

The Advocate

THE FLORIDA EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

FALL 2024

A VOICE ON THE JOB
SAFER WORKPLACE
HIGHER WAGES
BETTER BENEFITS



Members Building Union Power

In the face of attacks from anti-union and anti-public education lawmakers, FEA members across the state are fighting back and our locals are growing stronger.

Local Profiles: A growing union family **PAGE 6**

The critical 2024 elections **PAGE 10**

Organizing at the worksite **PAGE 19**



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The 120,000 members of the Florida Education Association (FEA) include PreK -12th grade teachers and education staff professionals at Florida's public schools; professors, faculty, assistants and staff at the state's colleges and universities; retired members; education students and staff.

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On the cover

Liliana Ruido joined members of her local, the Broward Teachers Union, and other FEA locals at the 2023 Not Fooling Us March in Miami. Ruido's sign highlighted unions' role in ensuring 'a voice on the job, safer workplaces, higher wages and better benefits.' See page 6 for the story of how other locals in FEA's 'growing union family' are building member power.

FEA LEADERSHIP

Standing in Our Power



President Andrew Spar started teaching music at a Daytona Beach public school in 1994. He was elected president of Volusia United Educators in 2003, elected vice president of FEA in 2018 and president in September 2020.



Vice President Carole Gauronskas became the first education staff professional elected as an officer of the FEA in 2018. She previously worked as an ESE paraprofessional in St. Augustine, and was elected president of the St. Johns Educational Support Professional Association in 2015.



Secretary-Treasurer Nandi Riley previously taught English at Florida A&M University and high school in Gadsden County, where she first began her FEA journey in 1999. She was elected FEA secretary-treasurer in 2020.

Every day, you show up and do your best as a professional for your students, because you know that they are the center of your calling. And though you may “clock out” at the end of the day, you never stop being an advocate for students.

You have been placed right in the center of an intense battle that is raging in public education — a battle between our students’ needs and corporate, political agendas. This year, we have seen:

- the expansion of vouchers at the cost of public schools;
- the continuation of inaccurate history standards;
- the banning of books by fringe political groups;
- average pay that is ranked at #50 in the nation — and politicians adding insult to injury by falsely blaming our unions for this failure in their own political will;
- the elimination of diversity programs in our higher education system and the diminishment of sociology as a course offering; and
- the politicization of our profession.

And this has all happened against the backdrop of anti-public education politicians looking to take away your voice, your power and your ability to advocate for your profession.

We know that sometimes it feels like we are on an uphill journey that may never end. But the truth is we are educators, problem solvers, and even on our most difficult days, we never stop fighting for what we know is right. Today, we are standing in our power more than 120,000 members

strong, each of us united as the voice for public education excellence in Florida.

Our profession is made up of stories of challenges, hope and triumph. We’ve shared some of those stories in *The Advocate: Power Edition* that’s in your hands. Look no further than page 6 to see how we can win when we work together. These stories are your stories, and they exemplify what it means to be in public education. Our communities are better because you are in them, and our state is better off because of your work. Nothing, and no one, can change that.

As we have weathered these continued attacks on public education, our students and our professions, we have heard from our members in every corner of Florida. They have shared how they have won at the negotiating table and how they have changed the way they view organizing (page 19).

We know we can’t do this alone: our ability to stand united is the reason we continue to stand today. You can learn about the many wonderful organizations that are in this fight with us on pages 12-14.

As you read this edition, it is our hope that you will feel connected to your work, and that you will feel compelled to act. On page 10 we discuss the importance of elections and how you can hold Florida’s decision makers accountable. After all, at the local and state level, they are the ones deciding how and what, you can teach.

When we stand united in our power, we can face any challenge head on. **FEA**

FEA Members Recognized for Excellence in Their Field



High school science teacher receives FEA teaching award

Dr. Claudia Singkornrat, a science teacher at Pompano Beach High School and member of the Broward Teachers Union (BTU), was awarded the 2025 FEA Award for Teacher Excellence at the May FEA Governance Board meeting.

Dr. Singkornrat currently guides students in AP Biology, Anatomy, and Physiology. Her extensive twenty-plus-year career is a testament to her ability to adapt to her students' changing needs. Singkornrat, a true leader in her field, understands the importance of continuous learning and innovation — setting a high standard for all of us.

Pictured above: **Dr. Claudia Singkornrat** (center) is joined by fellow BTU members and leaders after receiving the 2025 FEA Award for Teacher Excellence at the May Governance Board meeting.



Flagler county bus driver represents Florida at NEA ceremony

Lakisha Ayers-White proudly represented Florida at the 2024 National Education Association (NEA) ESP of the Year Awards Ceremony. She is a member of Flagler Educational Support Professional Association and school bus driver for Flagler County Public Schools.

Lakisha's contributions extend far beyond her role as a bus driver. She has significantly impacted the lives of her students and peers. Recognizing the challenges faced by many of her colleagues, who often juggled two or three jobs, Lakisha took it upon herself to initiate a Thanksgiving food drive. This drive aimed to support those in need within the community, ensuring everyone could enjoy the holiday season.

Pictured above: **Lakisha Ayers-White** (2nd from right) was presented with the 2024 FEA ESP of the Year Award by FEA's officers at the FEA Delegate Assembly last October.



In July, FEA members, leaders and delegates advocated for public education during the world's largest deliberative body: the National Education Association's Representative Assembly, held this year in Philadelphia.



TEAR IT & SHARE IT

Post this in your break room and ask a colleague to join their union. Scan to join!



Unions raise the wages of their members by 10–15 percent.

Unions reduce race- and gender-based wage gaps.



Union wins have a "spillover effect," resulting in higher wages for non-union workers.



By reducing income inequality, unions contribute to overall economic growth and resilience.



Unions are enjoying their highest public approval rating in more than 50 years.



A study of 4,000 workers

found that **52%** of non-union workers want to be in a union.



But only **6%** of private sector workers are union members. That gap shows the need for policies that better protect workers' right to unionize.



NEA INFOGRAPHIC REPRODUCED WITH PERMISSION. ILLUSTRATION: SHUTTERSTOCK; SOURCE: "LABOR UNIONS AND THE MIDDLE CLASS," U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY, 2023.

Local Profiles: A Growing Union Family

Florida has the fourth largest economy in the United States. In fact, if Florida were a country, it would rank in the top 15 countries in the world for total economy. In spite of Florida's tremendous wealth, many of the people who make Florida run simply can't afford to live in the communities where they work. Average pay for teachers ranks #50 in the nation, and the pay for education staff professionals and higher education faculty often falls far short of a living wage.

FEA and our local unions look at these facts and see a big problem. We work every day to create a better life for educators and advocate for better pay and benefits, and more respect and autonomy.

Overcoming Obstacles

Too many of Florida's elected officials and their corporate donors, however, look at this situation and see a different "problem": our unions and union members like you. They know that if they can get rid of

Floridians. That is why over the past six years, Florida politicians have enacted three different bills explicitly aimed at taking away educators' collective voices through their unions.

First was 2018's HB 7055 which required 50% union density for public sector unions comprised of instructional personnel. Every impacted FEA local rose to the occasion and met the 50% density mark. This led to 2023's SB 256 that upped the mark to 60% and expanded the scope of the bill to include all public sector unions — except those representing law enforcement and firefighters — while also eliminating payroll deduction of union dues.

Again, FEA locals overcame the obstacles placed in their way. So, legislators changed the rules yet again this legislative session with SB 1746 that requires each member to fill out a state-mandated "membership authorization form" in order to be counted toward the goal of 60% density.

One thing is clear in the persistence of anti-public education politicians: they do not want you to keep fighting for your students or each other. Yet our locals are once again, rising to meet the challenge through their hard work and dedication. In fact, many FEA locals are not just surviving these attacks but are thriving in the face of them.

Recently, we interviewed presidents in three locals to get their insight on what it takes to be a thriving union in the face of unprecedented legislative attacks.

You've Got to Have a Good Team Around You

When Gov. DeSantis signed SB 1746 on March 22, 2024, the bill took effect immediately. For the Martin County Education Association (MCEA) that meant there was a limited window of opportunity to get members to sign the newly created



(Above) Members of the Martin County Education Association — joined by family and community members — advocating for better pay and working conditions by showing up in force for contract negotiations.

(Below) When April Rose-McCoy didn't get the response she was hoping for after speaking at a school board meeting, she asked her members to email the superintendent and school board members. Marion Education Support Professionals members responded with a flood of emails and Marion County School Board members agreed to walk in the shoes of ESPs.

membership authorization form required by the law. Within 10 days, more than 98% of MCEA members jumped through this newly created hoop and signed and returned their form.

As Matt Theobald, a government and economics teacher and president of MCEA put it, "The idea of wanting to take away teachers' voices really spurred a lot of people into action...they get that the redundancy and the extra work was designed to be burdensome. We're not stupid."

The groundwork for this success was built over the whole school year and was representative of the collective bargaining campaign MCEA implemented to ensure fair raises for all teachers.

One key to that successful campaign was constant communication. In MCEA, this took many of the usual forms such as newsletters, a bargaining survey and putting together bargaining organizing action teams— but it did not stop there. MCEA hosted monthly "teacher takeover" social events, had sounding boards which helped to facilitate one-on-one conversations, and even engaged the public through the local press and by working with community groups. Not only were MCEA members showing up at contract negotiations and demanding fair pay for themselves, community members who support public education also made their presence felt during negotiations and at school board meetings.

Together, these activities created an "[atmosphere in our local] that was more inclusive and gave people the opportunity to be involved," says Theobald. "Because there were so many people involved there was a buzz and that's what really ended up shifting the [school] board."

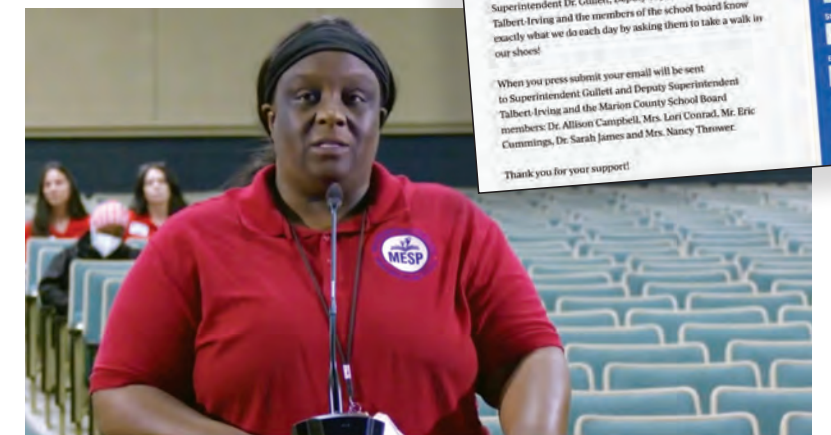
When MCEA settled their contract, they were able to obtain \$500,000 more than the school district's initial salary offer. As importantly, the bulk of the

money went toward increasing pay for experienced teachers who received up to a 6% raise to help combat salary compression that results from elected officials dedicating funds to almost exclusively raise salaries for new teachers.

Whether it comes to collecting paperwork to meet newly imposed burdens or getting teachers and the community to show solidarity by showing up to pressure the school board, Theobald is quick to give credit to the many people including executive board members and building representatives whose help was instrumental in these wins: "How do I get a week's worth of work done in a day and a half? The answer is you've got to have a good team around you. It's as simple as that."

You Can't Spell Respect without ESP

For a little more than a decade now, April Rose-McCoy has served the students of Forest High School in Ocala as a special needs paraprofessional. Currently, she also serves as president of the Marion Education Support Professionals (MESP) which represents more than 1,000 non-instructional school employees across three dozen job classifications.



“

The idea of wanting to take away teachers' voices really spurred a lot of people into action... they get that the redundancy and the extra work was designed to be burdensome. We're not stupid.”

— Matt Theobald, President,
Martin County Education Association

unions, they will be able to get rid of the loudest voice in the state that stands up and demands fair pay and treatment for working people. In turn, this will allow them to achieve their ultimate goal of keeping even more resources for themselves while ignoring the needs of everyday

Now more than ever, she knows that for her members and potential members alike it is important they “see we are doing something; we’re not just here and taking a seat. We are trying to fight for better working conditions for them.” For Rose-McCoy, this starts by making sure the superintendent and school board members truly understand what education staff professionals do.

responded with kind words of appreciation for the work of the education staff professionals who keep Marion County Public Schools running, but words were not enough for Rose-McCoy— she was seeking action. “You say you appreciate what we do, but do you even know what we do,” she wondered.

Determined to spur school board members into action, Rose-McCoy reached out to FEA for assistance with an email campaign and in short order, an online form was created that would allow MESP members to email the superintendent and school board members with just one click. The response from the district was almost immediate, catching even Rose-McCoy by surprise.

About an hour after the email campaign went live, the superintendent reached out to union leadership to tell them, “I’m pretty sure you know we’ve gotten a lot of emails. Just give us the date, the time and where we need to go.”

Rose-McCoy got to work scheduling opportunities for the higher-ups at the district level to spend a day with education staff professionals. Again, there was an immediate impact.

As school board members saw the workload faced by MESP members, they acknowledged a need for better pay and updated job descriptions. Reaction from MESP members and potential members was swift as well.

“It did spark something,” said Rose-McCoy. There has been increased engagement from MESP members and more questions from potential members looking to join. For members of the school community who have felt overlooked for so long, having the school board and superintendent take an interest in their jobs has made a real difference.

Heartened by the success, MESP is planning to make this an annual event to take place during ESP Week. When asked for any words of advice for a local union who might be interested in having their own “walk in our shoes” events Rose-McCoy says, “Don’t be afraid to shake



things up. We need to be in the community and we need to be seen.”

It’s All About Relationships

The lawmakers and special interest groups who seek to undermine unions and public education know that the most powerful weapon in their arsenal is division. They attempt to drive a wedge between those who care about Florida’s children and public schools and distract from the real issues our state faces.

In Florida’s Panhandle, the Walton County Education Association (WCEA) is showing what happens when division is rejected in favor of focusing on shared values of providing the best education possible to every child — no exceptions.

Kelley Stephenson teaches English language learners at Walton County High School and serves as president of WCEA. In talking about the relationships she maintains with her superintendent she says, “Monthly we sit at the same table and we have the same goals. We don’t always agree, but we walk away knowing what we talked about is going to better teachers, students and the district.”

It wasn’t always this way, though. Earlier in Stephenson’s tenure in Walton County she recalls things “were contentious. It was horrible. [I thought] ‘it has to be better than this.’” To turn this around Stephenson has made building relationships a priority. She focused on building relationships within WCEA, building relationships with the superintendent and human resources and building relationships with FEA.

Along with these stronger relationships has come positive change. Walton County has a starting salary of \$55,000. Beyond ensuring a living wage, WCEA takes their role as the collective voice of Walton County teachers seriously. As

Stephenson puts it “Our teachers know they have a voice in this county...They are going to be heard, and they are going to be validated.” This is why in spite of all of the legislation aimed at weakening teacher unions, WCEA didn’t just exceed the 60% membership threshold required by law, they currently have their highest membership ever.

The growth in WCEA is a testament to what happens when local unions reject attempts at division and instead work on bringing all stakeholders together with a common vision to meet the needs of educators and students. When asked why WCEA has been so successful, Stephenson’s answer is not at all surprising: “(The) number one (reason) is relationships.”

Walton County Education Association members demonstrate solidarity by packing the room to support their bargaining team (in green) as they work on negotiating their contract. When members stand united and speak with one voice, they can make big, positive changes for themselves and their students.



[We asked school board members to walk in our shoes. ‘As you visit the schools, spend some time with our ESPs and shadow them as they provide the services our kids and schools need every day’.]

— April Rose-McCoy, President, Marion Education Support Professionals

When Rose-McCoy spoke during the public input portion of the Marion County School Board meeting on February 27, her ask was clear: “Walk in our shoes. As you visit the schools, spend some time with our ESPs and shadow them as they provide the services our kids and schools need every day... remember, you can’t spell respect without ESP!”

Members of the school board

I’m sticking with my union!

As of the writing of this article, eight locals have held an election to recertify as a result of SB 256 and **each of those locals have won their election with an average vote of 95% of educators voting for their union.**



[Our union and the superintendent] don’t always agree, but we walk away knowing what we talked about is going to better teachers, students and the district.]

— Kelley Stephenson, President, Walton County Education Association

Our Unions are Growing Stronger

We know the legislative attacks are not done, but we will continue to use every attack on our unions as inspiration to grow stronger.

As these three locals — and countless others around the state — have demonstrated we will never back down, and we will never give up. The day is coming when Florida’s educators will have the pay, respect and resources they deserve, and when that day arrives it will be because our unions make us strong! **FEA**

Together, We Make the Future

Educators are united for positive change for their students and themselves

The Primary Election

In most professions, people do not get to choose their boss. As educators we have the power to elect the school board members and (in many districts) superintendents whose decisions directly impact our salaries, benefits, working conditions and so much more.

This August, we will use this power to elect leaders who will prioritize fair raises, respect teachers and education staff professionals, and work with us to stand

up against those who seek to restrict curriculum and rip books off of library and classroom shelves.

When policies come down from Tallahassee that are meant to cause chaos and sow division in public schools, it matters who is sitting on the school board.

We can elect candidates who will join with us and stand up for the best interests of students, educators and school communities. When we do that, we will have the necessary power to win fair raises for all employees, address ever-rising healthcare costs and be treated with the respect we deserve.

But the time to act is now! Many school board elections are decided in the August 20 primary election. For most school districts in Florida, that will be during the second full week of the school year for students—which is always a hectic time. Remember you don't have to wait until election day to vote! Voting by mail and early voting are both very convenient options that provide maximum schedule flexibility.

Learn more about all the ways you can cast your ballot by visiting FEA's Voter Toolkit at feaweb.org/elections.

FEA's Voter Toolkit

Need clarity on the changing laws regarding vote-by-mail? Have questions about where to vote? The FEA Voter Toolkit (FEAweb.org/elections) is the place to go. There you will find information on checking your voter registration, signing up to vote by mail, important election dates and how to make a plan to vote.

The toolkit also lets you see which candidates and proposed constitutional amendments have been endorsed by FEA and our local unions. Endorsements are based upon a commitment to our neighborhood public schools, colleges and universities, our students and to the people who work in public education. All endorsements are made by committees of FEA members like you. If you have questions about the endorsement process or would like to learn how you can get involved in the process in the future, reach out to your local president.

The General Election

As soon as the primary election ends, the general election gets into full swing. As in the primary election, it is important not

School Board Races

REMEMBER: You can vote for school board races regardless of your party affiliation. Because these races are non-partisan, they are open to all voters unlike the majority of races on the primary ballot.

BUT MAKE A PLAN TO VOTE NOW: Many school board elections are decided in the August 20 primary election. For most school districts in Florida, that will be during the second full week of the school year for students—which is always a hectic time.

VISIT FEA'S VOTER TOOLKIT at FEAweb.org/elections to learn more about all the ways you can cast your ballot.

PRIMARY ELECTION AUGUST 20, 2024

- JULY 6** Vote-by-mail begins

- JULY 22** Deadline to register

- AUG. 8** Last day to request a ballot by mail

- AUG. 10** Early voting begins*

- AUG. 17** Early voting ends*

- AUG. 20** Primary Election Day

GENERAL ELECTION NOVEMBER 5, 2024

- SEP. 21** Vote-by-mail begins

- OCT. 7** Deadline to register

- OCT. 24** Last day to request a ballot by mail

- OCT. 26** Early voting begins*

- NOV. 2** Early voting ends*

- NOV. 5** Election Day

* Check with your local supervisor of elections for possible additional early voting dates in your county.

to let the local races get drowned out in the noise of statewide and federal elections.

After all, the policies we most need to see changed in our public schools have been put into place by the 40 state senators and 120 state representatives who are elected at the local level. In order to address the teacher and staff shortage; make sure all students have the mental healthcare they need; strengthen the Florida Retirement System so that all educators can afford to retire with dignity; and repeal the 20-plus rules and laws surrounding teacher pay that have led to salary compression, we must support candidates who support public education.

When educators unite and vote for public education, we can make big, positive changes for ourselves, our students and our communities.

We know this because we have done it before.

Let's remember, the majority of students in the state live in a county where voters have chosen to raise their own taxes in order to provide more funding for public schools. We have the power to create a better future and we have the responsibility to use that by power by voting. **FEA**

Mark your calendar!

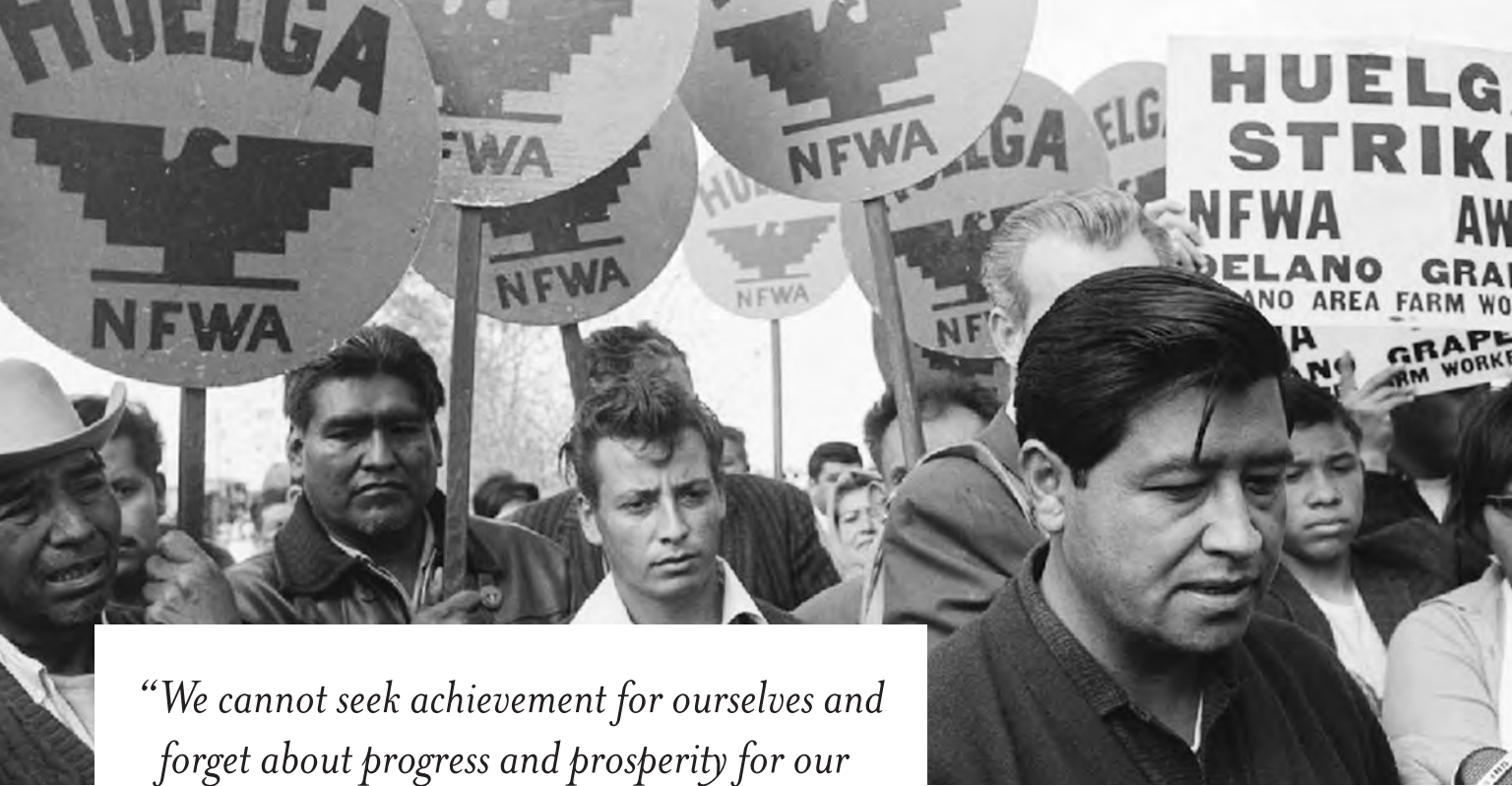


2024 Election Dates

Looking Ahead

Election day gets a lot of attention and rightfully so. But there is so much more to creating the change we need than participating in biennial elections. **FEA and our local unions engage with policy-makers year-round in attempts to create a better life for educators.** The power we have to make those changes is directly related to the number of people who commit themselves to being involved throughout the year — not just on election day.

To learn how you can become more involved in creating a brighter future reach out to your local president today and text **edactivist** to **22394** to stay informed!



“We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about progress and prosperity for our community ... Our ambitions must be broad enough to include the aspirations and needs of others, for their sakes and for our own.”

— Cesar Chavez

Cesar Chavez, bottom right, and the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) marched with the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC) during the Delano Grape Strike (*huelga*).

(Photo by Ernest Lowe. Reproduced under the Creative Commons BY-NC 4.0 License. Accessed at <https://tinyurl.com/chavez-calisphere> as part of the Ernest Lowe Photography Collection at the UC Merced Library and Special Collections.)

PARTNERSHIPS

The Power of the People

As members of the largest education union in the southeast, we know that public education is about more than what happens within the walls of a school. Ensuring our students have a successful education takes a community approach and requires us all to inventory the resources our communities provide- is there access to affordable housing, reliable public transportation, safe spaces and places, healthcare, fresh produce etc.?

FEA members have many concerns and each day, we are trying our best to juggle it all. But we also understand that in our fight for better lives for ourselves, our families and our students, we are part of a much larger movement – one that involves a variety of organizations, activists, non-profit groups and partners.

In this issue we'd like to honor the work of some of those who are committed to creating change for their communities and our state. This is by no means an exhaustive list. In fact, if there are statewide or national organizations missing that you follow, please send us a note at feacomm@floridaea.org so we can make sure to amplify their work! **FEA**

Equal Ground Education Fund, Inc.

Equal-ground.com

The **Equal Ground Education Fund, Inc.** is a community-centered organization engaging the rising American electorate through equal access to education about voting and empowerment. They focus their efforts around the goal of building and expanding current capacity in underserved communities. They have been a key voice in combatting voter suppression efforts in Florida.

Equality Florida

Eqfl.org

Equality Florida is the largest civil rights organization dedicated to securing full equality for Florida’s lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community. They led the fight against Florida “Don’t Say Gay” law and through their efforts, dismantled the most harmful pieces of the legislation.

Families for Strong Public Schools

Strongflschools.com

Families for Strong Public Schools is dedicated to centering students in education policy by unifying, educating, and empowering parents to support a strong public education agenda at all levels of government. Their #PublicSchoolStrong campaign is helping educators, staff and advocates build inclusive public schools.

Florida AFL-CIO

Flaflcio.org

The **Florida AFL-CIO** is made up of more than 500 local unions, 10 Central Labor Councils and represents more than one million union members — including all FEA members — retirees and their families. Their political work has set a standard in how Florida unions organize.

Florida Freedom to Read Project

Fftrp.org

The **Florida Freedom to Read Project** is committed to bringing together parent-led groups from across the state to protect every student’s right to access information and ideas. Their work by and with parents has helped educate communities across the state on the dangers of censorship.

Florida Immigrant Coalition

Floridaimmigrant.org

The **Florida Immigrant Coalition** is a statewide coalition of 83 member organizations and more than 100 allied groups working together for the fair treatment of all people, including immigrants. They continue to push for protections for Florida’s immigrant population and have been a steady voice on the issue of migrant-relocation.

Florida Policy Institute

Floridapolicy.org

The **Florida Policy Institute** is an independent, non-partisan, and non-profit organization dedicated to advancing policies and budgets that improve the economic mobility and quality of life for all Floridians. Their research has helped bring to light necessary conversations on the impact of school vouchers and children losing Medicaid coverage.

Organizational listings continued on next page »

Labor Campaign for Single Payer Health Care

Laborforsinglepayer.org

The primary mission of the **Labor Campaign for Single-Payer Health Care** is to increase and coordinate grassroots labor support for a single payer Medicare-for-All healthcare system in America, and is centered on the belief that health care is a fundamental human right and that the labor movement must take the lead in the fight for healthcare justice.

League of Women Voters

Lwvfl.org

The **League of Women Voters of Florida** is a nonpartisan political organization encouraging informed and active participation in government, working to increase understanding of major policy issues, and advocating for legislative changes and policies for the public good. They work to bring equity to voting for all Floridians and have been an active voice in Florida's redistricting and voter disenfranchisement issues.

Moms for Libros

[@Moms4Libros on Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/Moms4Libros)

Moms For Libros' work focuses on educating parents on the latest public school legislation in Florida and helping them reverse harmful laws — particularly around politically motivated censorship. Fed up with fringe and dangerous “moms” group that focus on division, Moms For Libros has been an active voice in the fight against unnecessary and harmful book bans.

Pastors for Florida Children

Pastorsforfloridachildren.com

Pastors for Florida Children is a non-partisan statewide group of clergy and laity advocating for fully funded public schools. They fought hard against the inclusion of unqualified chaplains in schools in Florida and remain committed to instead ensuring students have the proper professional resources available to them both in and out of the classroom.

Progress Florida

Progressflorida.org

Progress Florida is a nonprofit organization promoting progressive values through digital organizing, media outreach, and collaborating with Florida's leading progressive organizations. They are committed to educating Floridians on the laws that govern us and created the People First Report Card, which you can use to see how your state representatives and senators have voted on the issues that impact you most.

National Organizations You Should Know

The work your locals, FEA and our community partners do is boosted by the efforts of several national organizations. If you don't already follow their work, be sure to check out their social media channels and websites:

- American Federation of Teachers
- Healthcare NOW
- NAACP
- National Education Association
- PEN America

Is there statewide or national organization that we didn't list but you want us to know about? Send us a note at feacomm@floridaea.org so we can make sure to amplify their work! **FEA**

DELEGATE ASSEMBLY

2024 FEA Delegate Assembly

I'm sticking with my union!

SEPTEMBER 20-21, 2024 * ROSEN CENTRE HOTEL, ORLANDO



The Florida Education Association's 24th annual Delegate Assembly will once again bring together FEA leaders, members and activists to celebrate our strong belief in solidarity, the union movement, public education and the students we serve.

The Delegate Assembly is your opportunity to have a voice in the important decisions that will set the future course for our association and public education. Delegates — directly elected by members in FEA's 100+ local unions — will be able to debate and adopt policies for your statewide union and elect FEA's top leadership.

The candidates for FEA President, FEA Vice President, FEA Secretary-Treasurer and NEA Director Seat 1 are unopposed and are therefore elected by acclamation. Candidate statements and bios can be found on pages 16-17.



CAROLE GAURONSKAS
CANDIDATE FOR
FEA VICE PRESIDENT
(UNOPPOSED)

ANDREW SPAR
CANDIDATE FOR
FEA PRESIDENT
(UNOPPOSED)

NANDI RILEY
CANDIDATE FOR FEA
SECRETARY-TREASURER
(UNOPPOSED)

Position Statement

Without a doubt, the past few years have been very difficult for Florida’s public schools, colleges and universities. In fact, you might say the past few decades have been tough. While Florida’s voters believe in strong public schools, Florida’s lawmakers have clearly ignored them.

We all know that Florida’s students, teachers, staff, professors, grad assistants and retirees deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. We know that Florida, one of the wealthiest states in the nation can certainly do better than 43rd in the nation in per student funding. We know that Florida’s colleges and universities have ranked amongst the best in the nation because of the people who work there. Yet, new laws have made it harder and harder for us to do our jobs.

That is why team TAP (Transforming Action into Power) is stepping up to continue growing our power so that FEA and its locals can fight for better life for every member. Andrew, Carole and Nandi have been honored to work with our leaders and members throughout the state, and we look forward to what the next 3 years will bring. We hope we will see many of you at the DA in September.

Candidate Bio

Andrew Spar is an elementary music teacher who has served the past 4 years as President of the Florida Education Associa-

tion. Prior to serving as FEA’s President, Andrew served 2 years at the FEA VP and 15 years as President of the Volusia United Educators. Andrew also served 5 years as the Secretary/Treasurer of the Florida AFL-CIO. In addition to President of FEA, Andrew currently serves as a Vice President for the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), one of our national unions.

Carole Gauronskas is an ESE paraprofessional who has served as the FEA Vice President for the past 4 years. Prior to serving as VP, Carole served 2 years as the FEA Secretary-Treasurer and 4 years as President of the St Johns Education Support Professionals Association.

Nandi Riley is an English professor who has served as the FEA Secretary-Treasurer for the past 4 years. Prior to that Nandi was an English Professor at Florida A & M, served as a teacher and an educational staff professional.

Andrew, Carole and Nandi have decided to submit this joint Candidate Statement and short Bios to reduce the space needed for elections in this publication of the Advocate. This will allow for more pages to be dedicated to you, the members, who have so many stories of accomplishments, sorrow and triumph to tell. We hope to see many of you at the DA in September.



TERESA HODGE
CANDIDATE FOR NEA
DIRECTOR, SEAT 1
(UNOPPOSED)

Position Statement

I’m an associate professor of mathematics at Broward College and president of the United Faculty of Florida (UFF), the higher education statewide local of FEA. Since August 2002, I’ve actively served this union in various capacities at the chapter, local, state, and national levels.

- **Chapter:** Served as Grievance Chair, Bargaining Team member, Vice President, President & Chief Grievance Officer, and organizing fellow. Currently serving as an AFL-CIO delegate to the Broward County Central Labor Council (CLC).
- **UFF:** Served as Membership Committee chair, Senator, Council of Presidents member, Steering Committee member, and organizing trainer. Currently serving as UFF President.
- **FEA:** Served as a member of the Teacher Program Policy Council (2012-13). Currently serving as a delegate to the Delegate Assembly, Governance Board member, and member of the Executive Cabinet.
- **AFT:** Serving as a delegate to the 2024 Biennial Convention.
- **NEA:** Served on the Resolutions Committee. Currently serving as a delegate, member of several caucuses and councils, and as the interim NEA Director, Seat 1.

If elected to this 3-year position, I’ll bring the experience and knowledge I’ve obtained through many years of active union participation to represent the members of UFF and FEA at the NEA.

Candidate Bio

My name is Teresa M. Hodge and I’m from St. Thomas, US Virgin Islands (VI). I’m a graduate of the Charlotte Amalie High School in St. Thomas, VI where the motto is “To Excel Always.” To this day, I continue to actualize that motto in everything that I pursue.

After high school, I attended an historically black university in Hampton, VA, namely Hampton University (HU), on a band scholarship where I played the clarinet and became a section leader in the HU March-

ing Pirates. After changing my major from physics to mathematics, I earned my Bachelor of Arts degree in mathematics (1990) and then went on to earn my Master of Science degree in applied mathematics (1992). While in my graduate program at HU, I interned at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) on the Langley Air Force Base in Langley, VA. I worked in the unsteady aerodynamics branch (UAB) as an applied mathematician/programmer and, at that time, was the only Afro-Caribbean female in the UAB. After graduating from HU, I moved to Florida where I became a part-time mathematics instructor at Broward College. Today, I’m an associate professor of mathematics for mid-to upper-level mathematics and statistics courses.

My journey with union leadership development began in Fall 2010 when I was accepted into the National Education Association’s (NEA’s) Emerging Leaders Academy, a competitive year-long leadership training program for higher education union members that focused on various areas of union leadership. After successfully completing this program in Spring 2011, I continued to receive specialized training in the areas of bargaining, contract enforcement (i.e., grievances), and membership organizing for higher education institutions through the United Faculty of Florida (UFF), the higher education local of FEA. Since that time, I served on NEA’s Resolutions Committee, continue to serve on FEA’s Governance Board, became the President of UFF, and was recently elected to the FEA Executive Cabinet.

On a final and more personal note, I enjoy listening to great music, singing, eating great food, and doing awesome HIIT (high intensity interval training) workouts. I love all things ‘purple’ and adore volunteering at a local animal rescue group where I work exclusively with abused and abandoned cats. But what I cherish most of all is being the proud cat mama of seven wonderful rescue cats who have chosen me as their forever mom! With that said, kindly remember to “Adopt, Don’t Shop” should you choose to add a family pet.

Please note: Words ~~stricken~~ are proposed deletions; words in ***bold italics*** are proposed additions. Sections of the FEA Constitution and Bylaws that do not contain proposed amendments have not been reprinted and remain in effect.

Proposed Amendment to the FEA Bylaws related to annual dues

In accordance with Bylaw II Section 6(a), voting on the proposed bylaw amendment to modify FEA Active Member dues will be conducted by a “simple majority of delegates voting by stand-up vote.”

BYLAW II

Membership

Section 6. Membership Dues

- (a) The dues required for membership in FEA shall be established by the Delegate Assembly. A simple majority of delegates voting by stand-up vote shall be required to amend the dues amount stated in these Bylaws.
- (b) Members of FEA shall also be members of FEA’s local affiliate and shall (1) pay the dues and assessments on behalf of the local affiliate, FEA, and be a member of and pay the higher of the dues and assessments of the National Education Association or the American Federation of Teachers, to at least one such national organization as required by the policies of FEA and (2) shall make per capita payments required by the Florida AFL-CIO.
- (c) The dues for each category of membership will be based upon a member’s annualized salary, as follows:
 - (1) **Active Member Dues** – Annual dues for active members whose regular annual salary is equal to or greater than the lowest base salary established for instructional employees within any school district within the State of Florida shall be two hundred and thirty three dollars and seventy nine cents (\$233.79) for the ~~2024-2025~~ **2025-2026** school year. Such dues amount shall be referred to as “full dues.” Notwithstanding the above, a dues increase of at least 1.2% shall be considered annually by the Goals and Budget Committee beginning with the 2023-2024 fiscal year.

Organizing for Power: A Worksite Leaders ^{and coworker's} Guide

Members working together in the workplace to solve problems and enforce the contract is the foundation of a our strength and power as a union.

Some worksite leaders are called “stewards”, others “building reps”, others still are simply known as “the person other members go to with a question or issue.” Whatever the name, they share the same goal: building power through organizing, two-way communication and creating a culture of union activity at their worksite.

We spoke to worksite leaders and FEA Regional Specialists across the state about three critical elements of this organizing work — building relationships, organizing conversations and preparing for bargaining — and best practices they've developed.

*“We are stronger when we band together to achieve a common goal. **Worksite leaders are uniquely qualified to describe their worksite, the groups that exist, the leaders within their schools.** They can find out the things members are ready to take action on and help educate from within.”*

– Latonya Starks, 4th grade teacher and Vice President of Membership, Teachers Association of Lee County

1. Building Relationships

Worksite leaders agreed that building trust by building relationships is the cornerstone to their success in creating stronger unions. Here are their best tips for building long term relationships:

“ **Don’t be transactional.** Relating to people at a personal level is key to a worksite leader’s success. This doesn’t happen overnight.”

“ **Be visible** – have a bulletin board that is updated often and has your current contract posted. Ensure that your worksite team is known amongst your colleagues.”

“ **Listen!** Find out people’s motivations. Why have they chosen this profession? What drives them each day? What is their favorite part of their job? Take the time to get to know people.”

“ **Be open to those who may not think like you** and don’t give up on conversations that may be hard.”

“ Tie a potential member’s main concerns to our **collective strength.**”



A Palm Beach County Classroom Teachers Association member and her colleague discuss the power of being a union member during an organizing conversation.



2. Organizing Conversations

Any worksite leader knows that talking with their co-workers *in person* — not emailing or posting on social media — is the key to building strong relationships and trust. In addition to putting a human face to our union, organizing conversations help worksite leaders identify key issues, questions and objections.

Dealing with ‘no’

Teachers and education staff professionals have concerns, objections or just say “no” for a myriad of reasons, including misinformation from others and uncertainty. Trust us, we have heard it all!

It can be disheartening to feel shut down in a conversation. But worksite leaders across the state have found success with the A-A-R method: Affirm, Answer and Redirect. Here's an example of using A-A-R around the issue of dues:

Objection: “It costs too much to join.”

Affirm: Let them know you’re listening, you understand, and their feelings are valid. Don’t get mad at them—validate and educate them.

“I understand that. My partner and I are both teachers and we have paid dues for over 10 years.”

or

“Yes, this is an investment in our profession.”

Answer: Give a truthful, concise answer to the objection, preferably one that is an “I” message that comes from your personal experience.

“However, we knew our union was always fighting for us to be paid and treated fairly.”

Redirect: Redirect the conversation back to the message and the ask of the conversation and re-ask.

“We could use your help in order to fight for fair pay and treatment for all educators. You and your coworkers deserve respect. Will you join us today?”

3. The Power of Bargaining

When asked to describe what power looks like to them, here’s what leaders across the state had to say:

- “Supporting members and each other.”
- “Collaborating with each other, with members and groups in our communities.”
- “Showing up, listening and acting so we can make change.”
- “Fighting with everything you’ve got, and doing everything you can — win or lose.”

Overwhelmingly, the conversation on power focuses on our ability to stand and work together for our cause.

One of the best tools we have at our disposal is our ability to collectively bargain in ways that are specific, strategic, and action oriented.

This is because bargaining is the bedrock of our work: every protection in every local contract — from healthcare to planning time to safe working conditions and everything in between — comes from members’ hard work negotiating with the district year after year.

And true power at the negotiating table comes when rank-and-file members are active and engaged throughout the bargaining process.

While each bargaining session with a school district is unique and brings its own challenges (and opportunities), here are some quick tips from union members on how to embrace approaching bargaining like a campaign:

1. Know your “why” and build your strategy around this.
2. Identify a goal and what a win looks like.
3. Set internal target dates and have an escalation plan to create leverage at the table if management is dragging their feet.
4. Engage members using escalating and creative tactics and empower them to help your campaign move.

5. Activate worksite leaders to communicate with members internally and share their stories externally. Follow up with worksite leaders about how the campaign is progressing discuss ways to engage members.
6. Be vocal about what your top issues and concerns are.
7. Tactics and activity do not equal strategy, but keep your strategy in mind when developing your tactics.

We know change doesn’t happen overnight but working by working together, we can create the best working and learning environments. **FEA**

Strategic Bargaining: A Leon County Case Study

When teachers in Tallahassee needed planning time, members at multiple schools spoke to their worksite leaders, who were able to bring the issue to the bargaining table. The Leon County Teachers Association (LCTA) negotiated for protected planning time and successfully bargained additional protections in their contract.

LCTA President Scott Mazur discussed this local victory:

“Bargaining work doesn’t just happen at the table, it happens each and every day in small and large ways. When we show up to work, we are showing up for ourselves, our students and our professions.”

“Leon County teachers needed more time to spend helping students and ensuring they had the right learning environments. We realized that meant they needed planning time that was protected. These protections didn’t happen overnight but because of our collective power — enforcing the contract and utilizing its grievance process — we were able to advocate and negotiate for our professions and win at the bargaining table!”

Share your story!

Are you a member who has seen positive changes come from the bargaining table? Are you a leader who has a win to share? Share your story with the FEA Communications team at feacomm@floridaaea.org

Politicians Restrict the Freedom to Learn on Purpose. What Can We Do?

"A Republic, if you can keep it,"

Benjamin Franklin's words echo through history, reminding us of the democratic republic America aspires to be: a nation where informed and engaged citizens lead their communities.

Yet, Florida's laws mandating a distorted version of history stand in stark contrast to this ideal, preventing students from reaching their fullest potential.

Anti-public education politicians like Gov. DeSantis and Commissioner of Education Manny Diaz, Jr. have uplifted and championed policies that have only exacerbated the attacks on students' freedom to learn within Florida's schools. Policies such as:

- banning AP African American Studies,
- approving Black history curriculum that omits historical facts,
- restricting the instruction of race and racism, and
- anti-public school legislation which aims to further privatize education at the sake of public education.

These policies betray the very principles of equality, opportunity and freedom these decisionmakers (and others like

them) pretend to uphold. If we don't act against policies like this, we are certain to repeat the history Florida is trying hard to hide.

Genesis Robinson, Executive Director for Equal Ground Florida, says good citizens can be formed when we give back and support the collective.

Adora Obi Nweze, NAACP Florida State Conference President and a member of the NAACP's National Board of Directors, believes the government is not doing anything to help. They both highlight a collective — and deliberate — failure: the government's draining of public education funds and the ineffectiveness of voucher programs that enrich corporations at the expense of students and communities.

Obi Nweze and Robinson agree that when public schools thrive, we all see and feel the benefits. Conversely, when vouchers drain funds from public schools entire communities suffer.

There is a lesson to learn from investing in the front end rather than the back end. Fully funding public education for our K-12 students today can prevent public money in the future from being used to pay for programs that result from an under-resourced public education system.

Politicians want to divert \$2,790,276,311 from our public schools for private school vouchers. What could your community schools do with that \$2.7 billion?



Members at the Together We Rise Conference, which was established to help members navigate the changes brought about by laws that directly impact educators, students, and their families.

When public schools thrive, students enjoy improved outcomes. They have better grades, higher attendance, and higher rates of graduation. A well-educated workforce with a stronger sense of community also lays the foundation for a strong economy, an economy those elected constantly tout. Communities can also see a reduction in crime and an overall healthier lifestyle for their citizens.

Instead, politicians want to divert \$2,790,276,311 from our public schools for private school vouchers. What could your community schools do with that \$2.7 billion?

The fight for quality education is for the future of Florida's children and communities. It requires a united front from all members of our state- not just from educators who, like Obi Nweze, view teaching as a privilege. The solution lies in our collective power and community engagement at the national, state, and local levels. We must advocate, organize, and be visible—attending school board meetings, sharing stories, and working together to amplify our collective voice.

We all need to adopt the advocacy mindset because, as Robinson says, "We cannot wait for others." We have the responsibility to act, and the time is now.

Here are four action steps you can take to help advocate for all students in Florida:

1. **Learn more** about the history and modern-day policies allowing segrega-

Obi Nweze and Robinson highlight a collective — and deliberate — failure [in Florida]: the government's draining of public education funds and the ineffectiveness of voucher programs that enrich corporations at the expense of students and communities.

tion in our schools.

2. **Get involved locally** by attending school board meetings and/or joining education advocacy groups in your area, such as Moms for Libros (see more groups on pages 12-14).
3. **Volunteer** to support your community and public schools and bridge the educational divide. For example, is there a youth mentoring group you can join?
4. **Vote** to support candidates who prioritize public education.

A special thank you from FEA to Adora Obi Nweze and Genesis Robinson for their invaluable contributions that helped shape this article.

The Future of Higher Education in Florida



Teresa M. Hodge, President, United Faculty of Florida

Teresa M. Hodge is an associate professor of mathematics at Broward College and UFF President. She began her union leadership journey in 2010 and was appointed UFF President in 2023.



Dr. Adela Z. Ghadimi, Executive Director, United Faculty of Florida

Adela Z. Ghadimi, Ph.D., is the Executive Director of UFF. She began her union work as a three-term president of UFF-FSU-GAU and is committed to equity and inclusion in all her endeavors.

Higher education in Florida is at a critical juncture: elected leaders continue to devote their efforts to undermining the ability of public sector unions to exist and advocate for their members, and higher education has received an additional layer of attacks.

Professors, graduate assistants, and librarians across the state's colleges and universities have experienced an onslaught of attacks geared at undermining academic freedom, removing DEI initiatives from our campuses and attempting to dismantle the academy as we know it.

We have experienced the purging of whole fields of study from general course offerings, action being taken to regulate course content and censor diverse perspectives, the launching of investigations targeting trans students and employees, attacks on tenure, and bans on international collaborations with scholars in other countries deemed to be "of concern." Critical research advancements are on the line, and the passionate members of UFF care about the integrity of thought and academic freedom independent of ideological forces intruding on academia. UFF will continue to grow and strengthen membership not only to survive and maintain our chapters but also to preserve the integrity of higher education in Florida.

With the implementation of SB 256, and now SB 1746, UFF and other public sector unions have been forced to enter a new normal that requires us all to organize! To survive, UFF must embrace an organizing mindset while continuing our work in bargaining, contract enforcement, arbitrations, and unfair labor practices.

UFF chapter members are actively participating in the work of keeping their chapters functioning *and* thriving. This organizing empowers members to make



UFF members joined K-12 members from around the state at an FEA bargaining training earlier this year in Miami.

the changes they want to see at their respective institutions.

Being a union member spans race, ethnicity, gender, identity and political ideology, and connects members to their profession. Unions also allow for a better life, better healthcare and improve our members' ability to do their jobs. So, as UFF, we will stand together around the issues that matter to our members and students, and ultimately, we will win.

A line in the song "Nina Cries Power" by singer-activist Hozier, featuring Mavis Staples, says, "It's not the waking, it's the rising."

So, we reinforce our commitment to the hard work ahead and adjust to the reality of this new normal because, at UFF, we will rise to the challenges that come our way... together.

The faculty and graduate assistants who make up UFF will continue to advocate for all members of the higher education community in the face of extremist, authoritarian attacks from Florida's executive and legislative branches. We will emerge stronger together for our members, the public good and the academy's integrity. **FEA**

Connect with the United Faculty of Florida online at myuff.org or on Facebook @UnitedFacultyofFlorida.

Building Connections Through Professional Development



FEA's Professional Development and Educational Research Department is on the move. As you begin your professional development journey for the new year, you will notice a rebranding of some of the trainings that you have grown to love and new course offerings throughout the year. As a union member, you have the opportunity to engage with others to enhance your personal goals, student achievement and school climate.

Together We Rise

In April, the FEA PD department presented the Together We Rise Conference 2024. It was a day of professional learning, networking and fellowship. The conference was designed to help educators navigate the recent changes to Florida's laws that directly impact public education. Many of the sessions like Celebrating Black History, Beyond Creating Equity, True Colors, In My Culturally Responsive Era, and the Student FEA Educator Panel were facilitated by members of FEA. More than 130 educators attended the conference and indicated they wanted more professional development opportunities on these topics.

In response, the FEA PD department will continue the work started at the conference by launching the Together We Rise Virtual Series. The series will provide online sessions focused on best practices for operating within the current political climate, strategies for fostering inclusive schools and workplaces, and monthly celebrations of diverse groups. The goals

of the series are:

- To bring together educators to learn best practices and strategies for creating inclusive learning environments.
- To provide opportunities for participants to build relationships with fellow union educators.
- To expose members to organizing by utilizing professional learning to engage and recruit members locally.

During the summer the Together We Rise Design Team — made up of member volunteers — will work to develop the session topics and guest speakers for the series. The Together We Rise Virtual Series is scheduled to kick off in September, along with the FEA PD 2024-25 schedule of events.

Literacy Changes the World

FEA Professional Development and Educational Research has also been working diligently to create strong professional development trainings in literacy.

We are proud to share that we have earned approval for 'multi-district use' on our reading endorsement course matrix from the Florida Department of Education and Just Read Florida. The reading matrix outlines the course materials and assignments aligning to the indicators for each of the five competency courses needed to earn a reading endorsement. All our locals are welcome to use our matrix in their district approval process.

FEA members from across the state gathered at the inaugural Together We Rise conference to share ideas, knowledge and best practices — all with the goal of learning and growing.

In addition to the reading endorsement matrix and courses, our team of experts in the areas of literacy and exceptional student education have worked hard to develop a strong course that covers the 40-hour Reading and the 20-hour ESE course material needed for recertification points. This course aligns to the FLDOE rule 6A-4.0051 which focuses on renewal and reinstatement of a professional certificate.

Don't forget, to offer FEA PD courses at your local, you will need to have your trainers take our train-the-trainer courses when available. These courses provide the professional development training required to be able to offer these courses at your local. Reach out to your local president and feaprodev@floridafea.org for more information. **FEA**

Get to know your FEA Professional Development team:

- **Dr. Primrose Cameron**
Director
- **Dr. Sarah Fulk**
PD Specialist
- **Donna Miller**
PD Administrative Assistant
- **Blanca Sotelo**
PD Specialist

Educators of Tomorrow



Letita Smith,
President, Student
Florida Education
Association

Letita Smith is a recent graduate of Florida A&M University with a bachelor's degree in elementary education.

To learn more about Student FEA go to: FEAweb.org/studentfea

***Ain't no power
Like the power of the union
'Cuz the power of the union don't stop!***

These were the words to a chant used at the 2023 AFT Civil, Human, and Women's Rights Conference in Houston. Being a part of this event was pivotal for me as an aspiring educator. There was a moment when AFT and NEA members joined Texas educators, to hear AFT President Randi Weingarten champion education rights in Texas. Many people were marching and expressing their frustrations about teachers losing their ability to teach without the interference of politics. The news was broadcasting the march live and while, up until then, I had only seen this on TV, I was there, holding signs and marching along with other educators. It was an incredible testament to our power and a core memory for me. It proves that even as an aspiring educator, our union has our back and will continue to fight for you as you continue your career in education.

The future of education is bright, with aspiring educators at the forefront of this transformation. The Student Florida Education Association (SFEA) provides crucial support, advocacy and professional development opportunities. FEA empowers new educators to confidently face the profession's challenges, preparing them to inspire and educate the next generation. As SFEA members, they are not just participants in the educational system but pioneers of change. FEA is committed to supporting them at every step, ensuring tomorrow's educators are empowered, inspired, and ready to make a significant impact.

When I started FAMU field clinicals, I knew I was required to sign up for NEA coverage while in the classroom. At that time, I didn't fully comprehend its benefits, but I quickly learned the value of what I



Letita Smith joined AFT, NEA and Texas educators at a rally during the October 2023 AFT Civil, Human, and Women's Rights Conference in Houston. Smith's sign, "Seen enough, heard enough, had enough!", demonstrated the spirit of joyful resistance the conference was centered on.

had signed up for. NEA coverage provided me with a safety net, ensuring that I was protected in case of any unforeseen circumstances during my field clinicals. But more importantly it provided me professional connections to my future career. When I received an email stating that it was time for Student NEA to start looking for new officers, I jumped at the chance.

My first SFEA conference blew me away with the knowledge I was able to take away- everything from how to have 1 on 1 conversations to the consequences of having a banned book in a classroom library.

Our union fights for us all, and if we can get more students to hear and see the things our union fights for daily, it could help us create meaningful change for the students we will someday serve. By immersing themselves in advocacy and activism, our SFEA members foster a stronger sense of community and empowerment, seeing firsthand how collective action can drive meaningful change. SFEA members are also proactive and informed citizens, who are equipped with valuable leadership, negotiation and civic engagement skills. I encourage all aspiring educators to rally with us. Your engagement today shapes the educational landscape of tomorrow. Join SFEA's mission to empower and enact the change we envision for our future educators! **FEA**

Sharing the Wisdom of Retirees



Janice Poirier,
President, FEA-
Retired, Ed.S.

Janice Poirier is president of FEA-Retired. The state-wide network allows retired educators to stay connected with fellow National Education Association and American Federation of Teachers members and programs, and to continue their advocacy for public education.

Learn more about FEA-Retired online at FEAweb.org/fea-retired. To join, contact Carol Drury, FEA Member Specialist, 850-201-2976 or carol.drury@floridafea.org

Hey, new teachers in Florida, congratulations on joining this amazing profession, one that I have loved for 38 years! I've taught every grade in elementary school, and I can tell you it's been an incredible journey. Teaching has changed since I started, but one thing remains constant—the mix of great and challenging days. Here are my words of wisdom for you as you begin this exciting adventure.

- **Remember the special moments.** Seeing a student's eyes light up when they finally 'get it' or when the spotlight is on them makes all the difference in the world. Those were moments that were special to me and gave me hope to keep going.
- **Put your best foot forward for lesson plans.** I always experienced some anxiety with evaluation, but in the end, I surprised myself. If you ensure you have great lesson plans from the objective to the closing, your lessons and evaluations will be a breeze. But remain flexible, allowing for priceless "teachable moments." When you meet the students where they are, your lessons will flow and make everybody happy. I have all the hope in the world, so please hang in there, do your best for your students, and have fun.
- **Remain flexible throughout your career; you never know what's next.** After my career ended in 2017, I had no idea what I was going to do. I considered being a substitute, returning to the classroom, or volunteering. One day, I had a "light bulb moment" when I received a call. That call was to ask me to run as president of FEA-Retired. That scared me to death. I took a risk and won the election. I have been the

FEA-Retired president for six years, and I will continue to be an advocate for you and our students.

- **Teaching is a learning process for you, too.** Even after retiring, I reflect on my past lessons, always thinking about how I could have done better or what I should have done. Teachers today have access to so many better ways of teaching a lesson than I did. With the rapid advancements in teaching methods and technology, embracing change and adapting is essential. There will always be others excelling in different areas, but the key is to do your best with the resources available. Keep evolving alongside the educational landscape, and don't hesitate to incorporate successful strategies you observe in others.
- **Stand with your profession.** The landscape has certainly changed. As a teacher, I never had to be concerned about whether a book I read would be interpreted by others as inappropriate. Being a union member is more important than ever. Joining the union was the first thing I did after signing my teacher contract. My mother, an ESP, encouraged me and my sisters — also teachers! — to join the union.

We must stand together, lobby in the legislature and speak at school board meetings because we are the union. Unions genuinely do make life better for us. Since retirement, I now realize how much my healthcare has been improved because of my membership in my union. It's difficult to imagine why some are not union members because I've always been one. Being a member is more significant than the boxes we are placed into daily. It spans race, gender, identity, and political ideology. Being a union is about working together despite the differences, and that's what we do.

I hope you enjoy your new career. I found immense fulfillment in my teaching career because I knew that every day, I was shaping the minds of my students and contributing to the future. I'm confident that you'll experience the same sense of purpose. Remember, I have all the hope in the world for you and I know you'll be great teachers. **FEA**

FEA-Retired Members in Orlando during their two-day January meeting, which included leadership training focused on sharing ideas to grow membership, and an executive board meeting to conduct the business of FEA Retired.



Florida Education Association
213 S. Adams St.
Tallahassee, FL 32301

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Association

got issues?



FEA members are engaged in all aspects of public education. We want to know what issues drive your commitment.

Scan the QR code and let FEA know what you care most about!