Certificate must participate in a beginning teacher assistance program before upgrading their certificates. "I Can Do It" is designed for teachers in their first two years and any teacher who wants to improve their classroom management skills. Teachers with several years of experience also find these sessions helpful. Missouri NEA partners with Maryville University to offer a meaningful program that meets the beginning teacher assistance program certification requirement.

Register by Nov. 26 at mnea.org/ICanDoIt.

Contact MNEA Professional Practice at (573) 644-9623 or email Laurie Bernskoetter at laurie.bernskoetter@mnea.org for more information.

JAN.
15

Declaration of candidacy for NEA R.A. State Delegate Election

**Declare your candidacy by Jan. 15
at mnea.org/NEARAdelagate.**

JULY
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NEA Representative Assembly 2024

July 3-7, Philadelphia

For more information about the NEA R.A. or to declare your candidacy by mail, contact Roxane Bly (roxane.bly@mnea.org) at (573) 644-9606.

Missouri's delegate allocation will be made based on membership as of January 2024. Last year, Missouri was allowed to elect 23 state delegates to the NEA R.A.

Aspiring Educators-Missouri delegates are elected in the spring. If you are a member of Aspiring Educators and interested in running for delegate, contact Shannon Weber at shannon.weber@mnea.org to declare your candidacy.

MNEA-Retired delegates will be elected at their annual meeting in April. If you are a retired member, contact Dr. Patrick Layden at patrick.layden@mnea.org to declare your candidacy.

MNEA salutes 2023 retiring members

THANK YOU FOR YOUR YEARS OF SERVICE FOR CHILDREN AND PUBLIC EDUCATION.

You may be retiring from your career in education, but we know that many of you are still living the good fight for public schools. Be sure to join Missouri NEA Retired (mnea.org/retired) to keep playing an important role in advocating for what's best for Missouri students.

BELTON NEA

Karen Howard

BLUE SPRINGS NEA

Kathleen Asbury
Robin Bledsoe
Kimberly Blevins
Corrie Clasen
Matthew Harper
Catarina Kennedy
Michelle Kimsey
Amy Lengyel
Matt Neuweg
Staci Perrin
Robert Sturman

BRENTWOOD T.A.

Dana Palubiak

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Kathryn Britt
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Catharine Petty
Julie Steimel
Erica Walker
Kimberly Wenom ❖

If you plan to retire in the spring of 2024, please let us know at mnea.org/mnea-retirement-declaration-form.

Advocacy and impact

BY THERESA REGER, MNEA-RETIRED PRESIDENT

As you may be aware, Missouri NEA-Retired is in the process of revising its vision, mission, and goals statements. At our annual meeting, the leadership team distributed a questionnaire for members to complete. One of the survey goals was to learn how members perceived the differences between MNEA-Retired and the Missouri Retired Teacher Association.

The most crucial difference members mentioned is national impact and political activity. Many respondents pointed out that we are active at the local, state and national government levels. Our involvement at the national level allows us to collaborate with other state organizations to improve our public schools, support our active members (both teachers and support staff) and lobby. We are part of the NEA's national lobbying efforts to repeal the Government Pension Offset/Windfall Elimination Provision to restore the earnings our members have contributed to Social Security. NEA's strength lies in its national influence and ability to organize members across the nation in helping to elect national government leaders who believe in our public schools and prioritize the needs of students and the employees who deliver services throughout the year.

Our experience as active MNEA members equips us to make a difference. MNEA-Retired members are well-informed about lobbying and education issues through up-to-date communications from MNEA Legislative Director Otto Fajen and MNEA Political Director Elizabeth Zerr. Focused on active member education, professional issues and retired-educator issues, we support pro-teacher school board members, lobby, volunteer in schools and the community, and support legislative measures that improve public education.

We have a special program for our educators in the classroom called CHEER (Caring Help for Education Endeavors by Retirees), which MNEA-Retired created to provide opportunities for our members to support public school district employees and provide financial and material resources. We also offer scholarship opportunities for students who aspire to become teachers.

MNEA-Retired members represent the retired local on the MNEA Board of Directors. We even have six retirees who serve in our Missouri House of Representatives. Most importantly, we have the support of MNEA staff members, including MNEA Executive Director Patrick Layden (our liaison), Administrative Assistant Olivia Compton, MNEA Pres. Phil Murray, and MNEA Vice Pres. Rebeka McIntosh.

MNEA-Retired is a member-run organization that provides retirees with opportunities to engage and continue being active in politics and education. Some of the words our retirees used to describe how we differ from MRTA include political activism, collaboration, camaraderie, fellowship, institutional and historical knowledge, mutual support, and continued connections to our profession. ❖

MNEA-Retired leadership

The MNEA-Retired Executive Council, elected at the annual meeting, plans the programs for MNEA-Retired and is the liaison between MNEA and NEA. Learn more at mnea.org/retired.

President: Terry Reger
Vice President: Linda Innes
Past-President: Carol Weatherford
Secretary/Treasurer: Joyce Bluett
Historian: Janet Leachman
Budget Chairperson: JoWanda Bozeman
Communications Chairperson: Holly Garrett

At-large committee members

Georgia Brady
Holly Garrett
Jane McPartland
Kassie Payne
Beth Ann Roland
Bill Stewart
Jim Ward
Susan Whitehead-Clark

MNEA Board of Directors Representative

Beth Ann Roland

PAC Council representatives

Nancy Copenhaver
Greg Meyer



Retired from our position but not from our profession.

Member Benefits introduces Travelers partnership

BY DARBY BOYD, NEA MEMBER BENEFITS AFFILIATE RELATIONS SPECIALIST

The NEA® Auto & Home Insurance Program in cooperation with Travelers Insurance provides coverage that works for you. As a Missouri NEA member, you can get quotes with a member discount at any time, regardless of when your current policies are due to expire. Plus, you don't have to wait to switch. Your coverage could go into effect the next day. Get your free, no-obligation quote from Travelers online by visiting neamb.com/products/nea-auto-and-home-insurance-program or call to speak to a licensed insurance representative at (866) 605-6045.

Travelers can meet an array of your personal insurance needs. Auto, home, condo and renters' insurance are available with the NEA member discount. Travelers also has competitive rates for umbrella policies, as well as boat and landlord insurance. You can also customize your policy with coverage options to meet your individual needs.

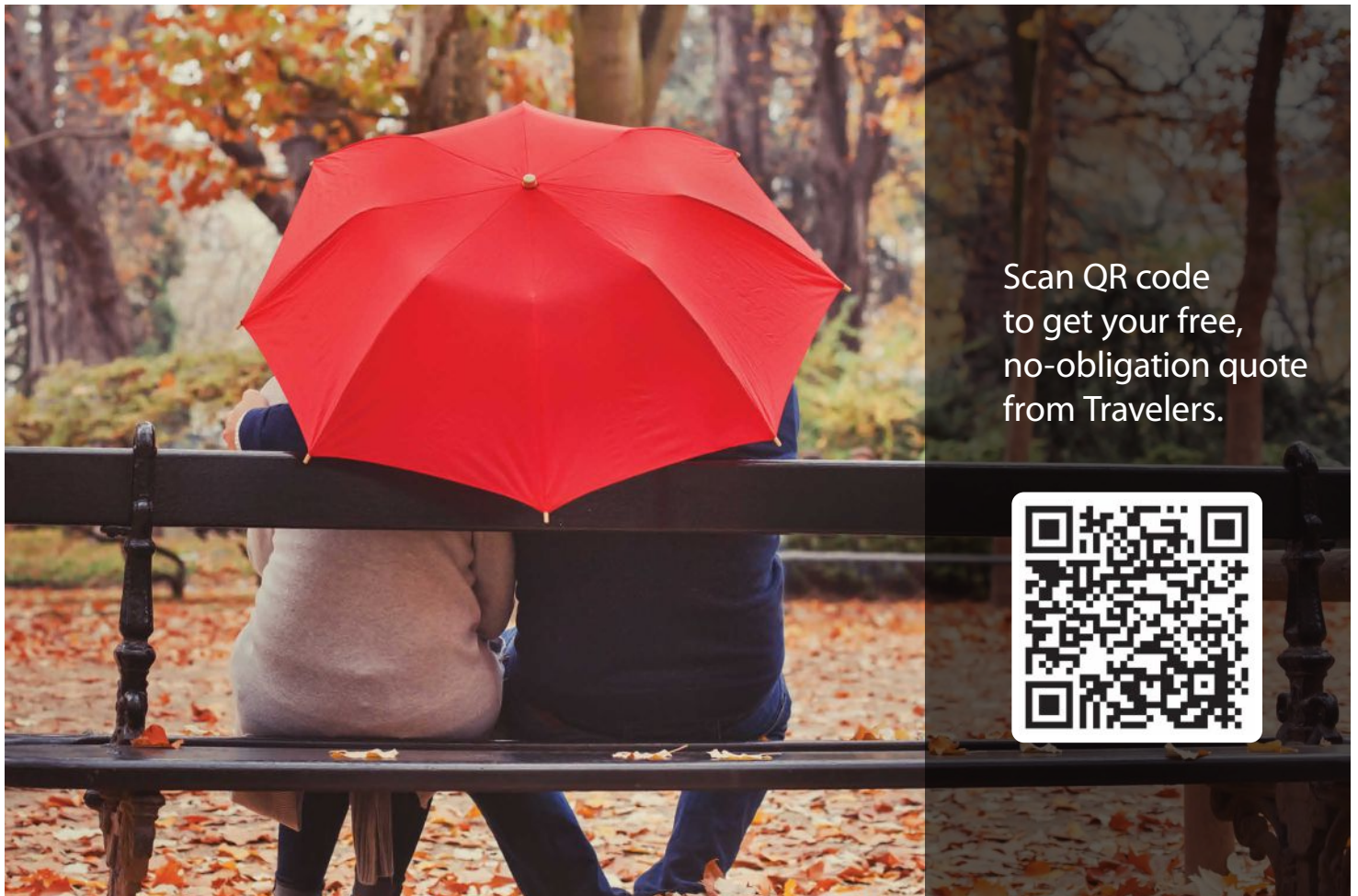
Don't forget all dues-paying NEA members and their family members residing in the household can apply for coverage from Travelers or other insurance companies through InsuraMatch, a

wholly owned agency of Travelers, if Travelers isn't the right fit at this time.

Even if Travelers isn't the right fit for you today, you can compare quotes from many other insurance companies to help you find the coverage that meets your needs and budget. Get 24/7 claim reporting and customer service online or by phone. Members can also get vehicle insurance cards, view bills and policies, and check the status of a claim on MyTravelers.com or through the MyTravelers mobile app.

Choose from automatic electronic funds transfer from your checking or savings account, recurring credit card payment, bill by mail, pay by phone or pay online. Simply select the payment option that works best for you. You will even find a multi-policy billing option to help consolidate bills. And, if you already have an auto and/or home policy with Travelers, please call (800) 842-5075 to learn how you can get the benefit from your membership in the NEA Auto & Home Insurance Program from Travelers.

You can report a claim online or by calling (800) 252-4633. Claim reporting is available 24/7/365. ❖



Scan QR code to get your free, no-obligation quote from Travelers.



Staying fit during the chill

As temperatures drop and the days shorten, the allure of cozy blankets and hot cocoa can sideline your fitness goals. However, maintaining an active lifestyle during the colder months is not only feasible, but it can also be gratifying. Here's how educators can stay motivated and keep fit during fall and winter.

Embrace the outdoors: Even though it might be chilly, the crisp air and changing scenery can be invigorating.

- Dress in layers to stay warm. Begin with moisture-wicking fabrics close to your skin, and add insulating layers. Remember a hat and gloves.
- Try brisk walking, jogging, or even cycling if the conditions permit. Engage in playful activities like building a snowman or having a friendly snowball fight.
- The colorful foliage of fall provides a beautiful backdrop for walks. The cooler temperatures can also make longer walks more comfortable.

Bring workouts indoors: If braving the cold isn't appealing, there are plenty of indoor activities to keep you moving.

- With countless online fitness classes, apps, and YouTube tutorials available, you can create a personalized fitness routine at home.
- Many gyms and community centers offer promotional rates during the colder months. Explore new classes like spinning, yoga, or pilates.

Embrace indoor sports: Consider joining an indoor sports league or organizing a friendly match among colleagues. Sports like basketball, volleyball or indoor soccer can be fun and challenging.

Set clear goals: A clear objective can be a powerful motivator.

- Consider signing up for a spring fun run or charity walk. A specific date to work towards can keep you on track during the school year.
- Devices or apps that track steps, heart rate and calories can provide tangible data on your progress and keep you accountable.

Stay social: Exercising with friends can make your workouts more enjoyable and provide an extra layer of accountability.

- Group activities can be motivating and fun. Look for fitness clubs in your community. Many clubs offer discounts to educators or groups.
- Exercising with a friend or a colleague can make the time pass faster and give you someone to share challenges and successes with.

Listen to your body: The colder months can sometimes lead to stiffness or seasonal aches. It's essential to warm up properly, stretch regularly and treat yourself to a warm bath to aid recovery.

Stay nourished and hydrated: Cold weather can be deceptive, making you feel less thirsty. Make sure you're drinking plenty of water and eating a balanced diet rich in fresh fruits and vegetables.

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¹LIMRA, “A Measure of Financial Wellness” 2020

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Winter is coming

Winters in Missouri bring the potential for dangerous snow and ice storms, which can lead to hazardous driving conditions. Make sure your car is road ready by following these winter tips from MO.gov.

When snow or a major snow storm is in the forecast, nothing is more important for your safety and the safety of others than the decisions you make about driving. Avoiding a non-essential trip

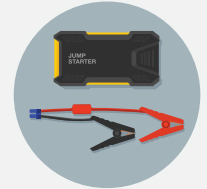
Winter weather safety

- Follow the local weather forecast and traffic reports. Plan travel during times when snow or ice are not in the forecast. Avoid unnecessary travel.
- Check MoDOT's Traveler Info Map for road conditions at traveler.modot.org/.
- Allow extra travel time and expect delays.
- Reduce speed and increase following distance. Drive based on conditions, not the posted speed limit.
- Focus 100 percent on driving because you have less control of your vehicle and less visibility. Use your headlights to increase your visibility to other drivers.
- Understand that bridges and overpasses often ice over sooner than other parts of the road.
- Place an ice scraper, battery booster cables, blankets, extra coats, gloves, water, non-perishable food, flashlight, and a bag of sand or cat litter in your trunk.
- Keep your gas tank at least half full.
- Travel with a fully charged cell phone. Park your vehicle before calling if you need help. *55 on a cellular phone connects you to the closest Missouri State Highway Patrol headquarters.
- Clear your vehicle's windows completely to ensure visibility before driving.
- Never overreact or slam on the brakes. If you begin to slide, steer in the direction of the slide to regain control of the vehicle.
- Understand four-wheel-drive vehicles may provide extra traction to get a vehicle moving in snow, but they are not better at braking or handling turns.
- If you must travel in a snow storm, let others know about your route, destination and estimated time of arrival.
- If you become stranded in deep snow and are idling the engine to keep warm, be sure to keep the area around the tailpipe clear to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning inside the vehicle. Also, open a window slightly to let in fresh air. ❖

during a snow storm might not only prevent a traffic crash, but also it can allow road crews to clear roads more quickly and keep you from becoming stranded. Before hitting the road, decide whether the trip is truly necessary. If you must drive when it's snowing, here are some safety tips from the Missouri State Highway Patrol.

Winter car kit checklist

- Winter tires with appropriate air
- Plenty of fuel
- A car battery that is in good condition
- Windshield scraper
- Small broom
- Flashlight
- Blanket
- Spare radio with batteries
- Snacks or energy type food
- Water
- Jumper cables
- Flares and matches
- Compact shovel and ice scraper
- Sand or shingles (for tire traction)
- Hats, socks and gloves
- First aid kit
- Fluorescent distress flag





NEA Member Exclusive

A trusted and valuable benefit

As an NEA member, did you know you receive \$1,000 of term life insurance at **no cost** to you? You're already enrolled in the NEA® Complimentary Life Insurance Plan, but it's a good time to make sure you've selected a beneficiary.

When you do, you can have some peace of mind that your loved ones will receive their benefit in a time of need. This unique benefit helps ensure educators like you have additional coverage beyond what may be provided through your district. It's just one of the many ways your union membership works hard for you.

**Scan the code or go to
neamb.com/mycomp for a
quick and easy path to update
your beneficiary information.**



DT281023

A dog's world

Ever wonder what life is like on the furrrier side of things? Here's a lighthearted peek into the world of dog owners. Prepare for tail-wags, face licks, and a whole lot of love!

- **Who needs an alarm clock?** Your furry friend is more than happy to wake you up with the sunrise for its morning walk.
- **Night owls beware!** Puppies can give newborns a run for their money when it comes to sleepless nights. So, dog parents, get ready for some round-the-clock parenting.
- **Home security just got a fluffy upgrade.** Nothing gets past your canine companion. Intruders, consider yourself warned!
- **Dog hair is the new black.** It's not just a fashion statement; it's a lifestyle. And dog owners wouldn't have it any other way.
- **Love and loyalty have a new definition, and it's spelled D-O-G.** There's nothing that can melt a heart quite as quickly as a pair of puppy eyes.
- **Fur babies, indeed!** The joys and challenges of having a dog are not so different from raising a child.
- **Dogs know how to appreciate the great outdoors.** Watching them chase their tails in the sunshine is a reminder for us all to get out and enjoy nature.
- **Playdates aren't just for human kids!** Nothing tires out a pup like a good romp with their furry friends. And yes, the photo ops are priceless.
- **Doggy kisses: Once a cringe, now a treasure.** Slobbery? Yes. Gross? Not at all. In fact, they're a dog owner's badge of honor.

So, here's to all you dog owners out there. We see you, we appreciate you, and we're pretty sure you wouldn't trade your pup-filled life for anything. ❖



Would you like to write for *Something Better*?

Something Better is looking for **beginning and experienced teachers** to write articles about their experiences in Missouri public schools.

Let fellow Missouri NEA members know what it's like to be a **beginning teacher**. Focus on successes and challenges with students, joys and frustrations of the teaching profession, classroom discoveries and surprises, rewards and disappointments, survival tips, union involvement, and any other insights the authors can provide about working in today's classrooms.

We are also interested in featuring articles by **experienced teachers**. Perhaps you have an innovative program that you created to address your students' needs. Tell *Something Better* readers your story and how they might learn from your experiences.

Please email your resume, with writing samples and article ideas, to: Mark Jones, MNEA communications director, at mark.jones@mnea.org.

Authors will receive \$200-\$300 for articles published in *Something Better*. ❖



I am
MNEA



“ Being active in the Missouri NEA is not just about advocating for nursing, teaching or school employees; it's about championing the well-being of every student, ensuring our colleagues have the resources and support they need, and collectively shaping a brighter future for education. Together, we can make a difference, drive change, and uplift our colleagues and students.”


~ Lori Harmon, school nurse, Springfield NEA

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Please follow the QR code to a short survey.

