



Contact George Strout
Telephone 603-224-7751 x308
Cell 603-867-3104
Email gstrout@nhnea.org
Website www.neanh.org

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NEA-NEW HAMPSHIRE ANNOUNCES LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES FOR 2016

CONCORD, NH — NEA-New Hampshire, the state's largest union representing 16,000 public school professionals, announced their 2016 legislative priorities today. The Association plans to actively and fully support upcoming legislation that promotes these priorities.

- **Ensure All New Hampshire Public School Students Have a Qualified, Certified Teacher in Their Classroom**

Current law requires that only 50% of teachers at public charter schools in New Hampshire be certified or have three years of experience, and there is no requirement that those teachers that are certified be certified in the subject matter that they teach.

"NEA-NH believes that all New Hampshire students have the right to be taught by qualified, credentialed teachers. We fully support HB 1120 that requires all teachers at a public charter school in New Hampshire are credentialed," said McGilvray.

- **Ensure Access to the Family and Medical Leave Act, FMLA, for Education Support Professionals**

To be eligible for FMLA leave, an employee must have worked 1,250 hours in the preceding 12 months. Due to cutbacks, many Educational Support Professionals have seen their hours rolled back to the point that even if an ESP worked every hour available to them, they would never reach 1,250 hours, and thus never qualify for unpaid leave. NEA-NH supports setting the eligibility level for hourly school employees at 900 hours in the previous 12 months. This would allow employees working 25 hours a week access to this important benefit.

- **Establish a Death Benefit for School Employees Killed in the Line of Duty**

Following the murder of Officer Michael Briggs in 2006, the New Hampshire Legislature passed Michael's Law, which provided a death benefit of \$100,000 to the family of any police officer or firefighter killed in the line of duty. Like police and firefighters, educators find themselves on the front line of violent situations, often putting themselves between the assailant and their students.

"Beyond being trained and expected to act in an emergency, we know New Hampshire educators will instinctively move to protect the children in their care, putting themselves in harm's way when the need arises. This level of dedication, caring and protection creates the need for this legislation."

- **Provide a Supplemental Thirteenth Check to NHRSC Retirees**

The average retired teacher in New Hampshire is almost 70 years old and receives a pension of \$21,401. No teacher has received a cost-of-living adjustment in over three years, and there has not been a full COLA for all members in over seven years.

NEA-NH supports the Retirement Security Coalition's proposal that would allow all retirees to receive a supplemental thirteenth check that would benefit them in this time of rising medical, prescription, and housing costs. This supplemental check would only be provided when the return on the New Hampshire Retirement System's investments exceeds the projected rates, and would be provided based on years of service to New Hampshire retirees to ensure that those who need the supplemental benefit most receive the assistance they need.

"This supplemental benefit will not only benefit retirees, but New Hampshire's economy in general," said McGilvray. "Every dollar invested in the pension system supports \$7.55 in total economic activity in the state."

- **Guarantee Disabled Retirees Get a Fair Hearing Before the Retirement System**

Under current law, if a hearing officer recommends that a member's disability retirement claim should be denied, the same person who made the initial determination to deny that claim also hears the appeal. "That's just not fair," said McGilvray. "Any appeal should be heard by a new hearing officer, one who does not bring biases to the table."

"In addition to these priorities, NEA-NH will continue to advocate for well-funded and cared-for public schools, learning opportunities that begin by age 4, well-rounded curriculum, and the support and respect all education professionals deserve."

For more than 150 years, NEA-New Hampshire has been committed to improving student achievement in New Hampshire public schools, providing learning opportunities for teachers and students, and ensuring that all students are ready to learn. "Our unified belief in opportunity, respect and fairness drives our legislative and leadership teams who work tirelessly for our members," said Scott McGilvray, President of NEA-New Hampshire.

The complete document, *Priorities for New Hampshire Public Education, 2016*, is available on our website in pdf format.

About NEA-New Hampshire:

Founded in 1854, the New Hampshire State Teachers Association became one of the “founding ten” state education associations that formed the National Education Association in 1857. Known today as NEA-NH, and comprised of more than 16,000 members, our mission, to advocate for the children of New Hampshire and public school employees and to promote lifelong learning, remains true after more than 150 years. Our members are public school educators in all stages of their careers, including classroom teachers and other certified professionals, instructors at public higher education institutions, students preparing for a teaching career, education support personnel and those retired from the profession.

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