Giving Until it Hurts

As educators continue to deal with the enormous challenges posed during the pandemic, there are many people that may not understand why so many in our ranks are concerned with extending the school year. While this is not true for all in our profession, there are substantive and valid reasons for those concerns. I have shared in the past that my husband, Patrick, and I both taught middle school for twenty-five plus years. I would often say in jest that we were not able to participate in summer learning or extended calendar days simply because we were usually in the fetal position by May. This statement was, of course, an attempt at lightness and humor, even though there was some serious truth to the concept. The reason we were in the fetal position or curled up in a protective ball was that we could not have taught any more days, or even been at school, because we had already provided our students with everything we had. That is not a joke or lighthearted.

Patrick and I both taught in NM middle schools that were 100% Title I, free and reduced lunch schools (due to so many children living in poverty) with lots of students who were English Learners and many others who had various disabilities, from behavior issues, to autism, learning disabilities, blindness, hearing loss etc., just like many of you. During the schoolyear, we GAVE EVERYTHING we had to our students, colleagues, and administrators. We did experience great joy and satisfaction at times. However, we also listened, we counseled, we fed, we protected, we saw abuse and neglect, we experienced suicide, death and grief, we saw children with no advocate, educators with no support, we convinced, we bargained, we mediated, we motivated, we inspired, we suffered, we disciplined, we overcame barriers, we spent our own money, we taught, we advocated for students, educators, and parents, we learned, we stretched our skill sets, we felt targeted, we felt helpless, we felt alone, we felt abandoned, and we felt overwhelmed and bullied in a system that didn't seem like it really wanted to fix what was broken with it. We wondered where God was in a Godless system. We pumped stress hormones (cortisol) through our veins along with too much caffeine. Finally, we were scared that we were shortening our own life spans due to the pressure, secondhand trauma, and stress that we were surrounded by at school on a daily basis. In addition, we felt guilty that we were not emotionally or physically available to our own four children, parents, and siblings when they needed us.

In contrast, during the summer, we took necessary time to heal, reflect, rest, sleep, exercise, appreciate silence, eat home-cooked meals, reconnect with our children, parents and families, nurture our beliefs and souls, and build up the strength to do it again.

Several schools across New Mexico will participate in an extended calendar this year and we stand in support of those educators and students. However, many educators and families raised concerns about extending that same calendar and we stand in support of them as well. It is my hope that this article provides a better explanation of why not all educators, students and parents want to participate in longer school years and some of the reasoning behind it.

True school transformation will take a much greater degree of resources and staff to ensure that students are learning all the days in the current calendars. Let us work on fixing the 180 plus instructional days before, or at least simultaneously, as we continue to add more or longer days moving forward.
Providing Pay Equity and a Living Wage for All School Employees

NEA’s Rankings and Estimates report, which provides thousands of education statistics, has been produced by the National Education Association for more than 70 years. You can see some valuable information that is specific to New Mexico and some of the ground we have gained through our collective voice and political activism. However, we are not done yet. We must continue to be competitive with the states around us to continue recruiting and retaining quality educators. Investing in salaries is important and helps address many financial issues for those working so hard to change the lives of our students. However, it is not enough when crossing the state border in all directions can yield significant increases in pay. And we must continue to take care of our veteran educators or that wisdom and experience will continue to find new roads elsewhere. Finally, our underappreciated and vital Educational Support Professionals must move towards a compensation that recognizes their true impact to our students.

We call on the NM Legislature to fully fund the statutorily required increase to Statewide Teacher Licensure levels to $45,000 for Level One; $55,000 for Level Two; and, $65,000 for Level Three, and ensure all experienced teachers at each level are similarly respected by enacting an across-the-board minimal increase of ten percent (10%). We also call for a $15 minimum wage for school employees, including but not limited to school secretaries and other administrative support staff, food service, transport, and custodial employees.

Also, while we are progressing in some areas, it’s simply not enough when dealing with students in poverty. Approximately 25% of our children live in poverty and that is too many. Not only does that poverty impact nearly every aspect of their personal well-being, but it’s also important to note that it costs at least 40% more to educate a student in poverty to the same standards as a more affluent student – and this is simply because they lack the same enrichment resources.

Hear what the Chair of the Senate Education Committee says about educator pay raises below in the conversation with Senator Soules.

Read Funding Gaps Report

NM State Rank
Take Some Time for You and Your Family

After all that you have been through, all the strength and dedication for your students, isn’t it time for your own personal recess? Time to reconnect with family and friends while making some terrific memories along the way? Planning a summer break has never been easier (or cost effective) thanks to the exclusive content provided by NEA Member Benefits.

One of our valued members recently booked a trip to Las Vegas and was able to save nearly one thousand dollars in the hotel booking alone. Maybe that extra money can now be used in a different way!

Start Planning

From the Roundhouse to Your Schoolhouse

We invite our members to watch a recorded interview with State Senator William Soules. We hope with this lively interview that you will get a better understanding of where our legislators stand on the issues of educator recruitment and retention, sufficient public school funding and the progress towards fulfilling the Yazzie/Martinez educational sufficiency lawsuit.

NEA-NM Interview with Senator Soules
Summer Leadership Academy – Building Strength for Stronger NM Schools

This past year tested school communities across the state, from parents, students, and educators, alike. Your Local NEA-Affiliate chapters also stepped up and fought for MOU’s and contracts that addressed many challenges. This summer is an important time to reflect and appreciate gains made but also assess the organizational strength of Local Affiliates and strategize to build the Locals that serve our members best. There is a Summer Leadership Academy on June 16th and 17th where important conversations and planning will take place and we welcome members to participate. If interested, please reach out to your Local Affiliate leaders and ask how you can register. If you aren’t sure who they are and want to attend, you can also email the State Organizing Specialist Marco Nunez.

Email Marco

Teacher Salary Project Survey

The Teacher Salary Project is a nonpartisan organization committed to working with everyone in the country to ensure that teaching becomes the prestigious, desirable, financially viable, and professionally exciting job we all know it needs to be. The Teacher Salary Project builds public awareness and political will for higher teacher pay by sharing teachers’ stories, highlighting research and data, lending thought partnership, and advocacy.

Please participate in this important survey to make sure your voices are heard. Also, take note that the survey window will close Monday, June 7th.

Take Survey
Take Note of...

- June - Pride Month, NEA's Season of Justice
- July 5 - Independence Day, NEA-NM Offices Closed
- July 23 - All Committee Day
- Check out NEA's Pop-Up Practices on our webpage

Putting Kids First • Promoting Professional Excellence • Improving the Well-Being of School Employees

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