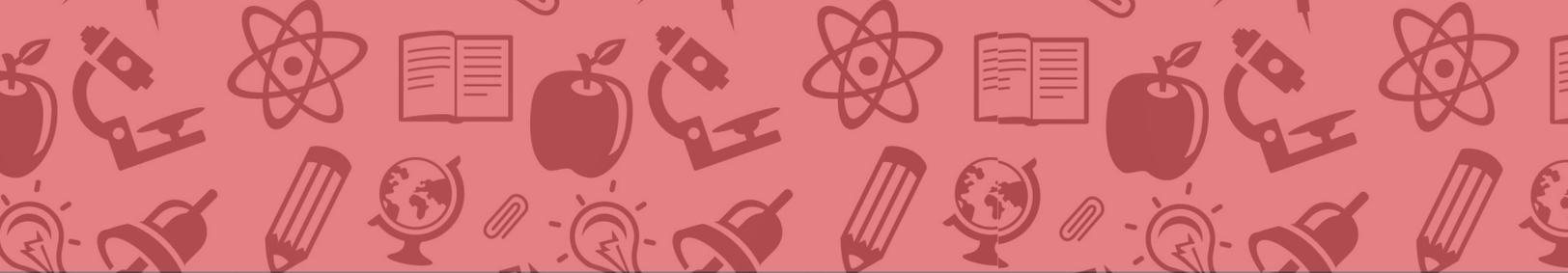


# Priorities for New Hampshire Public Education

# 2016



**We know that strong public schools are the best way to give every student the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their zip code.**



**F**or 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.

To that end, we defend and improve the integrity of our profession in NH by our legislative efforts in Concord and Washington. Attacks on education, opportunity and fairness are not ancient history – they happen every year, and we believe 2016 will be no different. As this legislative season restarts, we have prepared our legislative priorities and agenda, and plan to actively support the following legislation to the fullest.

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

Ask educators why they work in schools and most will respond instantly: they believe in children. Education isn't just a job, it's our calling. Educators strive to connect with each child, discover their passions, and unlock their potential. They also keep them safe, placing themselves in harm's way to protect the students in their care, and in some cases have paid the ultimate price in doing so.

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 often find themselves on the front line of violent situations, often putting themselves between the assailant and their students. Since 2013, our nation's schools have averaged nearly one violent criminal situation resulting in death a week. FBI statistics increasingly show education environments among the top two settings for incidences of mass violence. New Hampshire has been fortunate that none of them have happened in our state, and NEA-NH hopes that this benefit is never needed.

Beyond being trained and expected to act in an emergency, 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.

A bill creating this benefit has already been filed, **LSR 2016-2565** - "Establishing a death benefit for a school employee killed in the line of duty," sponsored by Representative Kathy Rogers (D) and co-sponsored by Representatives Paul Berch (D) and Joseph LaChance (R).

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

The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) was a major first step in the effort to recognize and support the work of caring for families. FMLA guarantees certain workers unpaid job-protected leave for up to 12 weeks to bond with a new child, care for a seriously ill family member, recover from one's own serious health condition, or to deal with certain obligations (including child care activities) arising from a spouse, parent or child being on, or called to, active duty in the military. The FMLA also provides up to 26 weeks of unpaid leave for workers whose spouse, child, parent or next of kin is a seriously ill or injured member of the armed services.

FMLA has helped millions of Americans, but far too many workers in the United States are ineligible for FMLA leave or cannot afford unpaid leave.

To be eligible for FMLA leave, an employee must have worked 1250 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 member worked every hour available to them, they would never reach 1250 hours, and thus never qualify for unpaid leave. NEA-NH has proposed 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.

**LSR 2016-2813** - "Relative to eligibility of school district employees for Family and Medical Leave Act coverage," has been filed by the bill's sponsor Senator Donna Soucy (D).

## 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.

Security in retirement is a promise that the state made to its workers who decided to enter public service. For years, NEA-NH has worked with the New Hampshire Retirement Security Coalition to provide public sector workers with the retirement they deserve.

This term, the Coalition has proposed a plan 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. Every dollar invested in the pension system supports \$7.55 in total economic activity in the state.

**HB-1449** - "Relative to additional temporary supplemental allowances for retired members of the retirement system," has been filed by the bill's sponsor Representative Robert Elliot (R).

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

Current law requires that only 50% of teachers at charter schools in New Hampshire be certified or have three years of experience. Additionally, 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. **HB 1120** requires that all teachers at a charter school in New Hampshire are credentialed.

We believe that all public schools must be held ac-

countable to the same high standards of transparency and equity to ensure the success of all students.

As taxpayer-funded schools, charter schools must operate in a manner that is both transparent and accountable to the families and communities they serve. This includes meeting the same quality standards for student outcomes, fair treatment of all students, and open and observable use of taxpayer dollars the public insists upon for all other taxpayer-funded schools.

**HB 1120** requires that all chartered public school teaching staff to possess a valid New Hampshire teaching credential. The bill is sponsored by Representative Deanna Rollo (D) and co-sponsored by Representatives Mel Myler (D), Kathy Rogers (D), Mary Gorman (D), Tim Horrigan (D), June Frazer (D), Cindy Chase (D), and Janet Wall (D).

## Guarantee Disabled Retirees Get a Fair Hearing Before the Retirement System

When a member is faced with the realization that they may have to retire from a job they love due to a disability, they deserve to have their claim heard in a fair manner.

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 is not fair.

An application for disability retirement is not a simple process. The applicant can be subject to an independent medical examiner, and then a six to nine month waiting period to see the results of their claim. After navigating the complex application procedure, a member should not have their final plea heard by an hearing officer predisposed to rubber stamp their own decision. Any appeal should be heard by a new hearing officer, one who does not bring biases to the table.

**LSR 2857**, sponsored by Senator Dan Feltes (D) and Senator Donna Soucy (D), will ensure that is exactly what happens, providing a substantial benefit to those affected by this process

## Ongoing Priorities

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.



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**For additional information on  
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