



Cultivating Safe, Just, and Equitable Learning Environments for Every Student

PROGRAM REPORT 2024



NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

The National Education Association is the nation's largest professional employee organization, representing more than 3 million elementary and secondary teachers, higher education faculty, education support professionals, school administrators, retired educators and students preparing to become teachers.

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Leaders for Just Schools: For Educators by Educators



Since the 1966 merger of the National Education Association and the American Teachers Association—an organization that was founded to connect and encourage Black teachers working to lift the lives of students who were surrounded by systems of inequity—NEA members have sought to create a public education system that is racially and socially just. We believe every student should have the resources, opportunities, access, and support that will prepare them to pursue and attain their highest aspirations.

NEA's Leaders for Just Schools (LJS) program continues that important work. As attacks against public education continue to escalate—from attempts to whitewash and then rewrite the nation's history and eliminate the contributions and lived experiences of Indigenous, Black, and other communities of color, to the maligning and marginalization of LGBTQ+ students and educators—the work of LJS is more important than ever.

Launched in 2018, LJS prepares educators to advance local, state, and national education policies that will increase equitable outcomes for every student. The program helps NEA members deepen their cultural awareness, identify and implement culturally responsive teaching practices, and gain the skills and knowledge that will empower them to create learning environments that are fair and equitable and encourage students to live as their authentic selves.

This vital work is part of the NEA vision to unite not just our members, but also the nation, to reclaim public education as a common good, as the foundation of our democracy, and then transform it into something it was never designed to be—a racially and socially just and equitable system that prepares every student, every one, to succeed in this diverse and interdependent world.

Through an individual and collaborative exploration of research and experiences, LJS helps to transform that vision into a reality. The program is building a nationwide network of educators who understand inequity is sewn into every social system in our nation and are ready to take action. In response, our members are determined to hone their cultural competency in their teaching and practice, advocate for policies that celebrate their students' differences, and honor their sacred responsibility to teach this nation's true history—the unsettling along with the uplifting.

With LJS leading the way, NEA will work tirelessly to achieve our highest goal: ensuring that all of our students—of every color, ZIP code, background, and ability—have the joyful, just, and excellent public education experiences they need and deserve to live into their brilliance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rebecca S. Pringle".

Rebecca S. Pringle, NEA President

Program Mission

The Leaders for Just Schools program helps NEA member leaders better understand how they can cultivate just schools for students of every race, place, background, and ability. The NEA's vision is a great public school for every student. The core values of the Association are centered on this vision.

Program Goals

Create a national network of educator equity leaders who have the knowledge and experience to apply provisions in federal policy to advocate and lead school, community, and district-based efforts that will advance equitable outcomes for all students.



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“We have seen time and time again at the national and state level that our union is on the right side of history and a promoter of change when it comes to important societal issues and workers' rights. I see this work as more purposeful and intentional in achieving equitable outcomes for our members and our students and a continuation of the work we already do but with more of an eye on the people that are inevitably impacted the most by bad policy decisions (at all levels of government and within our own organization).

By making racial and social justice a focus of our work, we make the world a better place for everyone.”

—Jamie, from Iowa

Identify and train educators to take on local leadership roles to address a wide range of problems created by institutional racism.

Strategically equip leaders to utilize education policy to advance solutions that will positively affect students for years to come.

Expand and connect NEA's current leadership development offerings for educators who want equity and racial and social justice at the center of their advocacy.

Engage in ongoing performance assessment and improvement of the Leaders for Just Schools program by cultivating a continuous feedback culture with an impartial, external evaluator that specializes in program evaluation for socially conscious organizations.

Background

In 2015, NEA made a deliberate association-wide decision to address institutional racism when its highest leadership body—a congress of roughly 8,000 educators—took a formal position and established programs to support the idea. Since that time, NEA has deepened its commitment to explicitly address racism and its effects on educational experiences and outcomes.

Also in 2015, President Barack Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) into law. This reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act reformed the federal education policy landscape in a way that explicitly aims to close achievement gaps and improve equitable education outcomes for all students regardless of race, place, background, or ability. The NEA, which advocated for ESSA’s passage, developed tools and resources to help educators leverage the new law—particularly, in regard to educator voice—to ensure the successful and equitable implementation of education policy across the country.

In 2018, NEA’s leadership body voted to put racial and social justice at the forefront of NEA’s work, adopting a policy committing to “actively advocate for social and educational strategies fostering the eradication of institutional racism and white privilege.” In the wake of the 2020 murder of George Floyd and in the midst of the continued trauma of the COVID-19 pandemic and its disparate impact on students

and communities of color, NEA’s leadership body called on its affiliates and allies to build powerful education communities and continue to work together to eradicate institutional racism in our public school system.

As President Biden took office, NEA celebrated increased visibility and influence in shaping federal education policy. At the same time, NEA welcomed new leadership under President Becky Pringle, who positioned NEA at the forefront of the racial and social justice movement and pressed the importance of “reclaim[ing] public education as a common good, and transform[ing] it into something it was never designed to be: racially and socially just, and equitable.” In response to increased protests against teaching students about a true and accurate accounting of our nation’s history, NEA began its “Honesty in Education” campaign in support of teaching a truthful and honest education that does not diminish the injustices experienced by generations of Americans to prepare our students for a more equitable future.



In 2022, NEA’s leadership body adopted the Policy Statement on Safe, Just, and Equitable Schools, which begins with NEA’s vision of schools as thriving spaces that are safe and welcoming for all students, discriminatory toward none, and that recruit and retain educators who reflect the communities they work in and who are prepared to center students’ needs and lived experiences. The policy statement has driven NEA’s work in support of teaching and learning conditions that honor our past, value diverse authors, and allow students to see themselves in what they learn.



“Leaders for Just Schools shows me a more specific example of how unions protect and support us in our equity-driven work. Many of the concepts from the LJS curriculum I learned through other opportunities, but I felt like LJS tied together how our choices in schools as adults can have a direct impact on our students.”

–Amelia, from Wisconsin

Since 2019, Leaders for Just Schools has been a driving force within the larger NEA professional learning portfolio by creating opportunities for educators to learn about the manifestations of racism and other injustices. The program guides participants on how they can use education policy levers to advocate for policy changes to reduce the prevalence of racial and social injustices in learning communities nationwide and identify solutions to ensure that every student can learn in a safe, just, and equitable learning environment.



PROGRAM OVERVIEW: CULTIVATING EQUITABLE AND JUST LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Leaders for Just Schools examines the sources of systemic education inequities at the individual, community, and institutional levels and is grounded in real-life experiences that are happening in schools across the country. Participants learn to advocate on behalf of their students using education policy levers to promote public schools that are racially, socially, economically, and educationally just for all students, no matter their race, background, ZIP code, or ability.

Curriculum Abstract

Through this three-year cohort-based program, participants connect previous learning to new concepts, creating a strong foundation and understanding of equitable policies and practices. By using scaffolding techniques, participants can connect positive practices with high levels of engagement among participants and their facilitators.

Year 1: Exploring Individual Bias



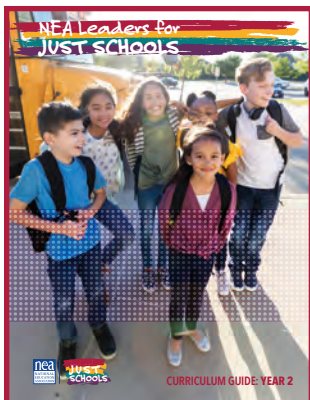
The Year 1 professional learning experience guides participants through an examination of self to discover individual bias and its role in hindering equitable education policy. The curriculum takes a deep dive into understanding equity and its impact on learning environments, beginning with a look into who each participant is and how they have formed the thoughts and opinions that impact not only their dispositions and relationships but also their instructional planning and content delivery.

Following the Year 1 learning experience, participants identify specific actions they will take in their individual spheres of influence that will foster and grow safe, just, and equitable learning environments. Participants are encouraged to share their plan with their affiliate leadership immediately upon their return. Examples of actions that participants can take include:

- ✓ Completing a section of the NEA Opportunity Audit;
- ✓ Delivering public testimony at a school board meeting or legislative hearing; and
- ✓ Engaging in their affiliate's get-out-the-vote efforts.

It is powerful for participants to leave Year 1 with action plans that have been created in writing, with the support of others who are doing this important work. By creating action steps, there is a greater chance these leaders will find success when they return to their schools and districts.

Year 2: Examining Structural Inequities in Education



Year 2 explores structural inequities and their impact on student success. Inequity is structural when policies keep some groups of people from obtaining the resources to better their lives. Structural inequities are deeply woven into the fabric of society, and structural racism poses fundamental challenges to America's schools. Participants first explore how individual biases they learned about in Year 1 perpetuate structural inequities and the historical contexts of structural racism. Then, they examine the role of families, communities, and partners in advocating for equity. Throughout the Year 2 professional learning experience, participants learn how stakeholders can—consciously and unconsciously—disrupt or perpetuate structural inequities.

At the conclusion of the Year 2 learning journey, participants create an action plan that combines what they have learned about individual biases and structural inequities in their school or district. At this stage, participants are encouraged to work with families, fellow educators, and partner organizations in their community to continue their work toward achieving safe, just, equitable, and inclusive learning environments for their students. Examples of actions that participants can take include:

- ✓ Working to create universal school meal access for all students;
- ✓ Designing and implementing justice-oriented training on family and community engagement for educator peers; and
- ✓ Serving as a state affiliate leader, such as governance or a board member.

Year 3: Organizing and Advocating for Just Schools



The link between individual biases and structural inequities is often manifested through institutional inequities. The Year 3 professional learning journey highlights tools and strategies to help participants organize and advocate for change by using education policy levers to create equitable and just learning environments at the institutional level. These institutions may include schools, districts, states, state and local affiliates of unions, and federal institutions.

In this culminating year, participants identify a problem of equity in their school or community and create a comprehensive plan to address it. At the conclusion of the professional learning journey, they will meet with fellow participants and facilitators to workshop their plans, ensuring they are ready to be put into action.

Capstone: Problem of Equity

This final component of the program ensures that participants have a well-defined understanding of a problem of equity in their school community and a comprehensive action plan to address it. LJS alumni have addressed a range of issues, including:

- ✓ Improving reading fluency and comprehension skills among Black and Brown students;
- ✓ Moving race equity work through school-level leadership; and
- ✓ Addressing district equity policies and removing harmful student handbook language.

Upon returning to their school communities, LJS educators work to address their problem of equity over several months based on what they learned throughout the three years of the program. Each cohort reconvenes to share progress on their plans while also working and learning from one another, which is an essential step for participants as they continue their journey as leaders for just schools.

Curriculum Development and Improvement

The LJS curriculum was designed by seven educator leaders, known as the LJS Leadership Team, from across the country in consultation with NEA and the Arizona K12 Center, a consultant organization. The LJS Leadership Team met regularly to brainstorm the objectives and activities of each year's program. The Arizona K12 Center facilitated the writing for the first two years based on these in-depth conversations, and NEA staff facilitated the writing for the third year of the program.

As each year of the program was developed, the LJS Leadership Team facilitated the curriculum for the participants from the Durham cohort. Following the conclusion of the first year that all three cohorts participated simultaneously, the LJS Leadership Team and NEA staff completed a comprehensive review for improvement and made major edits,

NEW RESOURCE: Advocacy Policy Plan

New to the curriculum in 2023, the LJS Advocacy Policy Plan (APP) was developed in response to feedback from participants and facilitators. The APP is a fillable workbook that accompanies the LJS curriculum guides and spans the entire three-year learning journey. It includes:

- ✓ A sampling of education policy-based racial and social justice activities that participants can take in their school, district, and state;
- ✓ A vetted list of resources on racial and social justice topics;
- ✓ A fillable log of activities, including quarterly updates, for each year of the program; and
- ✓ Advice for communicating within the association and sample communication to state leaders.

This resource helps participants evaluate their growth and actions as they move through the program. Using the APP, participants are able to chronicle their actions toward creating safe, equitable, and inclusive learning environments as well as share their experiences and accomplishments in advancing racial and social justice in education.

activity modifications, and updates to the entire curriculum based on feedback from NEA leaders and staff, LJS Leadership Team members, and participants. In subsequent years, the LJS Leadership Team gathered input and recommendations from participants, facilitators, and affiliates. They worked with NEA staff to make updates and improvements to the curriculum and learning experiences.

The curriculum is dynamic, with updates made based on continuous reflection and feedback. This includes conversations with NEA leadership; H&H Strategies, LJS's first external evaluator; and LJS facilitators and participants as they engage with the program.

Program Evaluation

Following engagement with an external evaluator through the initial grant process, NEA brought the evaluation process in-house in 2022. NEA staff began this process by updating survey instruments to incorporate standard language from NEA's guidance on events and conferences, which allowed the team to track participant demographics across all cohorts. Evaluative surveys were administered two ways in 2022, one of which included attributions and one that was completed anonymously. The two surveys were merged in 2023 after analysis of participant responses and feedback; NEA staff found higher completion rates among participants for the survey with attribution.

In fall 2022, the staff team conducted its first briefing of the LJS Leadership Team and facilitators to discuss the annual survey results, which was met with overwhelmingly positive reactions by both groups. They shared that the information was relevant to informing their approach to future curriculum development and facilitation and helpful for driving interactions with participants. NEA is also in the process of onboarding a new external evaluator to support program improvements rooted in objective evaluative feedback.



MAJOR ACTIVITIES

By developing and implementing culturally relevant models in schools and districts across the country, educators can work to correct the systemic limitations that are placed on students who often need the greatest advocacy and opportunities for empowerment. Leaders for Just Schools takes a multi-prong approach to connecting educators and creating a professional network of equity leaders through a combination of in-person professional learning, continuous mentorship and small-group check-ins, quarterly cohort check-ins, and extended virtual learning opportunities.



Virtual Onboarding

Participants begin their professional learning journey with a virtual onboarding that provides an overview of Leaders for Just Schools, the learning experience, and the implementation of participant expectations as well as supports provided throughout the three-year program. Prior to each year’s in-person professional learning experience, called LJS MegaWeek, there is a virtual learning day to kick off the participants' progression into the next stage of the program.

In-Person Professional Learning

Due to the sensitive nature of the program content, the LJS Leadership Team and NEA staff determined that in-person delivery allowed the necessary supports and learning space to guide participants through intense learning and introspection. This mode of delivery fosters deep connections through national cohorts, builds professional learning communities, and anchors participants in the purpose of creating equitable learning environments for every student. Each year, LJS participants convene by cohort for LJS MegaWeek to explore awareness, equity, and socially just learning environments from many levels.

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“I have never had an experience like the week I spent in Minneapolis [for LJS MegaWeek]. I left a different person and fully embrace the importance of a union to support our differences in schools and in education.”

–Kathleen, from Maine

At the conclusion of each MegaWeek experience, participants are encouraged to return to their school communities to take action, following the goals they’ve drafted in their Advocacy Policy Plan. These goals may include a variety of actions, as noted earlier in this report. LJS facilitators and participants make a commitment to create an honest, safe, and confidential learning space so that all educators can take full advantage of the growth and opportunities encapsulated in the LJS curriculum.

Facilitator Training, Mentorship, and Virtual Check-Ins

An essential component of Leaders for Just Schools is the ongoing mentorship educators receive as both participants and facilitators. Participants from each cohort who demonstrate exceptional leadership are selected by the LJS Leadership Team through a rigorous application and interview process to become facilitators for the subsequent cohort of participants. Prior to taking on their new role, facilitators gain specific skills related to

leading conversations around racial and social justice as well as policy advocacy through training led by staff from NEA Human and Civil Rights and NEA Education Policy and Practice. They also learn in-depth tips for facilitating this specific curriculum through coaching by the LJS Leadership Team.

Throughout the year, LJS participants have ongoing check-ins with their facilitators to discuss successes and challenges and offer support. The LJS Leadership Team also recommends monthly check-ins for participants and facilitators to connect on progress and discuss barriers they might be facing. The LJS Leadership Team, with support from NEA staff, also leads whole-cohort check-ins quarterly.

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“The connection and relationships I have built with my fellow facilitators have provided a safe space to make mistakes and grow as a person, an educator, and a facilitator. These are my people. They push back, call in, and love. I know I can count on any of them, at any time, to be there for me, support me, and share resources I might not otherwise be able to access. I will forever be grateful for the connections I have made through my LJS journey.”
—Leona, from Idaho

Continuous Learning

Throughout and beyond the three-year learning journey, LJS participants have the opportunity to engage in professional development to further their knowledge and connect with fellow educators who are dedicated to advocating for racial and social justice.

Learning Series

The Leaders for Just Schools program hosts an annual Learning Series designed to keep participants’ knowledge in the content and concepts addressed in the curriculum. The Learning Series sessions, presented virtually, are scheduled throughout the fall and spring, serving as supplemental learning opportunities for the LJS community. In each session, participants engage in robust discussions on a variety of topics and learn about tools and resources that can help them support their students and fellow educators.



Among the topics and issues explored, participants have discussed:

- ✓ Themes of racial and social justice through media, including *Nice White People*, a five-part podcast series about building a better public school system and what obstacles get in the way of achieving this goal;
- ✓ NEA's Honesty in Education campaign and attempts to limit culturally affirming instruction and historically accurate curriculum across the United States; and
- ✓ Disability rights and championing change to create environments where everyone's abilities and potential are recognized and nurtured.

Equity Symposium and Virtual Closing Ceremony

In July 2023 during the LJS MegaWeek, the program hosted its first annual Equity Symposium and its first annual Virtual Closing Ceremony, providing participants who have completed the third year of the professional learning experience the opportunity to present their Problem of Equity project to current LJS participants, NEA program staff, and their fellow cohort members.

Both events featured participant efforts to impact school and district policies and influence school culture in pursuit of just and equitable learning environments for every student. Equity Symposium highlights include:

- ✓ Nick, from Wisconsin, discussed the opportunity to leverage the power of aligning the goals of educators, school and community leaders, community advocates, and other co-conspirators to elevate student and educator voices and create spaces where all students can thrive.
- ✓ Celeste, from North Carolina, presented concrete steps educators can take to increase student reading skills and reduce disparities in reading; and
- ✓ Lindsey, from Idaho, shared about her successful effort to remove harmful language from her district's student handbook.

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"My former student helps felt good about providing reading interventions to my students. My five students were excited to get new library books that reflected the cultures of Black and Brown students. I didn't just want to help students improve their reading skills, I also wanted them to look forward to selecting books that reflected the communities that they live in and develop a love for reading."

–LJS Participant (Anonymous Evaluation Comment)

Learning On-the-Go at NEA.org

Available on NEA.org, mini LJS learning modules adapt content from the first two years of the professional learning experience. Modules provide introductory learning on several topics, including the Every Student Succeeds Act, equity, microaggressions, zero-tolerance policies, and restorative-based practices. Each module includes background on the topic, downloadable resources and other digital media, information that connects each topic with education policy, and questions for consideration.

TIMELINE OF MAJOR ACTIVITIES

Since the last LJS Program Report, the following activities and actions have taken place.

2021	
MARCH-APRIL	LJS member leaders present the Spring Learning Series, engaging participants in a series of conversations around three topics: statues, mascots, and symbols in the USA; the difference between cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation; and the importance of Native Lands Acknowledgments and restoratively honoring Native People.
JULY	NEA staff, in consultation with the LJS Leadership Team, continue to develop the third year of the curriculum.
SEPTEMBER	NEA staff and the LJS Leadership Team meet to review the curriculum and programmatic structural components to make revisions as needed for continued improvement of the program.
OCTOBER-NOVEMBER	NEA staff from the Center for Racial and Social Justice and the Office of the General Counsel present the Fall Learning Series. These sessions focus on NEA's Honesty in Education campaign and the recent attempts to limit culturally affirming instruction and historically accurate curriculum in K-12 schools and institutions of higher education across the United States.
2022	
MARCH	LJS member leaders facilitate the Spring Learning Series, which features presentations and discussions on the documentaries <i>Crip Camp and Disclosure: Trans Lives on Screen</i> ; the <i>1619</i> and <i>R.E.A.L Storytellers</i> podcasts; and the book <i>Rise Up! How You Can Join the Fight Against White Supremacy</i> .
APRIL	NEA staff, in consultation with the LJS Leadership Team, finalizes the third year of the curriculum.
MAY	The NEA hosts virtual professional learning experiences: Educators from the Durham cohort begin the Year 3 professional learning experience over two days; educators from the San Diego cohort attend a virtual refresher course on Year 1, followed by a one-day introduction to the Year 2 professional learning experience; and educators from the DC cohort, who were delayed one year due to COVID-19, participate in a one-day experience that introduces the Year 1 professional learning experience.
JULY	Educators attend the annual LJS MegaWeek in Washington, DC. The Durham cohort participants move into Year 3, with the roll out of the Problem of Equity capstone; the San Diego cohort participants move into Year 2; and the DC cohort participants begin Year 1.
SEPTEMBER	NEA staff and the LJS Leadership Team begin a comprehensive revision process across all three years of the curriculum, including modifying sequencing and replacing activities based on feedback and input from national cohort participants, program facilitators, affiliate leaders, and constituency groups within the NEA.

2023

MARCH

The 2023 Spring Learning Series offers two sessions—facilitated by NEA Government Relations and NEA Center for Racial and Social Justice staff with members of the NEA LGBTQ+ Cadre—that focus on creating LGBTQ+ inclusive schools.

APRIL

NEA staff and the LJS Leadership Team onboard the Minneapolis cohort virtually, introducing them to the program as well as setting a foundation for what and how they will learn. NEA staff and the LJS Leadership Team also complete initial onboarding of new facilitators virtually.

JULY

Educators attend the annual LJS MegaWeek in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The Durham cohort participants complete their journey in the national cohort program; the San Diego cohort participants move into Year 3; the DC cohort participants move into Year 2; and Minneapolis cohort participants begin Year 1 of their professional learning journey. NEA staff and the LJS Leadership Team launch the first Equity Symposium and Completers Closing Ceremony and roll out the Advocacy Policy Plan (APP), a new resource to help participants evaluate their growth and actions as they move through the program.

SEPTEMBER

NEA staff and the LJS Leadership Team begin curriculum revision process, incorporating input and feedback from national cohort participants, program facilitators, affiliate leaders, and constituency groups within the NEA.

NOVEMBER

The LJS Leadership Team facilitates the Fall Learning Series. Sessions are broken up by cohort, with each session providing a deeper dive into a topic area covered during MegaWeek.

The Fall Learning Series concludes with a session for all participants focused on disability rights and inclusion, which is co-facilitated by NEA staff and LJS program completers.



NATIONWIDE REACH

233 ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS

24 PARTICIPANT-TURNED-FACILITATORS

24 PROGRAM COMPLETERS FROM **11** STATES

7 LEADERSHIP TEAM MEMBERS

4 COHORTS

7 STATE-LEVEL LJS PROGRAMS LED BY NATIONAL PARTICIPANTS AND FACILITATORS

These state-level programs amplify the power of the LJS curriculum by exposing hundreds of educators to content and experiences that inspire them to advocate for education justice.



EDUCATOR HIGHLIGHTS

Throughout the country, LJS participants have gone on to lead significant actions to advocate for policies in support of safe, just, and equitable learning environments for students across race, place, background, and ability. They have led professional learning opportunities and organized advocacy efforts in their own schools, districts, and communities to promote public schools that are racially, socially, economically, and educationally just for all students.

In **Arizona**, Ann and Janice organize the Arizona Education Association–Retired social and racial justice book club, using fiction and nonfiction to educate members about historical and current racism. Book choices have focused on the African American experience, Central American refugees, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and poverty in the United States. Ann also writes a book review column called “The Book Corner” for the statewide newsletter.

Faith, from **Connecticut**, facilitated a Teacher Leaders for Equity program, and she used the Honesty in Education materials to facilitate work through her state affiliate and with regional counties. She presented “Advocating for What Teachers and Students Need and Deserve,” where she discussed how to talk to legislatures and be advocates. She also was asked to speak at the Connecticut Teacher of the Year Council’s Empowered to Lead Symposium. Faith, whose full-time position is to bring educational equity work into her district and state, is working with a high school group on hate-based and identity-based

role play so that they can practice how they will approach difficult situations. This work is the result of an equity study audit, which is part of the first year of the district’s action plan. This experience provides all students and staff with a shared experience about microaggressions, bias, and acts of exclusion.

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“The impact for me was at the school level. It helped low-income families in the community to have a free reading program for their children. I hope that it will help students become better citizens in our communities by remembering how hard we worked to make changes.”

–LJS Participant (Anonymous Evaluation Comment)

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“[LJS] has strengthened my understanding, love, and respect for my union and the people involved. The union protects and supports educators who are responsible for influencing our students who are the present and future.”

–Jequetta, from Arkansas

In **Idaho**, Leona co-facilitated the Year 1 curriculum through her local education association, personally inviting all equity leads in the district. More than 20 educators were in attendance, with about half of them being district equity leads.

Marta, from **Idaho**, has been working with the Human and Civil Rights Committee to facilitate the LJS curriculum. The committee is currently working to secure funding for Leaders for Just Schools. LJS facilitators of Idaho have been facilitating the curriculum and have formed a grant writing subcommittee. Marta also plans to provide LJS training in her district and to the Idaho Education Association Board.

Stormy, from **Idaho**, is advocating for the multilingual students in her school by changing structures that were keeping the students from getting the services they need by law. She is working to get more diverse literature in her department so that her students can see themselves represented in the stories they read. She has been on an adoption committee for books in her district, sharing with her colleagues the value of having diverse text selections in the classroom. Stormy also started an English language learner endorsement program and plans to integrate the LJS curriculum into the learning journey.

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“My connections are more profound than just the traditions we build when we are together. When I need encouragement, I turn to my LJS family. When I am looking for resources, ideas, and support, I turn to my LJS family. When the work gets hard and I need someone who truly understands, I turn to my LJS family.”

—Jamie, from Iowa

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“This program has changed my life. It has completely changed my view of myself, my upbringing, my privilege, my place in this world, and my work, and how I can use what I have to advocate for positive change for ALL of my students. I also now understand the impact of creating changes in policy that will continue to have a positive impact on students far after I have left the profession. In addition to this, I have a widespread network of [LJS] family to rely on for anything that I need to process as I continue to do this work.”

—Lindsey, from Idaho

In **Illinois**, Andy leads the Illinois Opportunity Coalition and drives the LJS curriculum through regional cohorts across the state.

Eriecce, from **Iowa**, is serving as an equity coach—a position created with ESSER money—in her district, where she is providing learning journeys and creating new structures to serve underrepresented students.

Kit, from **Maine**, has faced struggles in her district with members of the community calling out the district policy concerning transgender students and making efforts to ban books. In response, Kit has spoken up at school board meetings and has encouraged others to do so in support of students and staff in the LGBTQIA+ community. In addition, she has helped support and lead a gay/straight alliance for students, staff, and community members.

In **Maine**, Rebecca engaged with community organizations and the local education association to help elect candidates in support of public education and racial and social justice.

In **Maryland**, Georgene serves as the new racial justice coach in her district. She has implemented district-level racial justice programs, conducted racial justice training for staff, and held racial justice circles for students. In addition, Georgene has coordinated racial justice efforts with the school behavior team and provided racial justice data to the district. She is also engaging in continuous social justice self-study.

Nikki and Vernon, from **Maryland**, designed a hybrid LJS course for members. The course provides continuing professional development and graduate credit through Trinity University. Nikki has started working with an advocacy group to begin advocating and designing a restorative schools initiative at the state level. The principles of the initiative are inclusive of the LJS framework, elevating the necessity of restorative practices with a focus on cultivating inclusive and equitable school climate and culture across Maryland's more than 1,400 public schools.

In **Maryland**, Robin has trained nearly 300 educators and administrators in restorative practices. These sessions, which incorporate components of the LJS curriculum, include how implicit bias and racism play a part in the school-to-prison pipeline and contribute to the disproportionate number of Black children being suspended. At each training, Robin asks educators to complete a self-reflection on how they service children based on their racial and cultural needs. Robin has been addressing how American culture is not the culture of every child and teaching educators how to acknowledge that. She also has integrated a Restorative Pedagogy course to address how to make a classroom critically and culturally conscious.

Bridgett, from **Montana**, initiated a conversation with the Billings Public School superintendent, school board, and local president about exploring a new school schedule that will be more equitable for students and educators. She is also part of a cohort of educators from across the school district participating in a Social Justice Holocaust course.

In **Nebraska**, Ed reported that his state affiliate created a social justice committee that was charged with re-examining the strategic goals of the affiliate and incorporating racial and

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"The connections I have created with my LJS facilitator group have been invaluable personally and professionally. They have stretched my mind, they have touched my heart, and most importantly, they have energized me when the work just seemed too hard."

—Angie, from Kansas

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"Our district now has a program called the Honor Cadre. The program guides students in grades 6-12 through school, providing them with the opportunity to be in different gifted classes. The program also offers students the opportunity to attend one of four focus schools in our district."

—LJS Participant (Anonymous Evaluation Comment)

social justice into those goals. Additionally, this committee is investigating how to work with local affiliates to establish ongoing cohorts for “Challenging Racism.”

In **New Hampshire**, Misty and Terry have collaborated and worked with other educators within their state and have consistently worked and collaborated with LJS educators throughout the country, forming bonds with fellow allies who are also invested in this work. To continue their efforts, they have used strategies informed by Leaders for Just Schools to begin the necessary work to improve school environments for their students and create equitable school environments throughout the state.

Angel, from **New Jersey**, is doing racial and social justice work that will be featured in a documentary produced by her state union. She is also helping to create a print resource that will address equity issues and aid in having difficult conversations.



“This program has helped me to understand how to go after education equity . . . and win progressive policies at the federal, state, and local levels that benefit all workers. The meaning of membership is volunteering to be in a strong labor movement where members are protected, meandering through reducing disparities, and strengthening our democracy.”

—Sandra, from New Jersey

In **New Jersey**, Brenda presented “Introduction to Leaders for Just Schools” at the Maine Education Association Conference. She has lobbied at the state and local levels to move legislation and policies that advance racial and social justice.

In **New Jersey**, Lateefah created a survey that she distributed throughout her district to gather information about how to best support educators. She then presented the results to the district superintendent.

Sabrina, from **North Carolina**, has been running a county-wide LJS cohort since the beginning of 2023.



.....
"Participating in this program has reminded me about the importance of being a member because our union truly believes in equity and social justice."
–Kamber, from Oklahoma

In **North Carolina**, Tamika is working to incorporate statewide LJS-trained members on statewide committees, notably the NCAE Human and Civil Rights Commission, to move forward work around racial and social justice.

Chastity, from **South Carolina**, is on the executive board for her state education association. She organized a group of educators from her local area to receive LJS curricular instruction and is working to establish a statewide equity partnership with

members by facilitating the curriculum with state association leaders.

In **Vermont**, Christopher wrote a letter to his superintendent on ESSER funds and meaningful engagement.

Andrea and Shaniqua, from **Virginia**, presented at the Virginia Education Association Conference for Teachers of Color. Andrea presented the session "Equity Audits to Learn and Improve," which she received high remarks from those who attended. Shaniqua presented on topics including education equity, zero tolerance, and equity audits. She also discussed how educators can conduct equity audits in their schools.

In **Washington, DC**, Ray became the point of contact for his administration team for diversity, equity, and inclusion topics at his school. He is also working to collect data by conducting a school environment audit, which he will produce a report for his administration team.

Kelly, from **Wisconsin**, serves on her equity team and has helped create an anti-racist toolkit, which won an award from her state organization. Her team is currently developing an online course using the toolkit, which is planned to roll out for the upcoming school year.

In **Wyoming**, Karla has been providing LJS learning sessions with new teachers that she mentors. She also is starting a social justice group in her local education association.

.....
"The union wants me to have the tools to do the work. It's not just about gaining new members but training [existing] members on how to make our public schools better."
–Dena, from South Carolina

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

The overarching vision of Leaders for Just Schools is to continuously expand NEA's network of education equity leaders in communities across the United States, building cohorts of leaders in state affiliates to drive policy and practice change. LJS will continue to empower members to understand and change education policy at the federal, state, local, and school levels, taking action to ensure safe, just, equitable, and healthy learning environments for all students and educators across race, place, background, and ability. These members will be steeped in the LJS curriculum and conversant in policy strategies to achieve these goals for all students.

The NEA endeavors to support state and local affiliates to scale state-based networks and implement their own cohorts to further expand this work. By scaling the impact of the program, the NEA hopes to create systemic behavioral changes in educators, schools, districts, affiliates, and public education systems throughout the country.

The NEA is working with the LJS Leadership Team to:

- ✓ Leverage the knowledge and capacity of LJS members across the enterprise to best ensure safe, just, and equitable schools for all students;
- ✓ Engage participants throughout their three-year professional learning journey and beyond, including the introduction of an alumni network;
- ✓ Continue refining the improved process of gathering feedback from facilitators to better recruit, onboard, and support facilitators throughout their work;
- ✓ Utilize feedback from participants, facilitators, Leadership Team members, staff, and NEA leadership to improve the program beyond curriculum;
- ✓ Develop a visual representation for members that maps out their learning journey, from recruitment to the Problem of Equity capstone; and
- ✓ Improve the tracking and evaluation of participants' policy-related initiatives.



The NEA will continue to support state and local affiliates as their members engage in the Leaders for Just Schools program and work through their Problem of Equity to create and implement local and state policy, legislation, regulation, and bargaining/contract language in support of safe, just, and equitable schools for every student.



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