

**Delegate Questions from Post-RA Information Session on NEA Legislative Program  
July 7, 2020**

**Can the link for Lily's statement on reopening schools please be posted here?**

Here is the link to President Lily Eskelsen García's statement on reopening schools, "[Trump, DeVos ignore educators on what it will take to reopen schools safely.](#)"

Also, please see President-Elect Becky Pringle's recent piece in *Essence* magazine on this topic: "[COVID-19 is Not Over: Reopen Our Schools with Safety and Justice.](#)"

**What is NEA's position on how schools should open this fall?**

NEA's position is that all decisions about reopening schools must be rooted in ensuring the health and safety of students and educators, with input from our members. Students and educators need to have personal protective equipment and we need modified classrooms, cafeterias, playgrounds, and buses for proper social distancing. We also need to make sure we are prepared to help students and members with any trauma they may have as a result of the epidemic.

For months, we have called on the U.S. Senate to [pass the HEROES Act](#), as the House of Representatives did in May. We are now asking that the Senate, in any COVID relief package, include several provisions of the HEROES Act, including \$100 billion specifically for education, as well as \$915 billion for aid to state and local governments to help address budget shortfalls.

In addition, please see "[All Hands on Deck: Initial Guidance Regarding Reopening Schools](#)," which explains NEA's principles for reopening schools in a way that prioritizes the health and safety of students and educators and at the same time focuses on achieving racial and social justice so that all students, regardless of school, community, race, class, or ability, have the opportunity and support to learn.

**It's obviously not safe to send the kids back or the staff. How do you suggest that families handle NOT returning, as it is a life or death situation?**

We're working to ensure that all students and educators have the ability to continue teaching and learning by advocating for at least the \$4 billion called for in the HEROES Act to fix the homework gap (Emergency Educational Connections Act of 2020, S.6390, also included in Murray's education bill package just introduced). Funds would go to the Federal Communications Commission's successful E-rate program to be distributed to those students and educators who lack the internet access and/or devices that would enable them to participate in remote teaching/learning from home—to accommodate whatever the situation is (or becomes) this FY2020-21 school year.

**Are we willing to encourage a countrywide strike if we are forced back into life or death conditions?**

Educators have always done whatever it takes to protect their students and ensure that all students get what they need to be successful. We saw that in the #RedforEd movement, and we see that

now in the educators who have risked, and in some cases lost, their lives to support their students, their families and communities. The National Education Association always has supported our educators and students in that mission, and we will continue to do so while insisting on safety and equity. Nobody wants to see students back in the classroom more than educators, but when it comes to their safety, we're not ready to take any options off the table. That's why we are demanding that Congress and President Trump guarantee resources to our public schools so that they can provide a safe, equitable and quality education for all students, no matter their race, background or ZIP code.

**What is the name of the person from Louisville who spoke [on police reform and racial justice] during the Virtual Information Session? Is she a teacher?**

The member who spoke about Breonna Taylor, police reform, and racial and social justice was Jo McKim, a teacher who is a member of the Jefferson County Teachers Association, an NEA Director, and a member of the Legislative Committee.

**Does NEA have plans to support the BREATHE Act legislatively? Do we have a plan to support police-free schools?**

The BREATHE Act was just announced recently and we are currently reviewing the bill to see if we can support it. NEA is dedicated to the fair, respectful treatment of all students and a learning environment free from the effects of implicit or explicit bias. We therefore support school boards and our affiliates whose experiences with law enforcement in their schools have led them to question how hiring police officers impacts both students and staff. We recently supported the House's passage of the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, which is a step in the right direction in ending police brutality and dismantling policies of institutional racism in law enforcement.

**When did our union become so anti-police?**

NEA is not anti-police or anti-law enforcement; we are anti-systemic racism. We want make sure that members of law enforcement get the proper training they need to interact with and protect all members of society, regardless of their race, color, creed or gender. The events over the past few months, unfortunately, are not isolated and have highlighted deep, systemic racism. We are committed as an organization to the effort to end police brutality and promote policies that dismantle institutionalized racism in law enforcement. We are working at the local, state and federal levels to make that happen. We recognize that some in law enforcement have taken steps to adjust some practices and training programs, but much more is needed. NEA and its members are active in the fight for social and racial justice because it is directly linked to ensuring that all students, in every community, have access to the learning opportunities they deserve. But these opportunities are only accessible to the extent that we can keep students in Black and brown communities safe from police brutality and excessive use of force.

**How are the teachers going to be involved in lobbying our Congressional members this year?**

Traditionally, the teachers, postsecondary educators, educational support professionals, specialized instructional support personnel, and retired educators who have been elected to the NEA Board of

Directors formally lobby their states' congressional delegations when the board meets in Washington, D.C., three times a year. At these times, NEA directors meet with members of Congress and congressional staffers to persuade them to act on NEA-backed legislation and NEA's priority issues. Since the COVID-19 crisis, NEA Board meetings have been virtual and the lobbying is not being done in person. NEA directors lobbied most recently in May, and they asked Congress to: appropriate more money for the Education Stabilization Fund to help states address the pandemic's impact on students; provide funding to close the Homework Gap; and provide funding to enable school districts to purchase personal protective equipment for educators, among other asks. *We expect to continue these virtual lobbying activities at least through the end of 2020.*

Aside from the lobbying by NEA directors, all NEA members are encouraged to reach out to members of Congress in their states on a variety of issues of importance to students, educators, and public education, from the need for police reform to securing more support for rural schools. If you go to the [EdAction in Congress Center](#), you can, for example, email your senators to pass the HEROES Act and the ESP Family Leave Act (S. 1401). You can also email members of your congressional delegation to co-sponsor the IDEA Full Funding Act (S. 866/H.R. 1878). In fact, several "Take Action" alerts are up now, and they are constantly being updated.

**How can all of us contact Senators, who are not in our state, and tell them that our issues are important? I'm from NJ with 2 Dems Senators I want to contact other Senators from other states and they will only let those of their districts contact them.**

As much as we might want to call, for instance, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky even if we don't live in his state, that can be counterproductive. Elected representatives tend to place much more value on the feedback they receive from voters in their own states than they do on voters who live elsewhere. So the best advice is: Reach out to any family, friends, and others in "Red" states that you know, and have *them* weigh in with their elected senators.

**Why does McConnell have the ability to block legislation?**

With the election in November 2014, Republicans won a majority in the U.S. Senate. Their status as the majority gave them the votes to elect Senator McConnell to the position of Majority Leader. In that role, Senator McConnell has the power to, among other things, decide which bills are taken up by the Senate and which ones are ignored. He also serves as his party's spokesman in the Senate.

**Why can't we send everyday "normal" teachers to testify on Capitol Hill?**

We do! NEA members—teachers, education support professionals, specialized instructional support personnel, student members, and retirees—testify in congressional hearings both on Capitol Hill and in the field, and participate on congressional panels and in other events. On July 21, for example, Nyree Washington, a member who teaches at Miami Coral Reef Senior High School, participated in a media call with Rep. Bobby Scott (D-VA), chairman of the House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor, and other members of Congress on what needs to be included in the next COVID legislative package to help schools reopen safely. NEA members also take part in other events that are intended to affect the legislative process. For example, 2020 **ESP of the Year**

**Andrea Beeman** in late July was part of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights' briefing on the impact of Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's position on liability (pertaining to school and employer reopenings) on workers and communities of color.

In the past year, NEA members have testified before congressional committees about the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program, the importance of high-speed internet and the E-rate program in rural areas, and other issues.

**What are the plans for countering the efforts at voter suppression?**

NEA has been working on this internally and also very closely with coalition partners on continuing to push for more funding to make sure that voting by mail is made more widely available throughout the country. We want to make sure people have the ability to vote without risking their health or of those working the polls. \$400 million was included in the CARES Act to increase the ability to vote by mail, expand early voting and online voter registration, and increase the safety of voting in-person by providing additional voting facilities and more poll workers. But we are pushing for an additional \$3.6 billion to introduce and expand numerous provisions to all states, including: vote by mail; absentee voting, early voting, online and same day voter registration, among other things. Additionally, for our Native American voters living on tribal lands, we are pushing for allowing tribal lands to designate a building as a ballot pick-up location at no cost to them. We continue to support specific bills that have been introduced in both the House and the Senate on this issue.

**I have been trying to apply for loan forgiveness and have been denied. I have been paying on my loan for more than ten years and have not touched the principal. What legislation can the NEA present to support loan forgiveness for teachers?**

Linda, we are so sorry to hear that. It is unfortunate that your story is one of many and a demonstration of why Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) is being administered so poorly by the Trump/DeVos administration. NEA is in support of the College Affordability Act, a comprehensive reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, which would make significant reforms and streamline ways for public service professionals, including educators, to access the program. We also work closely with Reps. Boyle and Joyce who lead the bipartisan PSLF Caucus to improve the program. If you would like more information, please contact Ronny Lau in Government Relations, [rlau@nea.org](mailto:rlau@nea.org).

**Any update on Social Security for educators?**

NEA supports HR 4540, the Public Servants and Fairness Act that would address Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP). It does not address the Government Pension Offset (GPO), but is a good first step. We also support the Social Security Fairness Act (HR 141/S 521) which would completely eliminate the GPO.

We tried to get full repeal of both GPO and WEP in some of the COVID legislation, and we will continue to look for ways to get legislation passed and signed into law that will help out retirees who have been negatively impacted by GPO and WEP.

**Can we get a pledge of affirmation in support of changing NEA bylaws to support an individual candidate outside of primary elections?**

This is outside the Legislative Committee's purview.