The 2020 Utah State Legislature wrapped up on March 12, 2020. USEA tracked, and acted on, many bills that affected Education Support Professionals, public education, and our students. USEA and its allies fought against bills that negatively impacted public education overall and worked together on legislation that supports our students. However, there was some legislation introduced that directly impacted Education Support Professionals.

House Bill 148 and House Concurrent Resolution 5 were two pieces of legislation that aimed at supporting and recognizing Education Support Professionals. HB 148, Utah Recognizing Inspiring School Employees Award Program, established a program for Utah to submit a nominee for the federal Education Support Professionals. HB 148, Utah Recognizing Inspiring School Employees Award Program.

Specifically, the largest association in the state representing education support professionals in K-12 schools will submit an annual nominee to the Governor of Utah. They will then submit this nominee to the federal director of education for a final nomination. Utah is at the forefront of states passing legislation to enter this federal program.

The other piece of legislation USEA supported is House Concurrent Resolution 5, or HCR 5. This establishes a Utah Education Support Professionals Day to be held on Wednesday the week before Thanksgiving. Previously, the Governor of Utah would make a formal proclamation for Utah ESP Day. Utah ESP day will now be listed in state calendars as an opportunity for citizens to recognize all that ESP’s do for our state and its public education students. We would like to thank our allied organizations in the public education sector who supported these bills. We also would like to thank Representative Lee Perry and Senator Lyle Hillyard for sponsoring these pieces of legislation!

Education funding increased overall as the legislature approved a 9.7%, or $331 million, increase for public schools. These increases include:

• $50.6 million to fully fund student enrollment growth.
• $20.6 million added to the Teacher and Student Success Account to fund the Teacher and Student Success Program.
• A 6% increase in the Weighted Pupil Unit (WPU).
• $30 million one-time money to address school-level priorities like one-time student and school safety priorities.

Other pieces of legislation USEA tracked and acted on are:

• HB 332: Special Needs Scholarship Amendment. While noble in name, this piece of legislation sets up a scholarship program where companies and individuals can receive tax credits for donating to a private scholarship fund. Only students with an individual education plan (IEP) can qualify for these scholarships to private schools and their programs. However, to accept a scholarship parents would have to waive their federal protection law rights.
• SB 119S1: School Accountability Amendments. This piece of legislation stops letter grades from being assigned to schools from the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 school years. We believe this system is unnecessary and puts unfair grading to schools. SB 119S1 could start the process of altering this system altogether as seen in HB 175 Education Accountability Amendments.

USEA watched this bill intently as it added new language on how a Local Education Agency (LEA) and their personnel could handle a student using or possessing an electronic cigarette or “vape” device. Initially, the responsibility would be on LEA personnel to confiscate and dispose of these electronic cigarette devices. USEA and other education associations were weary of this language as this responsibility would fall onto all educators. However, this bill was changed for LEA’s to implement a policy on how to handle a student using and possessing an electronic cigarette device. USEA believes that the use of electronic cigarettes by students is a distraction in schools and their use potentially harmful.

USEA www.facebook.com/USEAUTAH
Get news from USEA on our members:
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For state, local, and national information about Education Support Professionals/Classified employees, visit USEA on the Web using one of the following methods:

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SPRING 2020

The Official Newsletter of the Utah School Employees Association

cont page 3
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Ohio Paraprofessional Named NEA Education Support Professional of the Year

NEA President Lily Eskelsen García: Even in the worst of times, heroes shine through

WASHINGTON - March 25, 2020 - Andrea Beeman, a special education paraprofessional at Maple Heights High School in Maple Heights, Ohio, has been named the 2020 National Education Association’s Education Support Professional (ESP) of the Year.

“NEA applauds Andrea and her commitment to helping students succeed in the classroom and beyond,” said NEA President Lily Eskelsen García. “Even in the worst of times there is always some light, something to celebrate, heroes who shine through. Andrea is one of those heroes.

As COVID transforms public education, ESPs are providing support services and advocating for public schools at a time when the whole world is reminded just how important our schools are to every community.

“ESP members are the glue that holds our schools and communities together,” said Beeman. “Never in the 21st century have we ever experienced anything like the COVID-19 pandemic. I want our nation to remember that education support professionals worked tirelessly when our students needed us the most.

Handling the unique challenges of students with severe developmental disabilities is demanding work, but Beeman not only derives tremendous satisfaction from her position, she calls it “an honor” to work with special education students.

“I believe it is our responsibility as educators to maintain a sense of dignity, confidentiality, and to keep students safe, and I strive to do that every day,” Beeman said. “I am dedicated to filling my students’ days with fun, laughter, learning and an occasional Soul Train line.”

Each year, one ESP receives the NEA ESP of the Year Award in recognition of their outstanding contribution to their schools, communities and profession. Usually announced at the annual NEA ESP Conference, this year’s announcement was made by Eskelsen García in a tele-townhall.

“I have been fortunate to know and work closely with Andrea for many years,” said Ohio Education Association President Scott DiMauro. “She is an incredible leader who has used her skills as an organizer to advocate for what’s best for students, the adults who serve them and our public schools at the local, state and national level. She has devoted her life to breaking down barriers to student success and has been relentless in working toward that goal in and out of the classroom. Her determination is a model for all of us.

“Caring, compassionate and caregiver are all words that can be used to describe Andrea,” said Shay Price, Maple Heights High School principal. “She is the epitome of a paraprofessional, a professional and a colleague.”

For the past 19 years, Beeman has worked with students with severe developmental disabilities. On top of accompanying students to inclusion classes, modifying assignments and helping with physical, occupational, and speech therapy, she even chaperones students at homecoming and prom, giving them a sense of belonging and freedom and easing their parents’ worry.

Beeman is a leader among her ESP colleagues. She was instrumental in advocating for several pieces of important contract language, including requiring bus monitors – a second adult – to be on school bus routes with kindergarten and all special needs students. She also obtained language that required the district to provide lifts in developmentally disabled units with non-ambulatory students.

She was instrumental in bringing union solidarity and protections to her district’s food service workers who were excluded from the bargaining unit. In 2013, she was elected association president. As 2020 ESP of the Year, Beeman will represent NEA and education support professionals at national education conferences, media events and other community occasions. She also will deliver a speech this summer at the NEA Representative Assembly in Atlanta.

“This pandemic is the start of our new normal and we need to be informed and active in decision making,” said Beeman. “My priority as ESP of the Year is to organize members because elections matter to every facet of our lives. This crisis is a clear window into how elected federal and state leaders respond to crisis and who truly has the backs of American families and the children of this nation.”

Education support professionals, who work in schools and on college campuses, are categorized into nine career families: paraeducators; clerical services; custodial services; skilled trades; technical services; security services; transportation services; food services and health and student services.

The nation’s public schools employ more than 2 million school support staff, comprising one-third of all public school employees. More than 70 percent of education support professionals live, shop and vote in the communities in which they work. For more information on education support professionals, visit: www.nea.org/ESP. Follow @NEArESPect on Twitter for the latest news.

Follow #WeLoveOurESPs on Twitter

The National Education Association is the nation’s largest professional employee organization, representing nearly 3 million elementary and secondary teachers, higher education faculty, education support professionals, school administrators, retired educators and students preparing to become teachers. Learn more at www.nea.org.
stay in your pajamas.

Your couch is now the doctor's waiting room. EMI Health TeleMed is unlimited, with 247/365 access, and a $0 copay. Plus, it is included in all our medical plans.

When fewer workers have unions, the standard of living falls for everyone and the gap between the rich and poor grows.—John Sweeney, 2003
Debbie Reyes gets very emotional when she recalls the day a student broke her nose. A special education paraeducator for the Pflugerville Independent School District, in Texas, Reyes works with students on the autism spectrum, many of whom are nonverbal and have severe sensory and behavior challenges.

It was the end of the day and time to clean up, but the boy was sleeping. His mother said he regularly woke up at 3 a.m., wanting to go to school and unable to go back to sleep. The special educators often let him nap, but when Reyes woke him up that afternoon, he responded by striking out, hitting her in the face with his elbow.

“I heard a pop and a crack,” she said. Her nose was fractured in two places, requiring surgery. It took more than a year for her nose to heal.

“I don’t blame him,” Reyes says, tearing up as she tells the story. “He needs a lot of behavior support, and his parents asked us for help. I work with him in the communications unit, a section of the special education room where we help students calm down and communicate what they’re feeling, because a student can’t learn until his behavior is under control.

“He just needs help and I want to be a voice for him.” Reyes is committed to being a voice for her special education students. She’s also a voice for her fellow education support professionals (ESPs) who are essential to a well-rounded education for their students but still don’t earn a living wage.

**Every Job Matters**

Reyes and fellow ESP members of the Pflugerville Educators Association (PFEA) in central Texas have been fighting for a $3 an hour pay raise for all hourly employees since last school year. Committed to their students, they work second and third jobs and rely on food stamps and other public assistance to make ends meet so they can continue their work in education, which most say is their calling.

“Every single one of our ESPs is critical to the success of our students and they shouldn’t have to worry about paying for groceries or making rent,” says PFEA President Cindy Maroquio. “Everybody matters, every job matters, and they all deserve to have a living wage income.”

Reyes, a single mother who lives with her 10-year-old daughter in income-based public housing, brings home $1,500 a month in her paycheck. Her rent is $1,000 and just went up by $40. She expects it will continue to rise as she struggles to stretch the rest of her wages to pay for food, gas, utilities, and everything else.

Her job is critical to the school district—it takes a strong, caring, and extremely dedicated person to work with students with severe special needs and behavior problems.

With a $3 an hour raise, Reyes would earn $20.57, about the same hourly rate as a landscaper, bank teller, or truck driver.

To earn at least as much is a matter of dignity and respect. In other parts of the country, in smaller towns or rural areas, $1,500 a month might be livable. But in Pflugerville, part of the Austin metro area, the cost of living has skyrocketed as more and more people move there and older, traditionally low-income areas of the city gentrify.

**Rising Cost of Living**

Austin is consistently voted one of the best places to live, not just in Texas but in the United States. In many low-income communities of color around the city, people are being pushed out by young, higher earning professionals who want to experience life in the “Live Music Capital of the World.”

“The cat is long out of the bag,” says Maroquio. “Austin is an amazing place to live.”

But it should be an affordable place to live for everyone—including the ESPs who want to live in the same community as their students. To Reyes, it’s an issue for all ESPs, but especially for ESPs of color whose low wages can’t keep up with gentrification.

**Sabrina Reid**

Sabrina Reid is an educational associate for essential academics. She’s a single parent to four kids. “I didn’t set out to be a single parent, I set out to be the best parent I can be, and that hasn’t changed,” Reid says. “What has is the cost to support them … Many times I have to tell my children no because of financial reasons, which breaks my heart. I work hard and want to be able to earn enough to provide for my family.”

One month when she couldn’t pay the electric bill, she had to rely on help from her church.

“How are we supposed to survive without a proper living wage?” Reyes asks. “How am I supposed to show up at work and do a good job if I haven’t eaten a decent meal or if I’m not properly dressed? It’s not OK.”

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**Every Job Matters**

Reyes regularly makes calls to members to encourage them to share their stories at school board meetings. (Photo: Kimberly Davis)

Many of the ESPs in her district were raised in poverty in border towns like Donna, Brownsville, Mission, or Mercedes.

They live in trailers or crammed with two or three other families into one-bedroom apartments. As the cost of living rises, even those will become unaffordable unless they receive a raise.

“I tell them I will keep fighting for you because I know. I also started at $11 an hour,” Reyes says. “I know poverty. I know how bad it is.”

After years of stagnant wages coincided with enormous increases in the cost of living and the fastest growth rates in rent and home prices in
the state, PFEA ESPs decided to take action.

Last April, they circulated a petition, asking all Pflugerville educators to support the $3 an hour raise. Then they took that petition—with its hundreds of signatures—to spring and summer school board meetings.

With more than 30 union members, all wearing blue, sitting behind her in support, Reyes addressed board members in April, sharing her story of having worked in the district for more than a decade as a special education paraeducator, and loving her job despite the physical assaults and constant stress. She held aloft a copy of her pay stub alongside her monthly bills, explaining that her current pay was not enough to cover expenses for herself and her daughter.

One of the school board members has a nonverbal daughter with autism who is one of Reyes' special education students. “He said we were paid enough,” she says. “I was completely heartbroken to hear him say that, knowing that I worked with his daughter, knowing her struggles. I pleaded with him and the other board members to come to our classroom and walk in our shoes for a day and then tell us we don’t deserve the increase.”

According to PFEA President Maroquio, anyone who claims the Pflugerville ESPs “make enough” do not have to live on $35,000 a year. “They haven’t experienced what that’s actually like, making only $35,000 a year and supporting a family,” she says.

“How are we supposed to survive without a proper living wage? How am I supposed to show up at work and do a good job if I haven’t eaten a decent meal or if I’m not properly dressed? It’s not OK.” – Debbie Reyes

“I love my work as a special education paraeducator. I worked at a state hospital and a treatment center helping patients with behavior issues. I feel like this is my calling.” The Pflugerville ESP members aren’t alone. ESPs working in neighboring districts also struggle with low wages. Maroquio and other PFEA members support other district campaigns and regularly attend their school board meetings in a show of solidarity.

“What message would a raise of the minimum wage deliver to the students of America?”

It would send a message about what we value. What this means is that when a student walks into the school, they know that the people who are there to make sure they have a safe, clean environment, a nutritious meal at lunch, and safe passage to and from school are paid in a way that acknowledges the dignity of their work. It tells the students how important the work they do is to fulfilling the promise and investment in the future of our children. If those workers are their parents, it allows them the security of knowing their parent is going to be a job where they are valued and will provide for them with a decent wage. This is critical to the well-being of a child who depends on their parents for their security.

As of late September, the school board had voted to give hourly district employees a 5 percent increase, which would raise Reyes’ salary by about a dollar to $18.45.

“We are going to continue the fight,” says Maroquio. “We will continue to go before the school board and ask for that $3 an hour. We’ve been advocating for this for a long time and we’re not going to stop now.”

Raising the Minimum Wage for a Living Wage

In Texas, the minimum wage is $7.25 an hour, the same as the federal minimum wage, which hasn’t been raised since 2009, the longest stretch in history. States can set their own minimum wage levels, and the highest around the country include Washington, D.C., at $13.25 and California, Massachusetts, and Washington at $12 an hour. NEA supports raising the minimum wage and NEA Today spoke with Heidi Sherholz, senior economist and director of policy at the Economic Policy Institute on the benefits of raising the minimum wage Americans raise.

Why is it imperative that we raise the minimum wage for all workers?

It’s basically in which we do not allow employers to pay workers so little so that they cannot afford a modest lifestyle for full-time work. A minimum wage is an absolutely foundational labor standard put into place more than 80 years ago. People must get paid a decent wage for the work they do. It’s about the dignity of work.

The Congressional Budget Office found that low-income families would get $22 billion a year if we raised the minimum wage. Inequality would go down and poverty would go down—13 million Americans would be pulled out of poverty and the deep material deprivation they currently face. Half of those people would be kids whose parents would have the stability and security to make their rent, put food on the table, maybe fix their car to get to their jobs, afford gas or bus fare, and pay for child care. These are hardworking adults, many of whom are the primary breadwinners, who depend on their low-wage jobs to make it month to month.

How will a higher minimum wage help those who work in our public schools?

There are clear benefits from both sides—those who work in the schools and the parents of students who attend the schools. A higher wage reduces the chaos in a family’s life. When you can make ends meet from month to month and provide food and basics, you can do a better job at work and at home as a parent, sending your child to school dressed, fed, and ready to learn. Kids do better when they have parents who make a decent wage and have stability at home. Another clear benefit of raising the minimum wage is reduced job turnover. This is so obviously beneficial to students who are surrounded by troubled adults they eat lunch on, the bus, in the halls, and in their classrooms. We know they do better when they have a consistent teacher and can rely on the same faces they know and trust. A higher minimum wage for school staff will result in a better educational environment for the kids.

Can you explain why paying a living wage is an issue of racial justice?

A myriad of forces, not least of which is occupational segregation, has pushed people of color disproportionately into low-wage jobs. When you allow wages to erode over time—the minimum wage is 30 percent below where it was more than 40 years ago—it disproportionately affects this population. Providing hourly workers a living wage is absolutely an issue of racial justice.

I ask you to stand and raise your hand if you support the Raise the Minimum Wage Act to $15 an hour. Though experts don’t expect it to pass the Senate, the minimum wage will be a topic discussed by the 2020 presidential candidates. Follow the discussion at educationvotes.org.

WHAT MESSAGE WOULD A RAISE OF THE MINIMUM WAGE DELIVER TO THE STUDENTS OF AMERICA?

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Why is being with the Association a good choice to make?

When I first started with SLC School District, and was told about joining the association, I just thought it was just another fee somebody wanted to keep. The person who wanted me to join told me about how it has helped him in a tight pinch and he was glad he joined. So I joined several months later, jump to now. A couple of weeks ago I was involved in a situation that I was accused of by a parent and student. I made several calls to the Association and was told they will be with me the whole time I need assistance. I had to go through an investigation process and was accompanied by an association rep the whole time. They even asked important questions that I would not have thought of to help me along the way. I also was able to talk to the USEA Organizational Specialist who informed me of how the process will go and what to expect from the investigation. Long story short, I went through the investigation, with the help of the association. The district investigator interviewed several people at the school, with the evidence collected in the course of the investigation; it is the recommendation of the investigator that there was No Cause to support the claim against me. I believe having been with the association, it has helped my process and having someone there with me helped me through the investigation. They even asked important questions that I would not have thought of to help me along the way. I also was able to talk to the USER Organizational Specialist who informed me of how the process will go and what to expect from the investigation. Long story short, I went through the investigation, with the help of the association. The district investigator interviewed several people at the school, with the evidence collected in the course of the investigation; it is the recommendation of the investigator that there was No Cause to support the claim against me. I believe having been with the association, it has helped my process and having someone there with me helped me through the investigation. If I was not with the association, I don't know whom I would have called or where to begin. The conclusion may have not been so kind or take the necessary steps required to question all the people involved. I am so glad I did join the association and I highly recommend you to join if you have not already. I have been with the association for several years, and have not needed them like this until now. Some may never need the association to help with a situation. But how can you chance it if you will?

A big THANK YOU to the UTAH GRIZZLIES.
Why I Joined USEA

I’ve spent some time thinking about why I joined the Association. At first, my why is always “because I want to help people.” So, I know I have to sit down and think about it more deeply. I first joined USEA because a very firm person handed me a paper and said fill this out. So, I did. When that person retired, I was made aware that we didn’t have any association representatives in our building. I was asked to do that. I realized helping my fellow ESP’s in my own building was one thing; then I was asked if I wanted to do more and was interviewed for the state board. I felt this was a great opportunity to help, not just ESP’s, but specifically paraeducators. We had no representation. We still have very little. As a paraeducator, I feel that I contribute to choices and decisions for the students I help teach and whose voice should be heard. In the past year, I have had a firsthand look at how the USEA helps us, specifically with the recent closing of schools, how they are helping us maintain our pay by assisting school districts with ideas for us to continue to work. These are all reasons why I am a member, and will continue to be a member.

Miki Guymon
USEA Executive Board

Dealing With the Stress of Uncertainty

Most people are creatures of habit. When things go as planned, we feel in control. But when life throws a curveball, it can leave us feeling anxious and stressed. For many Americans life feels particularly uncertain lately. No one can avoid the unexpected. But there are simple steps you can take to help you feel better. Here are our tips.

> Be kind to yourself. Some people are better at dealing with uncertainties than others, so don’t beat yourself up if your tolerance for unpredictability is lower than a friend’s. Remind yourself that it might take time for the stressful situation to resolve, and be patient with yourself in the meantime.

> Reflect on past traumas. Chances are you’ve overcome stressful events in the past—and you survived! Draw on past strengths and reflect on what you did during that event that was helpful, and what you might like to do differently this time.

> Limit exposure to news. When we’re stressed about something, it can be hard to look away. But compulsively checking the news only keeps you wound up. Try to limit your check-ins and avoid the news during vulnerable times of day, such as right before bedtime.

> Avoid dwelling on things you can’t control. When uncertainty strikes, many people immediately imagine worst-case scenarios. Get out of the habit of rummaging on negative events.

> Take your own advice. Ask yourself: If a friend came to me with this worry, what would I tell her? Imagine your situation from the outside can often provide perspective and fresh ideas.

> Engage in self-care. Don’t let stress derail your healthy routines. Make effort to eat well, exercise, and get enough sleep. Many people find stress relief in practices such as yoga and meditation.

> Seek support from those you trust. Many people isolate themselves when they’re stressed or worried. But social support is important, so reach out to family and friends.

> Control what you can. Focus on the things that are within your control, even if it’s as simple as having a clean house or being prepared for the day. Remember that you’re not in control of everything.

> Don’t let stress derail your health. Make efforts to eat well, exercise, and get enough sleep. Many people find stress relief in practices such as yoga and meditation.

> Play to your strengths. When things go as planned, we feel in control. But when life throws a curveball, it can leave us feeling anxious and stressed. For many Americans life feels particularly uncertain lately. No one can avoid the unexpected. But there are simple steps you can take to help you feel better. Here are our tips.

Adapted from www.apa.org/helpcenter/stress-uncertainty

May 16, 2020
Kaysville, Utah

Presented by Utah School Employees Association

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The Utah School Employees Association is an affiliate of the National Education Association.