

Rising Voice

A monthly union member publication and newsletter



SPECIAL LEGISLATIVE EDITION

EW EDUCATION
WEST VIRGINIA



Contents

- 3** Co-Presidents' Message
- 4** 2026 Legislative Agenda
- 6** Lobbying 101
- 7** Find and Contact My Legislators
- 8** Calendar/Bill Status/Committees
- 9** Stay Informed
- 10** Legislative Texts



Rising Voice

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ON THIS PAGE

TOP: LEGISLATIVE CALENDAR ON PAGE 8, PHOTO CREDIT: WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE; **MIDDLE:** SIGN UP FOR LEGISLATIVE ALERT TEXTS ON PAGE 10; **BOTTOM:** LOBBYING 101 ON PAGE 6

ON THE COVER

EDUCATION WV CO-PRESIDENTS DALE LEE AND KRISTIE SKIDMORE PREPARE FOR A BUSY SESSION UNDER THE DOME.



Sign up to *get text updates* during the 2026 West Virginia Legislative Session and find out how you can help protect and improve public schools.

**EW EDUCATION
WEST VIRGINIA**
UNIFIED FOR EDUCATORS AND PUBLIC SCHOOLS



Happy New Year!

Just a week and a half into the new year, we will be starting the legislative session. It's always an incredibly busy and sometimes chaotic time but rest assured that Education WV is there in force fighting for you.

Governor Morrissey has publicly stated in the past week that state revenue has exceeded expectations for the year. While he mentioned the possibility of tax cuts, Education West Virginia intends to press lawmakers to utilize those funds to address the main priorities of our members—salary and PEIA. While we will be at the Capitol every day to ad-

vocate for you, we will also need your voice reaching out to your specific legislators to demand they prioritize education, not just with their words but with the state's budget. Furthermore, it is equally important to follow how your legislators vote on our issues and cast your vote accordingly in the next election cycle.

I would like to give a special thank you to our members who have already started engaging with their elected officials by participating in our PEIA postcard campaign. If you mailed a postcard to your legislators, don't hesitate to follow up with them during the session and reiterate your concerns. Remember,

they represent you!

We will be communicating with you during the 60-day session using more methods than ever before, so be sure to find the methods that work for you (see page 9) to closely follow the action under the dome.

Let's put the power of our collective voices and activism together to increase the educational opportunities for our students and improve the working lives of those who serve them. 🍌



Kristie Skidmore
kskidmore@educationwv.org

It is hard to believe it's 2026 already. I hope each of you enjoyed some much-deserved rest over the holidays and are ready for the second half of the school year.

January also brings the much-anticipated legislative session. During the December interims, 15 of our 32 Republican state senators endorsed U.S. Senator Shelley Moore Capito in her bid for re-election. The amazing thing is that 17 Republican senators apparently think she is too "moderate" to support. This is an example of what I have been talking about regarding the upcoming election cycle...the 2026 election is about changing the state political landscape and electing moderates who want to move West Virginia and public education forward regardless of their political affiliation.

I am often asked "What can I do to make a difference?" The answer is quite simple...get

involved, make your voice heard, urge others to do the same, and hold your elected officials accountable. If you speak up and are not listened to, then we need to vote to change the people in power in our state.

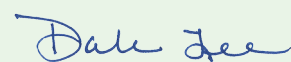
I am asking each of you to contact your senators and your delegate and have a conversation about things that occur at your worksite on a typical day. They need to know about the emotional state of the students you serve and how many days you are at your wits end but continue to try to reach every student. They need to know what resources and changes you need to do your job better and the frustration you feel when they and others try to "reform" education without asking for your input and their changes don't improve anything.

My second request is that you let us know about these conversations. We need to know which legislators are open to engaging

in a dialogue with educators as well as those legislators who have their own agenda. We must hold their feet to the fire as the May primary election approaches and spotlight as many of your conversations as possible.

Thank you for all you do for your students and for public education, and for being a member of Education West Virginia, the largest advocate for public education in the state. We are stronger together and your membership and activism increase our strength.

Let's make the year 2026 the best yet by standing strong together for our students and our profession. 🍌



Dale Lee
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Education West Virginia 2026 Legislative Agenda

Education West Virginia represents the teachers and service personnel working throughout the public schools of our state. Those individuals work diligently to make our students and our public schools successful. Education West Virginia is committed to advancing the priorities listed below to advance public education and increase student achievement.

PRIORITY – SALARY



A substantial increase in employee compensation must occur to make WV educators competitive with their counterparts in surrounding states. Salary is a determining factor in choosing a profession and remaining in that profession. West Virginia educators have continued to fall behind our neighboring states in pay. This issue must be addressed if we are to attract and retain a high-quality education workforce.

- Increase salaries to rank West Virginia school employees at a competitive level with contiguous states in their particular employment category. These salary increases should be funded on a multiple-year basis and keep up with the average yearly rate of inflation.
- Focus on salary to recruit and retain certified, high-quality teachers and education support professionals.
- Advocate for decreasing the local share allocation and dedicating those funds to salaries.

PRIORITY – PEIA



Stabilizing PEIA is a top priority. Out of control premiums and co-pays, ever-changing drug formularies and constant uncertainty of what will happen the following year are detrimental to attracting and retaining personnel. Employee benefits are a large part of their compensation package, and those benefits are consistently being eroded.

- Control PEIA prescription drug and health care costs.
- Base the spousal surcharge on a salary tier method rather than a flat rate.
- Support cost-saving and common sense PEIA health care measures for active and retired participants.
- Determine PEIA premiums by a fixed percentage of the active employee's education-related income and a fixed percentage of the retiree's education-related retirement pension.

Continued on pg. 5

PRIORITY – EMPLOYEE RIGHTS AND SAFETY



Basic employment rights must not be eroded and increased measures must be put in place to ensure that our employees are safe in their worksites, and our students have a safe learning environment.

- Ensure that all decisions regarding reduction in force are based on seniority.
- Dedicate adequate funding to alternative placements and behavioral supports for disruptive and violent students to ensure teachers and service personnel work in safe environments.
- Support a statewide full-time professional counselor/student ratio of 1:250 and a nurse/student ratio of 1:500, with no less than one of each per school.
- Allow long-term substitutes to accrue/access sick leave and holiday pay from their first day in that position and remove the requirement of consecutive days that a substitute teacher must work to move to a higher pay status.

PRIORITY – RETIREMENT BENEFITS



Those individuals who have dedicated their lives to the profession and to their students should be adequately compensated in their retirement years. From health insurance to pension increases, our retirees' fixed income must be taken into account.

- Increase the state income tax exemption for retired school employees to at least the first \$20,000 in teacher retirement benefits.
- Provide adequate funding of the retirement system to guarantee optimum benefits for current and future retirees. These benefits should include a COLA (Cost of Living Adjustment) which would allow retirees to maintain a standard of living at least commensurate with the retiree's pre-retirement living standard.

PRIORITY – FUNDING OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS



As public school enrollment continues to decline, including the loss of students as a result of the Hope Scholarship, the antiquated school funding formula is not providing adequate resources for our public schools. There must be adjustments to account for the rural nature of our state to ensure that more community schools are not forced to close. Additionally, guardrails for the Hope Scholarship, which pulls money out of the public education system, must also be implemented including:

- Income limits for participants.
- Closer scrutiny and restrictions on Education Service Provider Payments.
- Location and accountability requirements for recipient schools. 🗑️

Lobbying 101

The voice and actions of the members are the strength of the union!

Lobbying your legislators is one of the most helpful things that our members can do to further the legislative goals of the organization. While our Education WV co-presidents are onsite daily at the Capitol during the session to push for our priorities as well as fight threats against public education and the rights of our members, it's important to remember the power of constituents directly contacting their lawmakers. You live in their district, and ultimately, can vote for them... or their opponent in the next election. Calls, emails and meetings with legislators can help move the needle on our issues.

Apprehensive about what to say when you speak with a senator or delegate? No need to be! Read Education WV's lobbying guide for members and be prepared!

Lobbying Guide

- <https://educationwv.org/action-center/contact-your-elected-officials>

First, Request a Meeting

Contact your legislators

- Use our [legislative look-up tool](#) to find the contact information for your legislators.

Schedule the Meeting

- Plan to meet with members of the legislature or their staff in person or virtually, as some offices may prefer a virtual option.
- If the office is accepting in-person meetings, ask whether the number of participants is limited.
- Let the office know what issues you plan to raise and who will attend.
- Don't be put off if the meeting is with staff-



ers—members rely on them and take their advice.

Remember: no permanent friends and no permanent enemies

- Don't take traditional friends for granted.
- Never write off a legislator just because of party affiliation.
- Don't make enemies of legislators—you may need them as friends in the future.

Practice what you plan to say

You may find materials posted on [nea.org](#) helpful, particularly during the planning stage.

- Decide who will participate: Include people with compelling stories. Have a pre-meeting to determine who will speak and what role each person will play.
- Remind everyone: The day before the meeting, send an email reminder to all participants, including legislative staff.

Potential roles

- Meeting leader: Makes introductions, runs the meeting, keeps track of time and agenda

Continued on pg. 7

Find and Contact My Legislators

Not sure who your legislators are? Want to contact them on a particular issue?

[Click here](#) to input your address and find out who represents you at the Capitol. 🗳️

Continued from pg. 6

- **Story teller:** Shares a compelling story related to the issue you are lobbying
- **Delivery person:** Presents leave-behinds
- **Pitch person:** Makes the “ask”
- **Meeting recorder:** Takes notes on what happened and what you promised to do—very important when follow-up time comes

Sample agenda

- Introductions: 3 minutes
- Explain your goals: 5 minutes
- First educator story tells story: 3 minutes
- Second educator tells story: 3 minutes
- Reference EWV resources: 3 minutes
- Make the “ask”: 5 minutes
- Review next steps: 3 minutes
- Thank you: 1 minute

During the Meeting

Introduce your team

- Meetings can be virtual, using a platform like Zoom, or face-to-face.
- If you’re meeting virtually, pay attention to dress, lighting, your surroundings, and how it all looks onscreen. Mute yourself when not speaking.

Make your pitch

- Use personal stories to emphasize why the

issue matters and connect through values.

- A good story, even a short one, is about something that happened to someone. It needs to be true, and it needs to have a beginning, middle, and ending.
- Numbers can get in the way. Make sure they’re compelling.
- Don’t use jargon.
- Don’t try to cover every angle with one story.

Be clear about the “ask”

- Your request needs to be specific, tangible, and verifiable.
- Put issues before politics. Bipartisan works; demands don’t.
- Be open to questions.
- Don’t worry if you can’t answer a question or are unsure of the answer. Admit it and say, “I’ll look into that and get back to you.”
- Have patience and keep your sense of humor!

Email a thank-you after the meeting

- In addition to expressing your thanks, repeat the “ask.”
- Answer any questions raised during the meeting you were unable to address at the time.
- Be sure to provide any materials you promised to provide. 🗳️

2026 Legislative Calendar

- **January 14:** First day of Session, Governor's State of the State address
- **February 17:** Last day to introduce bills in the House
- **February 23:** Last day to introduce bills in the Senate
- **March 1:** Bills due out of committees in house of origin to ensure three full days for readings
- **March 4:** Last day to consider bill on third reading in house of origin, commonly known as crossover day (Does not include budget or supplementary appropriation bills)
- **March 14:** Adjournment at Midnight
- https://www.wvlegislature.gov/Bulletin_Board/calendar/calendar_2026.cfm 🗎



Bill Status

- Want to keep up with a specific bill? Enter the bill number into the bill status tool to track the progress of a bill.
- https://www.wvlegislature.gov/Bill_Status/bill_status.cfm 🗎

Education Committees

Senate Education

- <https://www.wvlegislature.gov/committees/senate/SenateCommittee.cfm?Chart=edu>

House Education

- <https://www.wvlegislature.gov/committees/house/HouseCommittee.cfm?Chart=edu> 🗎

Stay Informed!



During the Legislative Session, Education WV will communicate with members in the following ways:

- Email
- *Text alerts*
- Weekly Zoom updates with local officers
- Dedicated *legislative page* on Education WV website
- *Facebook*
- *Bluesky*
- *Instagram*
- *TikTok* 🐼

Legislative Lookout

Knowledge is power, and the power of our members can help make a difference with our elected officials during the legislative session.

That's why Education West Virginia is making it easier than ever before for members to stay informed and engaged during the session. We've created a dedicated page on our website to house the updates and resources you need to stay on top of the legislation that is moving, contact your legislators or get more information about the status of a bill.

Bookmark our one stop shop for the upcoming session, the *Legislative Lookout*. 🐼

The screenshot displays the Education West Virginia website. On the left is a blue sidebar with the 'EW EDUCATION WEST VIRGINIA' logo and a list of navigation links: 'UNITY & POWER', 'PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE', 'ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE', 'JOIN OUR MOVEMENT', 'TAKE ACTION', a search bar, and a footer menu with 'About Education West Virginia', 'For Members', 'Education WV News', 'Calendar', 'Member Benefits', and 'Contact Us'. The main content area has a light green background. It features a large heading 'Get the Latest' followed by links to 'Legislative Lookout', 'National RA and Convention', and 'PEIA'. A 'FEATURED ARTICLE' section shows a photo of two people in a legislative chamber. Below this is a 'Legislative Lookout' section with a paragraph of text and a 'READ MORE' button with a hand cursor icon pointing to it.



**EDUCATION
WEST VIRGINIA**

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Get Legislative Alert Texts

Click or scan the QR code to get text updates during the 2026 West Virginia Legislative Session and find out how you can help protect and improve public schools.

