Ohio activist provides NEA Board with tools to improve school discipline

The NEA Board of Directors heard from Zakiya Sankara-Jabar, national field organizer of the Dignity in Schools Campaign, as part of its Black Observance during the February Board meeting.

Sankara-Jabar, a native of Ohio, began her social justice work following her son’s admittance into a Cleveland-area pre-school. She said the issues began almost immediately. Phone calls home – or more specifically, directly to her while she was in class at a local university – about her son’s behavior. Her personal experience sparked her research and activism about racial justice in schools.

“Kids are being criminalized for normal childhood stuff,” she told the Board. “The data supports the fact that Black and Latino students, and students with disabilities, are disproportionately targeted by suspensions.

“She is unapologetic for who she is and what she believes in,” NEA Black Caucus Chair, Cecily Myart-Cruz, told the Board. “She is a badass and isn’t afraid of speaking the truth that others don’t have the courage to say.”

In addition to her work with the Dignity in Schools Campaign (https://dignityinschools.org), she is also one of the founders of Racial Justice NOW in Dayton, OH.

“Black and Latino students, and students with disabilities, are disproportionately targeted by suspensions,” Sankara-Jabar said. “We must look to positive approaches to discipline. Restorative practices, when done with fidelity, can work. People must understand it is not a program, it is a philosophy. You literally must change how you think about discipline across your school.”

Sankara-Jabar left the NEA Board with a call for action that included the following:

- Build strong, authentic relationships with students and parents
- Affirm your students
- Communicate with parents
- Work with community groups to help change bad policy
- Work to create a positive school climate with students, families, and administration
- Use resources from the Dignity in Schools Campaign
Budget Outlook Remains Bright
During her report to the NEA Board of Directors Princess Moss was pleased to inform the Board of a clean, unmodified audit opinion for the 2018-19 fiscal year. She also noted that, at the moment, 66.7% of the fiscal year remains and nearly 71% of the budgeted funds are available. Moss also shared good membership news. Total NEA membership sat at 2.99 million (as of January 27, 2020) which is up over 21,000 from this same time in 2019. Moss also presented good news to the Board in terms of widespread salary increases among members of both teaching staff as well as Education Support Professionals. The average EA salary is forecast to increase by 2.16 to $62,877 for the 2019-20 school year while the average ESP salary is due to increase by 2.51% to $35,159. When those data are used in the dues calculation formula found in NEA Bylaw 2-7, annual EA dues for 2020-21 will increase by $4 to $200. Similarly, ESP dues for 2020-21 will increase by $2 to $121.50. Based upon early projections, dues are tentatively set to increase by $4 per EA member and $3 per ESP member for 2021-22. Members can voice their opinions on the budget here: www.nea.org/budget

UniServ Advisory Committee Releases Preliminary 2020-21 Grant Rate
NEA UniServ Advisory Committee Chair, Tracy Phillips (ESP At-Large, NV) presented the Board the preliminary UniServ Grant amount for the 2020-21 fiscal year. The grant amount, which is tied to the overall dues rate for NEA members as well as overall membership, is expected to increase for the next year. The preliminary increase is established at 5.87% from $39,402 to $41,714. In aggregate, Phillips added, the NEA will be returning over $3.8 million more to state affiliates through the UniServ Grant program.

President Trump’s Labor Department Targets NEA’s State Affiliates
NEA General Counsel Alice O’Brien briefed the Board of Directors on the organization’s legal status since the Janus case ruling. To date, NEA has prevailed in 23 cases, with another 13 appeals pending and 6 more in district court defining the scope of the ruling. O’Brien reminded us that about 40% of the Federal court system consists of President Donald Trump appointees, so all parts and affiliates of our organization must be prudent and deliberate in their actions around processing membership drop requests.

Of special concern is a rule the Department of Labor is seeking to enact against state affiliates. According to O’Brien, “The law contains very burdensome financial reporting requirements that would require many hours of union time and financial resources….” Enacting this rule within the Labor Management Reporting and Disclosure Act (LMRDA) would threaten Associations’ ability to advocate for our students and our educators. The Labor Department has asked for public comment on its proposal. Educators and supporters of public education are encouraged to visit http://bit.ly/31PusSZ and fill out the form to leave a comment stating opposition of the proposed rule.

O’Brien highlighted a major victory for Missouri NEA, in which both NEA and its affiliate succeeded in a permanent injunction against HB 1413, a 2018 Missouri law that restricted the bargaining of contracts, public employee speech, and the ability to select union representatives. The court ruled that the law violated several parts of the Missouri Constitution.

Work Continues on Mission, Vision, Values
A discussion was held by the Board of Directors its mission, vision and values statements. A committee was convened to craft possible vision statements. Those statements were presented to the Board, and a straw poll was done to determine the most popular. The top three are:

- A great public school for every student.
- The promise of public education: every student in every community with every opportunity to learn.
- Public education is the cornerstone of our democracy where education professionals have a respected and valued voice and all students are empowered to be leaders of a just society.
In her report, Becky Pringle pointed out that throughout our organization, the NEA has prioritized “building a national network of educators prepared to advance equitable outcomes for students, work that is developed by educators for educators.” She pointed out many examples of this work, including Cape Grants, Leaders for Just Schools, MLT/WLT Participants, and Participants in the Leaders of Color Pathways Project. Becky also highlighted increased 3-l(g) participation and engaging members in all fifty states in racial and social justice advocacy.

A highlight of her report was the NEA racial equity language review process. After eighteen months of intensive work, Becky reiterated “We were not in a hurry. It was important to do this right. We were committed to addressing race explicitly, but not exclusively — our lens was intersectional and inclusive. We were committed to engaging diverse stakeholders with divergent perspectives, including White anti-racist leaders.” The RJE language stakeholder committee members shared the following general findings and recommendations:

- There are no perfect or universal terms that work for all situations.
- As imperfect as they may be, there’s a need for collective and unifying terms.
- We need to be mindful of the audience, context, and location, and embrace the flexibility to adapt our internal and external language accordingly.
- We need to strive for clarity and specificity with the terms we use.
- We need to embrace change and flexibility, rather than perfection or permanence.
- The terminology we choose must always align with NEA’s mission, vision, goals, and values.

Directors also shared the following recommendations regarding specific groups:

- We strongly believe in the right of individuals and communities to self-identify.
- It can be helpful to acknowledge that perfect specific-group terms, like perfect cross-group terms, do not exist.
- “Asian and Pacific Islander” is a recommended specific-group term.
- “Native People,” “Native,” or “Native American/Alaska Native,” are recommended specific-group terms.
- “Latin(o/a/x), Hispanic, and Chican(o/a/x)” are recommended specific-group term and order.
- “Black” or “African American” are recommended specific-group terms.
- “Multiracial” is recommended as a specific-group term to describe people with two or more racial identities.
- “White” is recommended as a specific-group term.

Additional items of note:

- NEA launches its #WeCount Campaign, which promotes participation in the 2020 census through the activation of our members to engage their communities. What is at stake? “From legislative power to funding to community services, the census determines where billions of federal and state dollars go,” answers Pringle. Members can find a toolkit and resources including lessons, posters, and more: http://neatoday.org/2019/11/13/2020census/.

- The Member Benefits report includes the impact of Member Benefits participation and loyalty to NEA, demonstrating a high loyalty score in previously non-agency fee states and an additive impact on engagement and participation. The NEAMB student loan forgiveness navigator (SAVI) “has put over $2.5 million back in members pockets!” celebrates Pringle.

- The National Labor Management Collaborations guidebook on collaborating for student success has increased shared decision making through lasting partnerships: http://myschoolmyvoice.nea.org/collaborating-for-student-success/.

- The Center for Great Public School grants have been revised to clarify guidelines and create consistency between the grant and school timelines. The NEA Board approved a new once-a-year allocation of grants.
President Eskelsen Garcia touts recent success, urges Election 2020 advocacy

NEA president, Lily Eskelsen Garcia began her report with some good news. The San Juan college faculty voted to organize; the new Governor of Kentucky, Andy Beshear, used his inauguration parade to highlight the Red for Ed movement; former NEA President Mary Hatwood Futrell is the James A Kelly Award recipient; Virginia has elected a pro-public education governor; and Wisconsin’s Democratic caucus will be introducing a bill to restore collective bargaining in that state — all good news for public education and public-sector unions.

Eskelsen Garcia then shifted her focus to the current mood in Washington, D.C., and the upcoming election. She shared with the Board a letter she is sending to Senator Mitt Romney (R-Utah) thanking him for his courage in standing up to the GOP with his impeachment vote.

Eskelsen Garcia encouraged members to head to the Strong Public Schools 2020 website to view candidate interviews and reminded members that the education talking points of all of the candidates are the same as NEA’s talking points, and that is no coincidence. The organization is working hard to create and maintain an infrastructure to protect voting rights and to make sure that our voices are heard. She stated, “Our secret sauce is our people” who will be integral in bringing home and election victory for public education. “This is not a game,” Eskelsen Garcia summarized. “We must be absolute warriors in our fight for democracy.”

Board hears from Pushout author during Women’s Observance

The NEA Board of Directors conducted its annual Women’s Observance by inviting Monique W. Morris, Ed.D to speak. Dr. Morris is the founder and president of the National Black Women’s Justice Institute, an organization that works to interrupt school-to-confinement pathway for girls, reduce the barriers to employment for formerly incarcerated women, and increase the capacity of organizations working to reduce sexual assault and domestic violence in black communities. She is an award-winning author and social justice scholar with three decades of experience in the areas of education, civil rights, juvenile justice, and social justice. Dr. Morris is the author of Sing A Rhythm, Dance A Blues: Education for the Liberation of Black and Brown Girls, which explores pedagogy to counter the criminalization of black and brown girls in schools. She is also the author of Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools. Members of the Board had an opportunity to screen the film adaptation of Pushout prior to its February meetings.

“As parents, educators, and concerned adults, our intentions and actions are either part of the problem or part of the solution,” she said. Dr. Morris’s work is informed by the statistic that the only group of girls who are overrepresented in the discipline continuum from K-12 are black and brown girls. This has prompted her to advocate for schools to be places where girls feel safe and are places of healing. Morris states: “When young people are deepest in crisis, that is the time we pull them in closer, not push them away. We must, as educators, work to heal girls and not punish them.”

Dr. Morris can be found on social media @monique.w.morris (Instagram), and @MoniqueWMorrisEdD (Facebook).
A pair of 2020-22 budget development engagements, facilitated by members of the NEA Program and Budget Committee, were held during superweek. The first, a more informal event, occurred Thursday evening. Members of the Budget Committee, Chaired by Secretary/Treasurer Princess Moss, with Vice-Chair Becky Pringle, including James Frazier (NJ), Amber Gould (AZ), Gina Harris (IL), Doug Hill (MI), Shannon McCann (WA), and Kathy Vetter (President, WY). The committee discussed budget issues with fellow Board members in a relaxed and social setting. A more formal engagement occurred Saturday when members of the Board were asked to review the trends identified in an unprecedented number of engagements with nine different constituency groups through the beginning of the New Year. Another seven groups have participated in budget engagements subsequently.

The data presented to the Board was broken down by responses to the six strategic objectives previously approved by the Board, including:

- Increasing Educator Voice,
- Recruiting and Engage New and Early Career Educators,
- Support Professional Excellence,
- Advance Racial Justice,
- Secure a Pro-Public Education Environment,
- Enhancing Organizational Capacity.

The Board reviewed feedback provided by groups that – at the time – included: Aspiring Educators, Education Support Professionals, National Council of Urban Education Associations, NEA-Retired, Higher Education members, and National Council of State Education Associations from three regions. With this feedback in mind, the Board broke into small groups and were asked to consider three guiding questions:

- What did you see that validated your thinking about NEA’s path forward?
- What did you see that was intriguing and new?
- Are you seeing something in your work back home that you did not see in the input reflected here?

The process will continue with the 2020-22 budget drafted between now and the next Budget Committee Meeting, April 2-3. Once completed, the Committee will present a recommendation to the full Board of Directors, May 1-2, for consideration and transmittal to the Representative Assembly. The Virtual Budget Hearing is set for June 22 at 8 p.m. EDT.

The NEA Board voted to allocate up to $25 million from the ballot measure/legislative crisis fund to its “behind the wall” team. These funds will be used to support multiple actions across the nation to register voters, fight voter suppression, advocate for issues, support ballot measure expenditures, and more. None of these funds will be used for candidate contributions. All expenditures will be guided by two questions 1) Can we afford it? and 2) Is it legally compliant? As Shelly Moore Krajacic (WI) declared, “This is an unprecedented ask because this is an unprecedented election. Our country, our ideals, and our decency must be protected.”

The NEA Board issued a report on ethnic studies, compiled from existing NEA work, resources, and policies, to be presented to the Board in May. The report will elevate exemplar affiliate work and provide recommended actions for state and local affiliates. As Robert V. Rodriguez (CA) advocated, “Ethnic studies benefits both students of color and white students ... and publishing the research will further clarify our position and allow us to build a legislative platform.”

“Our country, our ideals, and our democracy must be protected.”

— Shelly Moore Krajacic
NEA Executive Committee
Resources for Members

Dignity In Schools
www.DignityInSchools.org
- Solutions not Suspensions
- Counselors not Cops
- Model School Code

NEA 2020-2022 Budget Development:
www.nea.org/budget
- Provide Input to the Program and Budget Committee

Provide Feedback to Department of Labor’s Proposed attack on State Affiliates:

We Count: NEA Census Campaign
- Lesson Plans on Census
- Graphics and Social Media Engagements
- Toolkits to raise viability of the census.

Collaborating for Student Success
http://myschoolmyvoice.nea.org/collaborating-for-student-success/
- Learn how to foster lasting partnerships to boost student success.

NEA Ed Justice
https://neaedjustice.org
Learn more about NEA’s racial justice engagements, ending pushout and the school-to-prison pipeline, supporting LGBTQ youth, and much more.

National Black Women’s Justice Institute
https://www.nbwji.org/
- Resources and Engagements on ending School Pushout
- Follow Monique W. Morris, the speaker from the Woman’s Observance and the Co-Founder and President of the National Black Women’s Justice Institute on twitter: @MoniqueWMorris

Strong Public Schools 2020
http://strongpublicschools.org/
- Hear from the Presidential Candidates
- Register to Vote
- Become a Delegate to your party’s national convention

Early New Business Item Submission
Lily Eskelsen-Garcia strongly encourages delegates to submit New Business Items ahead of time. Additionally, the Committee on Bylaws, Constitution and Rules will be on hand to accept NBI submissions in person on the following dates:
- June, 30 2-4pm
- July 1, 10am-12pm
- July 2, 10am-12pm
NBI forms can be obtained at the link above or by e-mailing Carrie Lewis at the NEA Center for Governance at clewis@nea.org. Any questions can also be directed to Carrie at the same address.

NEA ESP
http://www.nea.org/home/1604.htm
NEA’s page dedicated to conferences, trainings, resources, grants and more for our hardworking Education Service Professionals.