

THE LAE VOICE

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Great Public Schools for Every Louisiana Child

Volume 20, No. 4 December 2024



From the PRESIDENT'S DESK

Dr. Tia T. Mills, President



"The holiday season is not as much about opening our presents as opening our hearts."

– Janice Maeditere

LAE, we've made it to the end of another calendar year. I am so grateful for the gift of you—especially the professionalism you display every day to improve the lives of our students. Realizing the impact we have as educators on "the future of the world" can be humbling and overwhelming at times. I appreciate that you live up to the challenge of inspiring hope, providing direction, and offering encouragement to our students. I hope you are planning to enjoy quality time with family and friends so that you can recharge and rededicate yourself to our profession!

Our association was active in supporting you through the legislative process this year.

While we did not get the permanent raise we wanted, we can enjoy the approved stipend and continue asking for a permanent increase next year. The implementation of Act 311, the bill we advocated for, is being strengthened because of your feedback. Continue to engage with me on this issue when you see local policies that would deprive educators of payment for required work beyond the school day. Additionally, your efforts (emails, phone calls, etc.) were effective in holding off the bills aimed at limiting the work of YOUR union. We appreciate your engagement during the 2024 legislative session. LAE will continue to foster relationships with legislators across the state, a critical component to ensuring that our profession advances. Your presence and your voice are needed at every public forum, school board meeting, and education stakeholder gathering. Every written statement (email or handwritten) or comment card you write lets decision-makers know that they are being held accountable. Stay tuned as we plan our work in 2025.

LAE elections are coming up soon. Several positions are open. The strength of our association depends on you participating and leading in the LAE democratic process. All forms must be submitted by Friday, Jan. 7, at 5:00 P.M. You can find more information about available positions in this issue and online (lae.org/elections). If you have a passion for making a difference for students, schools, and communities, consider offering your gift of leadership to the association.

I know you look forward to the holidays, a time in which you can take a break and focus on your self-care. Engage in the activities that you enjoy and that help you relax.

On behalf of the Louisiana Association of Educators, we are excited to meet more members, advocate for our great association, and celebrate more victories. In the meantime, may your holidays be filled with promise and good cheer. Let's bring in a New Year full of love, hope, and strength.

In Solidarity,
President Mills



MY UNION, MY WAY: MAKING YOUR PAYMENT CHOICE

Have you made your choice? Electronic funds transfer and credit card payment options give you the power to choose. Why change the payment method now? "LAE members should be in control of their membership and payment options rather than leaving it to the legislature to decide for us," says Dr. Tia T. Mills, president of Louisiana Association of Educators. Making your choice today rather than waiting for the uncertainty that the legislative session can bring will give you peace of mind and ensure that your membership stays secure. Choosing your payment method keeps your membership information private, another important reason to choose now!

Are you interested in assisting in the My Union, My Way campaign? Here's how you can help:

- Contact your local president or UniServ Director to get more information and learn how to get involved.
- LAE is partnering with the NEA Telephonic Autopay team to contact LAE members. The caller ID should say LAE with a 225-area code.
- Send your suggestions or comments to kcarpenter@nea.org.



LAE eDues

Have you selected an alternative method of payment yet?

[Follow this link](#) or use the QR code to select electronic funds transfer or credit card payment.

**Becoming a member of LAE was a great choice.
Now take the next step and choose your new payment method!**

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS: LAE MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Melissa Plaisance's Story

My name is Melissa. A position that started as a way in which I could ride the bus with my own children became a career of thirteen years. This job became very important to me and has always had two parts: 1) a member of the community who performs a service and receives a wage and 2) someone who is connected to students, colleagues, and the community. I had the privilege of watching many students grow to be young adults, from kindergarten to high school. The schedule was perfect, allowing me to be close to my children's school activities. I was able to see both all the way through their K-12 school career. Another impactful benefit has been the close friendships I developed over time with students on the bus, colleagues in the school system, and parents in the community.

Not everything during these thirteen years has been perfect. For instance, implementing COVID safety measures was particularly challenging. I had to put masks on forty students six times per day, ages ranging from 5-18. My career and my own health was tested during this time, and it was an unnerving experience for everyone. I continued my work through the mask mandate restrictions.

At one point, I enrolled to be a part of a group of drivers who would transport people in the community from a potentially dangerous zone to a safer location during natural disasters such

as hurricanes. Not long after I volunteered to participate, Hurricane Ida hit our local area as a strong Category 4 storm, very close to a Category 5. The storm devastated our community, and my home was listed as a total loss by insurance. Many of my family members and friends experienced the same loss. We went many weeks without power. As during COVID restrictions, damage from Hurricane Ida caused changes to routines, routes, and classes. Some students were required to change schools as some schools were combined with others. Post Hurricane Ida, I was displaced to a neighboring town which made it difficult for me to access my work. Students were very supportive with little gifts of flowers, art projects, or smiles. I decided to request a leave of absence without pay, and the leave of absence was granted.

Ninety days later, normal facilities and operations were still struggling. Community members (including me!) had limited available housing because of the widespread destruction so I applied for an extension to my ninety-day leave of absence. Upon submitting the request, my employer informed me that I no longer had a job. The termination of my employment after thirteen years of service deeply impacted me. I had many awkward conversations with the people who have become important to me: students, colleagues, and parents. They were all concerned about why I was not continuing

with my work. One of my colleagues asked if I was part of LAE, and I confirmed that I was a member. I contacted my LAE representative who reviewed the details of my termination. Both the representative and I felt as if the termination was an unfair, impromptu decision, without merit. Things started changing that day. I was no longer just a terminated 13-year employee. I was a 13-year employee with someone who would work on my behalf to request that my job and my 13-year seniority benefits be restored. From the first call to being reinstated as an employee with full benefits (health and dental insurance) took time. The LAE attorney took the case to court, and a judge determined that my termination was unjust. The small cost of membership per month gave me support that I never thought I would need. Without their assistance, I would not have been able to represent myself. I am now reinstated and can tell the students, colleagues, and parents that a long break was required, but I am back to work! We sometimes need people with the right expertise to review our circumstances. I wish I had never needed to make that call for help to LAE, but I am happy that I made the decision to join LAE. Thank you, to the senior bus driver who reminded me to call LAE, and thank you, LAE for being a voice for educators. I am able to continue serving students, working with colleagues, and engaging with the community through my work!

SUPPORT LAE'S PAC, LAE FUND FOR CHILDREN AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

The LAE's PAC, LAE Fund for Children and Public Education, has a record of endorsing candidates in Louisiana such as members of the House of Representatives, Senate, BESE, and school board races. During the 2023 fall election cycle, Louisiana Association of Educators won in 19 of the 30 races in the primary election, eight runoffs, and only three losses. Louisiana Association of Educators seeks to elect public education-friendly candidates who are key to passing good legislation. Pay raises, laws that take burdens away from educators, and accountability policies are all decided upon with a vote by our elected officials. We remain engaged in the election cycles, the political process of the legislative session, and policymaking at local school board meetings to have a strong say on our salaries and working conditions.

Consider donating to LAE's Fund for Children and Public Education. These funds are dedicated to help elect local and state-wide officials who will vote for policies and laws that support our students, teachers, and support professionals. Donating is easy, and even a \$5-a-month contribution can make a big impact! You can sign up for recurring monthly contributions in a few simple steps at the QR code in this announcement or at laefund.org.



1. Click on the monthly tab.
2. Select your re-occurring contribution amount.
3. Input your personal information.
4. Type in your payment method.

Following these steps help to make a difference through the LAE PAC Fund! Donate Today!



Carol Powell, 2024
State Teacher Image
Award Winner

NOMINATIONS FOR IMAGE AWARDS OPEN SOON

The LAE Image Awards are presented annually to recognize members whose leadership and actions in their professions have advanced public education in Louisiana. This year, LAE will choose one outstanding teacher, ESP, administrator, ancillary personnel, friend of education, and human and civil rights trailblazer to honor with these prestigious awards. The association is now accepting applications for the 2025 Image Awards. You can begin working on your application today at lae.org/imageawards.

lae.org/about/member-benefits/lae-image-awards

LAE Image Awards Deadline: Feb. 28, 2025

LAE'S 2025 ELECTION SEASON IS HERE

Serving on the LAE Board of Directors is a way to make change in the association, contribute to initiatives, or serve on committees that can impact public school working conditions. The following LAE Board of Directors seats are up for election.

Interested candidates must submit a nomination form (you can download from the forms at lae.org/elections) for the respective position of interest. Members interested in seeking a position should submit a [nomination form](#). Each candidate has the option of submitting a short professional biography (not to exceed 50 words) and a high-resolution photo which will appear in an upcoming issue of The Voice. Photos larger than a 5x7 will not be accepted.

NEA Delegate Spots are also open.

Members interested in having a say on the association's agenda at the national level might be interested in attending the NEA Representative Assembly as a Louisiana Delegate. Elections procedures and all applications to run for office are available at lae.org/elections.

Deadline to submit applications is no later than 5:00 P.M. Saturday, Jan. 7, 2025. Go to lae.org/elections to download the correct form(s) for submission. Completed forms should be submitted to Minette Carpenter at mcarpenter@lae.org.

Call for Candidates and Amendments

- President
- Vice President--minority
- Associational District - 1 Seat - C
- Associational District - 2 Seat - A
- Associational District - 3 Seat - C
- Associational District - 4 Seat - A
- Associational District - 5 Seat - A - Minority
- Associational District - 6 Seat - C
- Board of Directors Educational Support Professional ESP - A
- NEA Administrator/Delegate
- NEA State Delegate/Successor Delegate

Amendment changes?

If you are interested in offering an amendment to the LAE Constitution, Bylaws, and/or Standing Rules, please do so prior to the submission deadline on January 5, 2025. Submit your proposals to: <https://www.lae.org/amendment-application>.



EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL DAY

NOV. 20

Thank you to our Education Support Professionals! November 20 is designated as National Educational Support Professionals Day, a time to honor education support professionals (ESPs). ESPs contribute to a healthy school community while helping students inside and outside the classroom. There are nine types of ESPs including: clerical, custodial and maintenance, food, health and student, para-educators, security, skilled trades, technical, and transportation services. LAE loves and cares about our ESPs in whatever role they serve. LAE along with NEA affiliates across the country give a shout out to all our LAE ESPs.



Trish Clark works as an ESP in St. Helena Parish Schools.

SAVE THE DATE FOR THE UPCOMING 2025 LAE-RETIRED MEETING

LAE-Retired members are visible on campuses and at events across the state to let members know of the benefits of being part of LAE-Retired. Join in the work and the fun at the upcoming conference Feb. 3-4, 2025.



LAE Retired-President Anita Augustus poses at 2024 Representative Assembly.



Sheila Washington and Pat Thomas are ready to talk about the benefits of being a member of LAE-Retired.

Stay Connected with LAE!

Change of address, email, or phone number?

To keep current with LAE correspondence, make sure your information is up to date!

To update your contact information email membership.processing@lae.org OR use this link rb.gy/2a1il or QR code.



Save the Date for LAE's 2025 RA



Representative Assembly



Location: Marriott Baton Rouge
5500 Hilton Ave.
Baton Rouge, La. 70808
Apr. 4, 2025: Board of Directors' Meeting
Apr. 5-6, 2025: LAE Representative Assembly



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TAKE CELLPHONES OUT OF THE CLASSROOM, EDUCATORS SAY

Tim Walker, Senior Writer NEA Today: October 3, 2024 (edited, Nov. 7, 2024, Team LAE)

[Preface: Act 313, passed in the 2024 Louisiana Legislature, prohibits Louisiana students from having or using cell phones at school or on the way to school. LAE did not take a position on this issue. Here is an article posted by NEA Today about educator support of this type of ban.]

Across the country, a ‘teacher-led movement’ is demanding new cellphone policies to curb the constant distractions and disruptions to learning.

Two years ago, Devon Espejo, an art teacher at San Marcos High School in Santa Barbara, California, attached a numbered storage shelf, made from wood and with 36 pockets, on her classroom wall. Most of her colleagues didn’t do the same, that is until the shelves, or at least the intent behind them, became district-wide policy in the 2024–25 school year. “It’s better now that we all have them,” Espejo says. “A more uniform approach will help us control these devices in the classroom.” The devices are cellphones and the pockets hanging on the wall are makeshift “cellphone hotels.” High school students in Santa Barbara United School District (SBUSD) must park their phones in the holders before taking their seats—making the devices out of reach, out of sight (more or less), and (hopefully, eventually) out of mind. Better late than never, says Espejo. She and her colleagues were done competing with smartphones for students’ attention. “In addition to all the other things we’re expected to do, we were policing cellphones by implementing our own rules,” Espejo explains. “It was exhausting and not what I am here to do. I don’t want to be the phone police. I want to teach.”



Art teacher Devon Espejo installed this “cellphone hotel” in her classroom in 2022.

Credit: Courtesy of Devon Espejo

“It seems that everyone—including parents—agree that excessive phone use is detrimental to teenagers,” says Cassandra Dorn, a high school teacher in Red Bank, New Jersey. “We know about the negative effects on academic performance and mental health. Yet, we haven’t had the collective will to address the problem.”

Noelle Gilzow, a science teacher in Missouri and president of the Columbia Missouri National Education Association (CMNEA) says, “Our number one job is creating a sound and effective learning environment. Cellphones were making that impossible.”

Enough is Enough

As of September 2024, 15 states have passed laws or enacted policies that ban or restrict students’ use of cellphones in schools statewide. And seven of the nation’s 20 largest school districts forbid use of cellphones during the school day. The new momentum behind regulations at the state and local level did not happen overnight, says Victor Pereira, a lecturer on education and co-chair of the Teaching and Technology Leadership Program at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education. “This is really just the culmination of a decade and a half of schools trying to negotiate cellphone policies, trying to solve the problem of how much it distracts students from being engaged in learning.”

As smartphone ownership among young people accelerated 15 or so years ago, districts banned the devices. A few years later, under pressure from parents and willing to at least try to accommodate new technologies, many reversed course—even as the word “addiction” began to be associated with teenagers’ reliance on their smartphones. This dependency worsened during remote learning after COVID shut down schools—and followed students back into the classroom. A 2023 student survey by Common Sense Media found that, on a typical day, the average student receives hundreds of notifications on their phone, about a quarter of which arrive during the school day. That’s a lot of pings—and distractions—during instructional hours. “Students are reassured by that sound. They’re flipping it over and looking at the screen without even realizing that they’re doing it,” says Gilzow.

A 2024 National Education Association (NEA) poll found that 90 percent of teachers support prohibiting student cellphone use during instructional hours. Seventy-five percent favor extending restrictions to the entire school day.

Educators are deeply concerned about the impact social media has on students’ mental health and believe those negative effects are another reason to limit access to phones at school. But, according to the NEA survey, the biggest concern about social media use in school is the constant disruptions to learning. And it’s not just social media.

“We’re competing with Netflix, FaceTime, and texting,” Gilzow said. Kim Tilton, a science teacher at San Marcos High School



in California, agrees. “If the phone is in their hands, there is zero engagement, zero focus. That’s the experience we were all having, and it became a major working condition issue for us.”

While acknowledging the challenges posed by cellphones, too many districts and school leaders avoided enacting any sort of formal restrictions. Educators were usually told that a uniform policy would be complicated, controversial, and even unnecessary. Do what is best for your individual classrooms. Enforce it yourself. And good luck. “The district didn’t really want to get involved or even make any effort to get feedback from us about the impact of the devices.”

Pushback from Parents?

Cellphone restrictions will draw concerns from at least a few parents. A recent poll by the National Parents Union found that 78% of parents want their children to have cellphone access during the school day in case there is an emergency. They have legitimate concerns about being able to reach their kids for a variety of reasons, but schools have systems in place to handle emergencies, along with potential workarounds to provide another access point for communication.

“Parents are struggling with monitoring and dealing with these devices at home, so they know what we are dealing with,” says Espejo. “We understand why some parents are uncomfortable with the cellphone policy. But if they were to sit through a class with kids who have access to their phones and then sat through one where phones were not allowed, they would endorse it.”

Patching the Cracks

Enforcement is another perennial challenge to policy changes. Espejo continues, “Cracks in support are going to appear. We need to patch them and keep everyone on board. Educators will continue to lead on this issue because our feedback, our ideas should be front and center. We know what works and what doesn’t.”

THE LAE VOICE

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Nov. 27 - 29

Thanksgiving,
Office Closed

Dec. 1

LAE election nomination
forms and LAE image
award forms are live

Dec. 23 - Jan. 5

Holidays
LAE Office Closed

Feb. 3-4 2025

LAE Retired
Conference

April 4, 2025

Board Meeting

April 5 - 6, 2025

LAE Representative
Assembly