

# Rising Voice



A union member  
publication and  
newsletter

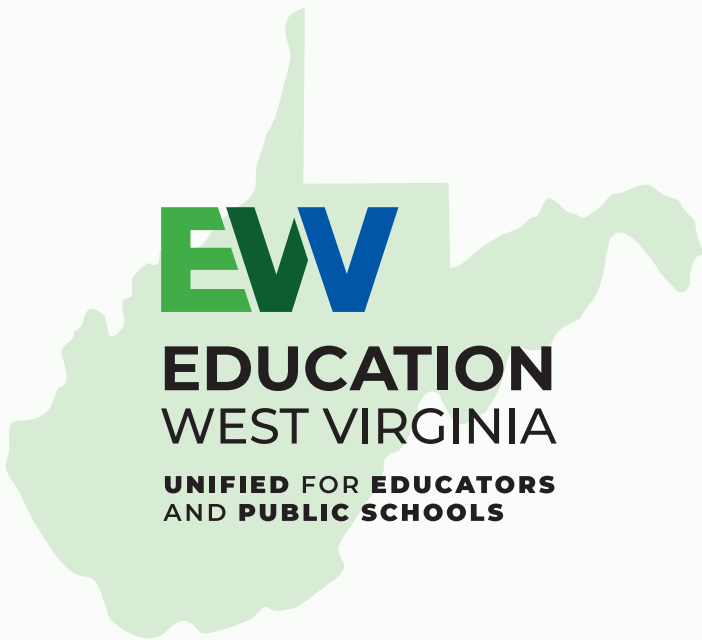
IN THIS ISSUE:  
2026 FINAL LEGISLATIVE WRAP UP  
EARLY ENROLLMENT  
UPCOMING CONFERENCES

**EW** EDUCATION  
WEST VIRGINIA



# Contents

- 3** Co-Presidents' Message
- 4** RIF & Transfer/Early Enrollment
- 5** Merger progress/Consolidations
- 7** AFT Convention/EWV benefits
- 8** 2026 Final Legislative Wrap Up
- 11** Milken award winner
- 12** EWV Kanawha pushes back on custodial staffing changes
- 13** 2026 NEA Representative Assembly
- 14** EWV Hancock County
- 15** Save the Date: Activist Academy



## Rising Voice

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### ON THIS PAGE

TOP: EARLY ENROLLMENT ON PAGE 4; MIDDLE: PHOTO CREDIT: PERRY BENNETT AND WILL PRICE; CO-PRESIDENTS' MESSAGE ON PAGE 3; BOTTOM: EDUCATION WV WYOMING COUNTY MEMBER WINS MILKEN AWARD ON PAGE 11.

### ON THE COVER

EDUCATION MURAL INSIDE THE CAPITOL DOME. READ FINAL LEGISLATIVE WRAP UP ON PAGE 8.

Spring always feels like a time of renewal to me. We've all had our share of the cold and snow (especially this year!) and we are ready to shed our layers and feel the rejuvenation that the sunshine and warmer temperatures bring us.

Having just concluded our first legislative session as a merged organization, the experience cements my feelings that a fresh start is indeed what West Virginia needs if we want to have a state where children can thrive and succeed and families and businesses want to put down roots among our mountains.

This legislative session was one of the slower producing sessions in recent years, despite all the talk about education being a priority. The actions of our elected leaders spoke otherwise. One needs to only look at the massive appropriation of \$290 million to expand the HOPE Scholarship, which serves under 15% of the state's students. This funding comes at the expense of our public

Frustration, anger, disbelief...I could go on and on with adjectives to describe the 2026 Legislative Session. I have been involved in the legislative process for the past 33 years, including the past 18 years as President (now Co-President). This session, in my opinion, was the worst session in those 33 years. The Governor's State of the State was the first insight on what was to come. This was the first time I can remember that the WV State Teacher of the Year and the WV State Service Personnel of the Year weren't introduced. Instead, the Governor introduced a family who was using the HOPE Scholarship to send their children to Christian school. I'm not criticizing HOPE Scholarship recipients, but the failure to recognize the WVTOY and WVSSPOY sent a message about the Governor's priorities.

Fast forward to the approach of crossover day, when bills had to pass the house of origin or die. The House Finance Committee originated a bill that would put guardrails on the HOPE Scholarship. Not only were the next few committee meetings flooded with families who receive the HOPE Scholarship, the Governor and First Lady came to the Committee meeting to show their opposition to any guardrails on the HOPE Scholarship.

While we had many delegates who supported these guardrails, the bill ended up only changing the distribution schedule of funds. Not only that,

schools—which serve the vast majority of West Virginia's children. I am not being dramatic when I say that public education is under attack and defunding is the weapon of choice.

We, as educators, have a powerful tool to fight back if we choose to use it wisely and encourage those in our communities to do so as well. That tool is our vote. By educating ourselves, along with our colleagues, neighbors and friends, we can elect candidates who support our public schools and the hard-working people who serve our students each day. The time is now to use the collective strength from our historic merger and create real change for public education. Let's do this...for our students and for our future! ✨



Kristie Skidmore  
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but the Governor's budget and the budget passed by the Legislature, includes roughly \$290 million to fund five payment allotments, meaning the funding is for not only next year but the first payment of the following year. In the meantime, the much-needed funding for our public schools' special needs students died. The adopted budget does appropriate some additional money for our public schools, but certainly not enough.

I share this to emphasize how critical the 2026 election is to public education. We must change the legislators who prioritize the 10,530 HOPE Scholarship recipients over our 234,957 public school students.

We must have our voices heard and our votes count. It is not enough for us to just vote ourselves; we must take our families and friends with us. We must become active players in the Republican primary which is now closed to only registered Republicans. Watch for our endorsements; then go out and work for those candidates who will work for our public school students like others do for the HOPE students. ✨



Dale Lee  
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# Know Your Rights: RIF and Transfer Timelines

We are now in staffing season, and it is critical for members to understand the legal timelines surrounding transfers and reductions in force (RIF).

- You must be notified of a transfer on or before April 1.
- If you receive a RIF or transfer notice, you have the right to request a hearing, and you must submit your written request within 10 days of receiving the notice.
- Any requested hearing must be held and have a decision issued on or before May 1.
- RIF and transfer decisions must follow seniority and certification rules.
- Employees placed on RIF may have preferred recall rights.

These timelines are critical. Missing a deadline could result in losing your right to challenge the action.

If you receive a RIF or transfer letter and would like assistance, or have any questions, call the Member Advocacy Center at 866-568-9832. 🗓️

**MEMBER  
ADVOCACY  
CENTER**   
EDUCATION  
WEST VIRGINIA  
**866-568-9832**

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## Early Enrollment Now Available

It's time to solidify Education West Virginia's foundation and strength with our Early Enrollment campaign. Early Enrollment allows potential members to experience the transformative impact of being part of the union for no immediate cost. Early Enrollment provides new members with:

- No Cost! Early enrollees joining between March 1 and August 31 pay no union dues for that period
- Having your voice heard within your local union and the opportunity to be a part of proactive change in your county
- Access to select Member Benefits programs
- Access as "Insureds" to the NEA Educators Employment Liability (EEL) Program
- NOTE: Early enrollees are not eligible for NEA Legal Services until September 1

New members who join during Early Enrollment will begin paying dues after September 1, 2026 and have access to all NEA, AFT, and AFL-CIO benefits and legal services.



During the month of March, potential members can use the QR code to complete a fillable PDF Early Enrollment membership form to print and mail in to EWV

office or give to your EWV field representative. Starting April 1st, Early Enrollment can be accessed through our Join Now link at [educationwv.org](https://educationwv.org).

Help grow your union and increase the power of our advocacy! Use this special opportunity to invite your colleagues to join EWV to stand in unity to fight for public education in West Virginia. 🗓️

# Merger progress continues in our locals

Merging our state organizations (WVEA and AFT-WV) was just one step in the process of creating Education West Virginia. The merger has many moving parts and at the state level we are still wrapping up business-related items that need to be done as we transitioned to Education West Virginia.

The exciting news is that we are now at a point in our timeline where our locals are going through the merger process and creating newly chartered locals. From October through December, Education West Virginia held regional workshops around the state to help locals understand the things that needed to be in place to officially merge and recharter their locals. These all-day trainings were attended by the leaders from both the former AFT-WV and WVEA locals. During the day, they worked together as a team to learn how to navigate the processes and procedures to create a new local.

“The purpose of the training was taking our local leaders through the basics of how to start forming a new local and to help them understand the process and sequence. Education West Virginia staff shared sample constitutions and by-laws, national requirements for chartering, LMRDA rules on election of new officers, establishing new EIN numbers with the government, and much more,” explained Education West Virginia Executive Director Kym Randolph. “It was a full

day, and everyone was excited to get started on creating their new local. It was wonderful to see the camaraderie and cooperation among the local leaders. Many of them had been working together since last spring after the merger was announced and they were excited about the possibilities the combined local creates.”

Proceeding through all the steps in the chartering process takes time but many locals are well on their way. As of March 1, twenty-two locals had adopted a new constitution and bylaws. Ten of those had already elected officers for the new local. Other locals are waiting for their constitutions to be voted on or local elections to be conducted. Education West Virginia submitted the first batch of locals to the AFT and NEA for chartering at the end of February.



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**Congratulations to Berkeley County ESP, Doddridge County, Hancock County, Lincoln County, Marion County, Monongalia County ESP, Ohio County, Randolph County, and Wayne County.**

All were included in the first submission to the nationals for chartering. Periodically throughout the spring, Education West Virginia will submit the names of locals who have completed the chartering process to the nationals. We will keep you updated of the progress. 🎉

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## What happens when a county closes or consolidates schools?

As public-school enrollment continues to decline in West Virginia, county schools systems are experiencing a record number of school closures and consolidations. These are understandably stressful situations for educators and service professionals in the affected schools. Here’s a look at the law surrounding the closure and

consolidation process:

### Closure Procedure

West Virginia Code §18-5-13a and West Virginia Board of Education Policy 6204 provide that prior to any final decision of a county board on any proposal to close or consolidate any school, except in cases in which a construction bond issue

was passed by the voters and which bond issue included the schools to be closed or consolidated, the county board shall prepare and reduce to writing its reasons and supporting data regarding the school closing or consolidation, and an impact statement on the school closing or consolidation. These are commonly called closure docu-

*Continued on pg. 6*

ments. They must be available for public inspection in the office of the county superintendent during the 30 days preceding the date of the public hearing regarding the closure. They must also be delivered to the principal of a school that is proposed to be closed or consolidated, and of any school which the county designates to receive the students who are relocated as a result of the closure or consolidation and to the chair of the LSIC representing a school that is proposed to be closed or consolidated, and any school that the county designates to receive the students who are relocated as a result of the closure or consolidation. The documents are required to contain substantial information about 1) enrollment trends 2) the impacted facilities, 3) the effect the proposed school closure or consolidation will have on professional and service personnel, 4) community impact, and 5) the impact on student transportation.

Notices for required public hearings must be advertised through a Class III legal advertisement in a local newspaper for three weeks prior to the date of the hearing and shall be posted in all schools, bus garages, and maintenance areas in the county in conspicuous working areas, for all professional and service personnel to observe. Members of the public are encouraged to attend the hearings, submit statements and testimony, and question county school officials about the proposed closures. At the conclusion of the hearings, the county board must take a

vote to approve or reject the closures. All of the information must then be sent to the State Board of Education for its review and approval.

### **Personnel Considerations**

#### **Know Your Legal Rights: School Closures and Consolidation**

West Virginia Code §18A-4-8f provides that prior to the implementation of a consolidation or merger, each faculty senate and each school or work site for service personnel shall take a vote to decide whether personnel affected by school closings will be given priority status in filling new positions. The total number of votes shall be tabulated separately for classroom teachers and for service personnel. The results of the votes must be posted prior to RIF and transfer notice requirements.

For both consolidations and mergers, classroom teachers will be given priority status in filling new positions only if a majority of teachers who cast ballots voted to do so. Likewise, service personnel will be given priority status in filling new positions only if a majority of service personnel who cast ballots voted to do so. When a school is closed and merged into an existing school in the county, a teacher or school service person may only receive priority for filling positions that are created by the influx of students into the school receiving students from the closed school.

When priority has been granted by county vote, positions at the new school or merged school

shall be filled in the following way:

1. The most senior teacher from the closed school or schools shall be placed first, the second most senior shall be placed next and so on until all the newly created positions are filled, or until all the teachers in the closed school or schools who wish to transfer into the newly created positions are placed.
2. The most senior service person from the closed school or schools has priority in filling any position within his or her classification category. The second most senior service person from the closed school or schools then has priority in filling remaining vacancies and so on until all available positions are filled.
3. If there are fewer new positions in the newly created school or merged school than there are classroom teachers or school service personnel from the school or schools to be closed, the teachers or school service personnel who were not placed in the new positions retain the same rights as all other teachers or service personnel with regard to seniority, transfer and reduction in force including placement on a preferred recall list.

If members have additional questions, feel free to reach out to the Member Advocacy Center at **1-866-568-9832** for assistance. 🍌

# AFT Convention

The national AFT holds their convention every two years, and 2026 is a convention year for the AFT! This summer's convention will be held in Washington, DC and will feature workshops on the top issues facing in education and dynamic speakers. Delegates to the convention will also elect the officers of the national union and set policy for the organization for the next two years.

The event will be held Thursday, July 16, 2026 to Sunday, July 19, 2026 at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center. Participants should plan to arrive on Wednesday, July 15.

Chartered local presidents should receive their AFT convention information packet by the end of March, with full details of the event. Locals will elect delegates to the convention in accordance with US Department of Labor guidelines for internal union elections. Individual members are responsible for the cost of attendance unless

voted on and provided for by their local chapter. Members in counties who have not chartered yet will receive information in the coming weeks. The latest convention details and news is available at [AFT.org](https://www.aft.org) and full details are usually posted by April.

“I have been fortunate to attend 7 AFT national conventions where I’ve had the opportunity to meet union brothers and sisters from across the country and around the globe. Each experience has strengthened my understanding of the important work we do as educators and advocates. The professional learning, collaboration, and shared commitment to public education are truly inspiring. I always leave the convention with a renewed sense of importance and purpose, ready to return home energized and committed to serving my students, colleagues, and community,” remarked EWV Secretary and Putnam County teacher Angie Turkelson. 🍌

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## Members get 3X the Savings and Perks with EWV Benefits

Education WV helps you make the most of every dollar

Life keeps getting more expensive, but your Education WV membership can help offset some of those costs by providing exclusive discounts and services offered by the National Education Association (NEA), the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), and Union Plus. Together, these programs support you both professionally and personally, with savings on everything from insurance and travel to shopping, entertainment, and more. As a result of the merger of the two state organizations, Education WV members now have access to three separate benefit programs as part of their membership. By utilizing these discounts and services, members can often save more than the cost of their annual union dues.

Member favorites include discounts on AT&T Wireless, attractions like Disney, Universal Studios, Dollywood, Legoland, concert tickets and pet insurance.

Be sure to take advantage of these benefits by scanning the QR code to start saving today! 🍌



**“I recently saved \$31 on a two-night hotel stay in Virginia through Member Benefits. It was easy to use, and every little bit helps!”**

# 2026 Final Legislative Wrap Up

As detailed in Kristie and Dale's columns (see page 3), supporting and funding public education was simply not a priority for the legislature during the 2026 session. Attempts to increase the amount of the pay raise as it moved through the process were practically impossible given the massive amount of money given to the HOPE Scholarship program this year. To put it in perspective, legislators could have tripled the amount of the pay raise for teachers, service personnel and state troopers and still allotted roughly \$140 million to HOPE for the same price tag as the appropriation given solely to HOPE this year. Attempts to increase funding for special education students failed to pass on the final day of the session. These things, when added to the complete failure of the legislature to address PEIA during this session, should demonstrate why educators and those in our communities must collectively vote to bring focus back to our public schools and the people who serve our students.

## Pay Raise Bill

The House passed [HB 4765](#), the teacher, school personnel, and state trooper pay raise bill on Feb 19th. The bill passed with a vote of 95-0 with 5 members absent. The bill provides for a \$1,560 increase for teachers, \$87 per month for service professionals, and a 3% pay increase for State Police. The bill moved to the Senate, where the gamesmanship commenced. The

bill was amended by the Senate Finance Committee to include market enhancement pay. Most committee members were in the dark about this amendment and had many questions that were not addressed during the meeting. The bill was passed as amended by the full Senate and then was sent to the House to concur. The House refused to concur with the amended version and sent the message back to the Senate to recede and pass the original bill on the last morning of the session. The Senate waited until around 5 minutes until the midnight deadline to recede and pass the original pay bill.

## No Action from Lawmakers on PEIA

In what can be described as one of the biggest disappointments of this session is the failure of legislators to pass any measure to offer employees relief on PEIA. Introduced bills to address PEIA costs for employees never appeared on a committee agenda. This affects the impact of any potential pay increase. [SB 660](#) would have removed the requirement that an employee pay the actuarial value for spousal PEIA coverage and instead require the employee to pay for the coverage based upon their salary and tier of coverage. [SB 526](#) would have modified the 80/20 method of calculation of the employer and employee contribution percentages for PEIA premiums, lowering costs for employees. Both bills would have offered employees some financial relief

in their PEIA costs and the legislature's failure to address this serious issue that affects so many West Virginians should be remembered in the upcoming elections.

## Attempts to put guardrails on HOPE Scholarship watered down, HOPE Scholarship receives massive funding expansion

The initial version of [HB 5686](#) capped the Hope Scholarship amount to a flat \$5,250, changed the payout to four times a year instead of two, limited payments to in-state private schools only, deleted some of the current uses for the Hope Scholarship, and provided that homeschool students with an IEP must take the statewide assessment given in the public schools. Education WV believed this bill provided much needed boundaries in both the funding and implementation of the program. However, the bill met resistance and House Finance ultimately put forth a committee substitute that bill simply changed the payment schedule for the payout of the HOPE Scholarship from twice a year to 4 times a year. The watered down version of the bill passed. Additionally, the Governor's appropriation of a whopping \$290 million to expand the HOPE Scholarship program was passed as a supplemental appropriation.

## Bills that passed

Eng. Com. Sub. for [HB 4982](#) creates the Make WV Healthy Act of 2026. The purpose of

*Continued on pg. 9*

this bill is to establish and expand a coordinated, statewide Healthy Lifestyles framework to promote nutrition, farm to school initiatives, physical activity, and wellness through cross-agency collaboration, school-based initiatives, public-private partnerships, grants, and reporting requirements to improve the health of West Virginians. The bill had passed the House and amendments were adopted in the Senate, where the bill passed. The House concurred with the Senate's changes.

**HB 4575** is a bill in response to Hancock County's financial crisis. This bill appropriates the funding to Hancock County Schools to meet their payroll and vendor obligations. During the Finance Committee meeting, the Chair and committee members made it clear that they expect the \$8 million dollars for Hancock County to be a loan, and to be paid back at some point. The bill was amended by the Senate before passage, and was sent back to the House, who concurred with the Senate version.

Committee Substitute for **HB 4002** establishes the WV Collaboratory, which facilitates the dissemination of policy and research expertise through WVU, Marshall University, and West Virginia State University. The bill passed.

Committee Substitute for **HB 4005**, the Workforce Development Act of 2026, provides for apprenticeship programs for ages 16 through 18, and clarifies the categories of employment which are prohibited or authorized for those who are

under the age of 16. The bill passed.

Com. Sub. for **HB 4087** creates the West Virginia-Ireland Education Alliance. The bill will create \$50,000 grant opportunities for 2-year and 4-year institutions. The bill passed the House and the bill was made effective on March 17, 2026. The bill passed.

The Committee Substitute for **HB 4395** relating to investigations of allegations of child safety violations for school personnel. This provides the investigations shall continue even if the employee transfers to another school or resigns prior to the investigation being complete. The bill passed.

**HB 4592** requires safety mapping data for higher ed institutions and school crisis response planning. The bill passed.

**HB 4996** relates to bail in cases involving terroristic threats to schools or children. A Committee Substitute was offered and creates mandatory bail conditions for individuals charged with making terrorist threats against a school, or a similar location including condition of bail or pretrial release that the defendant shall not reside within 1,000 feet of the boundary of any licensed child care center or school, GPS monitoring of the individuals charged, and mandates no contact, either direct or indirect, with any student, school employee, or any other person directly associated with or employed by the threatened facility. The bill passed.

The Committee Substitute

for **HB 4999** relates to crimes against athletic officials. The bill adds "participants" and other school personnel to the language. The bill passed.

**HB 5110** amends the code providing for waiver of tuition and fees for older persons auditing certain college classes. This bill changes the age from 65 to 60. The bill passed.

Engrossed Committee Substitute for **HB 5212** is a bill to revise, update and streamline the requirements for higher ed grants, scholarships, loans and financial aid for postsecondary education programs, workforce development initiatives, and workforce grants. The bill is a series of strike through and new policies for higher ed institutions. A Committee Substitute was adopted and allows people with a degree to apply for a grant if going into the EMT field. The bill passed.

**HB 5438** modifies the foundation allowance to improve instructional programs. The House voted to make the effective date July 1, 2026. The Senate made some technical changes and the House voted to concur thereby completing legislative action.

**SB 63** creates the Sustaining Opportunities for Academics in Rural Schools Act (SOAR). The bill would allow an established public charter school to expand into a rural school that faces closure or consolidation. It provides for additional funding if necessary for the school. A comprehensive strike and insert amendment incorporates portions of SB 67 that had been

left out. It provides the original intent of the bill to expand the Charter School. It provides for the right of first refusal for unused school building. It provides that a “conversion” charter school be authorized and regulated by the county public school. A committee amendment inserted a new subsection for rural in person public charter school and the definitions. This is to clarify the language allowing the county to authorize the public conversion charter school. The bill passed.

Eng. **SB 155** authorizes the State Board of Education to establish an adjunct teaching permit and allow counties to enter into a contract with these individuals when no certified teacher applied for the position. The individual must have a four-year college degree or 4 years’ experience in the related field. The bill passed the Senate unanimously. On 3/4/26, the House Education Committee adopted a committee amendment in that would make two changes to the bill. The first require the position to be posted each year and the adjunct could reapply each year. The second change added clarifying language about the adjunct applying each year. SB 155 passed.

Com. Sub. for **SB 402** creates the Workforce Readiness and Opportunity Act. This bill was introduced at the request of the Governor. The bill includes establishment of a Micro-Credentialing Program, expands the apprenticeship training tax credits, and eliminates barriers to professional licensures for military trained applicants.

The bill passed.

**SB 502** creates the Women’s Collegiate Sports Protection Act. The purpose of this bill is to protect and sustain women’s collegiate Olympic sports programs through permanent endowment funding, reward verified institutional efficiencies; incentivize private investment through targeted tax credits; and ensure full compliance with federal Title IX requirements. The bill passed.

Eng. Com. Sub. for **SB 558** modifies penalties for school bus safety violations by vehicle operators. The bill passed.

Committee Substitute for **SB 694** removes county residency requirements for county superintendent of schools. An amendment to omit the travel time (hourly) restrictions was ultimately adopted. The bill passed.

Committee Substitute for **SB 890** changes certain school calendar requirements from days or months to hours. The Committee Substitute strikes the reference to school employment term and removes reference to retirement, so it doesn’t affect existing employment contracts and retirement benefits. It brings the focus to instructional time. It defines “employment term” as 200-day contract and “instructional term” as 954 instructional hours for teachers/aides. It includes the “Leave Teacher Alone” days from SB 802. It changes six two-hour blocks for faculty senate days to three two-hour blocks and clarifies these meetings will occur on “Educator Focus Days.” The bill passed.

**SB 899** permits certain teachers to be certified to work as school principals. A committee substitute was brought before the committee. The bill permits teachers with 15 years of experience at the elementary, high school, or middle school level to be certified to be principals at the levels they have taught in for a minimum of 15 years and have good evaluations. The WVDE will create a one year program for principals to address topics to be included including school law, finance, etc. The bill passed.

**SB 913** removes the annual report requirement for WV Research Trust Fund. This bill eliminates reporting requirements for the WV Research Trust Fund (once known as Bucks for Brains) because there is no longer a balance in the fund. The bill keeps the program in place in case the state wants to revive it in the future. The bill passed.

**SB 1064** redefines “long-term substitute” as it relates to public school personnel. The bill will allow a long-term substitute to remain in a position for the year that no certified teacher has applied with the position being posted at the beginning of the term and at mid-term to see if a certified teacher can fill the position. A primary amendment was offered to make technical changes and redefine “long-term substitute” to avoid unintended consequences. A secondary amendment was offered by Delegate Toney to add the ability to pay a lump sum payment of no more than \$6,000 to the family of an employee who dies before retire-

ment and has unused sick days. The secondary amendment was ruled not germane. The primary amendment was adopted. SB 1064 as amended passed.

**HB 4425** to repeal the provision allowing students to transfer from one school to another without losing eligibility. The bill repeals the current transfer rule for athletics. The bill passed.

**HB 4768** updates definitions to incorporate federal law changes to qualified higher education

expenses for purposes of 529 accounts. The bill adds public schools to the definition of eligible educational institutions in which the money may be used. The bill passed.

**HB 4798** requires teachers to wear a “mobile alert button” for emergency situations, to be known as “Alyssa’s Law.” This bill would require the alert button to be worn by all teachers, and the funding would come from private donations and administered by the Department

of Homeland Security. Four counties in WV already use this system for educators. A Committee Substitute was offered that makes this permissive instead of required. The bill passed. 🗳️

**Continue reading** the rest of the wrap up online!



# Education WV Wyoming County Member Wins Milken Award

Brooke Bailey, an Education WV member from Wyoming County, is one of 30 teachers nationwide awarded \$25,000 as part of the prestigious Milken Educator program.

At a school assembly in November scheduled to honor Mullens Elementary as the 2025 Exemplary School Award, Bailey was surprised with the honor. “Totally shocked that they announced my name,” Bailey said in an interview on WV MetroNews Talkline. “God has truly given me a gift of teaching and I so much enjoy it. I put in a lot of work and a lot of time, and I love these kids, so it does feel great to be honored,” she continued.

Along with teaching, Bailey is active in her community as a youth sports coach, president of the



PHOTO CREDIT: WEST VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

local Little League, and ministry teacher at her church.

The Milken Educator program is the nation’s preeminent teacher recognition initiative, providing public acknowledgement and unrestricted financial awards of \$25,000 to outstanding K-12 teachers, principals and specialists who are furthering excellence in education. Recipients join the Milken Educator Network, a cadre of over 3,000 distinguished educators advancing leadership and innovation at the state, national and international levels. The Concord University alumnus will join other honorees at the Milken Educator Awards Forum from June 12–14 in Washington, D.C. Congratulations Brooke! 🗳️

# EWV Kanawha fights proposed change in staffing formula for custodians

In recent weeks, EWV Kanawha County leadership and custodial staff in Kanawha County Schools have raised their voices in support of the essential services they provide, and called attention to the potential impacts of proposed staffing changes across the district.

During the January 15th regular Kanawha County schools Board of Education meeting, Superintendent Paula Potter announced to the Board that she intended to change how schools are staffed with custodians. She stated that the district would move to a formula based on each school's enrollment and move away from a model that considers the number of custodians on square footage of the school building.

EWV Kanawha County sprang into action, calling an emergency meeting for February 3rd to hear from custodians on the impact of such a drastic change.

With 140 positions expected to be eliminated this spring due to declining enrollment, district leaders have said adjustments are needed to balance budgets and bring staffing levels into compliance with the school aid formula. However, the effects of those cuts are being felt far beyond the numbers, especially by service personnel whose work ensure students and staff learn and work in safe, healthy environments.

At the February 19th regular Board of Education meeting, EWV Kanawha County Co-President Dinah Adkins spoke on the broad scope of custodian duties. She emphasized that school custodians do much more than sweep and mop, they help keep the entire school community healthy and functioning every day. EWV Kanawha County Co-President David McCloud and many other members also attended the meeting.

Custodians shared personal testimony about what these changes might mean for schools' day-to-day operations, pointing out that while student numbers may be decreasing, school building themselves have not shrunk. The work of cleaning, maintaining restrooms, and preparing facilities for daily use still falls on custodial staff and they warned that reducing the number of workers could leave schools understaffed and less safe. It could also mean that work goes undone and places students and staff in unhygienic or unsafe environments.

Education West Virginia Staff Representative Randy Halsey spoke to the Board and challenged the district to look at all areas of the district to balance the budget, including central office itself. It stands to reason that with a loss of enrollment, less staffing at schools, and schools closing soon that it is only logical that there should be cuts at the central office as well.

The discussions at the board meeting reflect a broader concern held by many in the district: while budget challenges are real, the cost savings achieved through staffing changes should not come at the expense of clean, safe schools. As decisions about staffing formulas and positions move forward, custodians and supporters will continue advocating for policies that recognize the full value and impact of their work in schools across Kanawha County. ✊

# 2026 NEA Representative Assembly

Each year, the National Education Association brings together educators from across the country for the Representative Assembly (RA). This summer marks an important milestone as Education West Virginia sends delegates for the first time. Participation in the Representative Assembly allows educators from across the nation to come together to set priorities, advance policies, and ensure that the voices of members, and the needs of students, remain at the center of NEA's work.

The RA is NEA's primary legislative and policymaking body and the highest decision-making authority of the Association. Its power comes directly from the membership. During eight business sessions over four days, more than 6,000 delegates discuss and make decisions that guide the Association's work in the coming year.

At the RA, delegates:

- Adopt NEA's strategic plan and budget

- Set the legislative program
- Debate and vote on resolutions and new business items
- Vote by secret ballot on proposed amendments to the NEA Constitution and Bylaws
- Elect NEA's executive officers, members of the Executive Committee, and at-large members of the NEA Board of Directors

In our November 2025 issue, the state delegate nomination form for the NEA Representative Assembly was published, giving members across West Virginia the opportunity to step forward and serve.



NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION  
REPRESENTATIVE ASSEMBLY

We are pleased to introduce the 2026 Education West Virginia RA State Delegates who will represent our organization at this year's NEA Representative Assembly in Denver, Colorado:

- Sara Ballengee, Mercer County

- Lucinda Burns, Kanawha County
- Jennifer Craig, Ohio County
- Jason Crouch, Fayette County
- Jessica "Jessa" Dunn, Kanawha County
- Joshua Gary, Marshall County
- Mary "Beth" Hardy, Mineral County
- Daniel Hodges, Mercer County
- Dale Lee, Mercer County
- Danielle Lee, Mercer County
- Blake Mangold, Mineral County
- Amber McCoy, Wayne County
- John Quesenberry, Raleigh County
- Kristie Skidmore, Randolph County
- Wayne Spangler, Monroe County
- April Wallace, Wayne County
- Angela Wyatt, Jefferson County 🇺🇸

# Education WV demands transparency and accountability amid Hancock County financial crisis

Hancock County Schools is facing one of the largest public school layoffs in recent state history in terms of percentage of employees impacted. With less than 600 employees in the county and roughly 143 positions reportedly over formula, 25–30% of employees are slated for elimination. The forecasted reductions in force are due to a major financial shortfall projection of upwards of a \$7 million deficit.

The district's fiscal crisis appears to be a result of inadequate financial oversight and unwise spending decisions by the county. Concerns include the strategic filing of reports, failure to utilize the state-mandated West Virginia Education Information System (WVEIS), and audits that failed to fully disclose the district's deteriorating financial position. These factors allowed the depth of the deficit to remain obscured. Jeff Davis of Education Consulting Team LLC identified several critical missteps, including the use of federal COVID relief funds to sustain recurring operational expenses and significant capital outlays for athletic facility upgrades. These projects included turf installations at both Oak Glen and Weir High Schools, reportedly exceeding budgeted amounts by approximately \$2 million, as well as a Weir High renovation that surpassed levy commitments by roughly \$1 million. The district is also carrying a long-term loan obligation tied to those improvements. Collectively, these decisions contributed to a widening structural deficit that ultimately prompted a state takeover.

On January 16, 2026, the West Virginia Board of Education voted unanimously to intervene in Hancock County Schools. Superintendent Dan Enich and Assistant Superintendent Dave Smith were immediately removed; the county was placed under direct state oversight under the

direction of Watler Saunders, former Director of Federal Programs and Assessment. These leadership changes took place after the county had already removed Financial Director Joe Campinelli after concern that the county could not meet February payroll.

In the meantime, lawmakers at the Capitol have passed a bill that will provide an \$8 million loan to help Hancock County Schools stabilize the finances.

While final numbers for job cuts are still being confirmed, the scope is undeniable and ultimately everyone in the county will feel the impact when you consider those losing positions, being transferred, and even those who remain in their jobs.

“Those cuts are not just numbers,” EWV Field Representative Lisa Summers said, speaking at the February 2, 2026 board meeting. “Those are families. Mortgages. Health insurance. Classrooms and bus routes.”

The cuts are taking a profound toll on teachers and service personnel in the county. The effects will reach every classroom, every bus route, and every cafeteria line.

“This is devastating for our schools,” said Hancock County Co-President Paige Bruno. “These are not just positions. These are people who have dedicated their lives to our students and this community.”

During the last week of February, HCS Superintendent Saunders began visiting schools to individually notify affected employees regarding their impending RIF or transfer.

Declining enrollment in the county adds another layer of concern. Morgan Bricker, Building Representative at Weir High School, pointed to continued student loss to virtual and private options, including Steubenville City Schools (Ohio), which has promoted accepting Hope Scholarship funds.

“We are bleeding students,” Bricker said. “And

*Continued on pg. 15*

Continued from pg. 14



EDUCATION WEST VIRGINIA

1558 Quarrier Street  
Charleston, WV 25311



A union member  
publication and newsletter

now we're cutting the very staff who made our schools strong. Fewer students and fewer staff create a cycle that will be hard to reverse."

Even Education WV local leaders are not exempt from these cuts, such as Molly Cribbs and Melissa Wallace, who found themselves RIF'd in the cuts. "This is bigger than any one of us," Cribbs said. "But it hurts to see so many dedicated professionals treated as numbers on a spreadsheet."

Education WV Hancock County has vowed to fight vigorously for its members. Cribbs, Bruno, and Wallace have demanded full transparency about how decisions were made and whether seniority laws were strictly followed. "We are being sacrificed for leadership's failures at Hancock County Schools—reduced to numbers, stripped of our livelihoods, and left to carry the wreckage of mistakes that were never ours," said Wallace.

As Hancock County moves forward, the union has made clear it will not simply accept outcomes without transparency and scrutiny. Union leaders have requested meetings with Superintendent Saunders to review RIF and transfer decisions in detail and are representing members through their own RIF and transfer hearings.

Our union will continue to closely monitor and track the district's decisions moving forward. We stand together to fight for and with our members and students of public education in West Virginia. ✊

# Save the date for our 1<sup>st</sup> ever Education WV Activist Academy!

Plans are underway for Education WV's first ever Activist Academy! This brand-new summer conference will feature engaging sessions for every level of union activist to grow and develop your skills as an educator and leader.

Whether you are a local officer, building representative, or a member looking to be more involved, our conference will offer something valuable for you! The event is scheduled for June 22–24, 2026 at the Embassy Suites in Charleston, WV.

Each day will be jam-packed with informative sessions and speakers, and evenings will be a time for fun and fellowship with your union colleagues from across the state.

Watch our website, social media platforms and your email for more details and registration information in the next few weeks! ✊

JUNE 2026						
SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
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