

SPECIAL  
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# Essex Exchange

NOVEMBER, 2010

## Acting Commissioner of Education Snubs NJEA

On November 5 and 6, 2010 teachers from across the state converged on Atlantic City to attend the annual NJEA convention.

One of the traditional highlights of the convention is the annual address of the NJ Department of Education Commissioner. For decades, the NJEA invites the commissioner to the convention where he/she presents an overview of the state of education in New Jersey. This year, the acting commissioner chose not to address educators from across the state.

Acting-Commissioner Rochelle Hendricks declined the invitation of the NJEA by sending a scathing email to NJEA President Barbara Keshishian on Monday, November 2.

The commissioner

declined the invitation because “...the New Jersey Education Association has shown it is unwilling to accept reforms that put results for our children first and use them as part of our metrics for evaluating teacher performance. Over and over the NJEA has only been interested in protecting the status quo that continues to fail students, particularly in our urban schools.”

Hendricks has chosen to join the vendetta campaign of Governor Christie rather than performing the duties of the commissioner of education as a non-partisan advocate for education.

Hendricks' email is clearly biased and partisan. Hendricks writes, “As such, Governor Christie has put forward a bold reform agenda to accom-

plish the sweeping changes necessary to fix a system that has failed too many of our children. The New Jersey Education Association has failed to step up, identify the problem and be a partner with the Obama and Christie Administrations in fixing it.” Although she does acknowledge the success of NJ schools, the focus of the email is a veiled attempt to promote merit pay.

Hendricks writes, “Teachers who are highly effective should be rewarded for the progress made by their students with higher pay, expanded roles and access to career paths to increase their influence in their schools and communities.”

*For more info visit [njea.org](http://njea.org)*

## 7 out of 9 NJEA Pac-Endorsed Congressional Candidates Win

Seven out of nine NJEA PAC-endorsed Congressional candidates were victorious in the 2010 General Election. In Congressional District (CD) 3 NJEA PAC-endorsed Congressman John Adler lost a difficult race to Republican challenger Jon Runyon and in CD 11 NJEA PAC-endorsed challenger Douglas Herbert was defeated by long-time incumbent Rodney

Frelinghuysen (R). The new makeup of the New Jersey congressional delegation is 7 Democrats and 6 Republicans. In two hotly contested races, NJEA PAC-endorsed candidate Congressman Rush Holt (CD 12) defeated challenger Scott Sippelle (R) 52% to 47% and NJEA PAC-endorsed candidate Congressman Frank Pallone (CD 6) defeated Tea Party-backed republi-

can challenger Anna Little 54% to 44%. NJEA members worked hard for all endorsed candidates - calling members, distributing literature to colleagues, and volunteering their time in campaign offices.

NJEA PAC-supported ballot question wins passage

*Reprinted from [njea.org](http://njea.org)*

*As Braun points out in his column, Ploshnick's reputation "was sacrificed to a political cause."*

## Star-Ledger columnist stands up for teacher (reprinted from njea.org Published on Monday, November 15, 2010)

Bob Braun, columnist for the Newark *Star-Ledger*, has written a ringing defense of a teacher whose life and career were turned on end when she was secretly recorded at the NJEA Summer Leadership Conference. Braun reveals that the teacher is a decorated hero: in 1997, she saved the lives of students by throwing herself in the way of a speeding van.

Last August, Passaic teacher Alissa Ploshnick – a decorated

special needs teacher for 14 years – was approached by a man who bought her drinks and surreptitiously recorded her for over an hour. The man was an operative working for discredited right-wing video "journalist" James O'Keefe, and two months later Ploshnick found herself the unwitting focus of a video on O'Keefe's website titled "Teacher's Unions Gone Wild."

Braun notes that Governor

Chris Christie was quick to praise O'Keefe's efforts, unfairly labeling the footage and comments by NJEA members as representative of NJEA's leadership.

As Braun points out in his column, Ploshnick's reputation "was sacrificed to a political cause."

Ploshnick was suspended for nine days and denied a salary increment for her comments on the video, and returned to work on Nov. 12.



## Partnerships with NJEA

- The Trenton Thunder will host assemble programs at school. Visit [njea.org](http://njea.org) for more information.
- NJEA and Radio Disney AM 640 present Read Across New Jersey, a reading contest for all Radio Disney 640 AM listeners who attend a public school in New Jersey. The school that reads the most books per student will be selected to win a Radio Disney Road Crew Appearance with a special Disney guest on May 20, 2011!
- The Philadelphia Wings professional lacrosse team will be hosting a special Teacher and School Staff Appreciation Night on Jan. 29, 2011, with ticket discounts exclusively for NJEA members.
- NJEA and the New York



Football Giants have joined forces to help your students Get Fit. These activities are fun ways to keep children active. They are designed for grades 4, 5 and 6, but may be adapted for lower grades.

*(For more information—visit [njea.org](http://njea.org))*

## ECEA Hospitality at Convention

The Essex County Education Association held a hospitality reception at the Sheraton on Thursday and Friday, November 5 and 6.

The reception was extremely well attended. As always, the ECEA reception is a first class reception complete with a combination of hot food

and breakfast pastries.

The ECEA has booked the hospitality suite at the Hilton for next year. Again, two receptions will be held—one on Thursday and one on Friday.



## NJEA Reacts to Christie's Comments

NJEA President Barbara Keshishian today labeled Governor Chris Christie's comments to a group of students last Friday "irresponsible and out of control," and accused him of "using students to advance a political agenda."

Keshishian said NJEA members were angered by Christie's comments to Trenton students, in which he said it was the "greedy teachers union" – and not his \$1.3 billion in state aid cuts – that was responsible for the lack of supplies in their classrooms.

She cited a news article showing that teachers spend between \$500 and \$1,000 of their own money each year on school supplies.

"So much for 'greedy teachers,'" Keshishian said.

In addition, a video clip of the conversation in the *Trentonian* features Christie ridiculing teachers for attending

the two-day NJEA convention last week, saying that "if the union cared more about all of you learning, they'd be in school, baby, that's right. They wouldn't be down there having a party, which is all this is, it's a party."

"This governor's comments are irresponsible and out of control," Keshishian said. "Not only is he lying to students about the obvious impact of his massive cuts to public schools, but it is inconceivable that a governor would use such language with students in order to advance a political agenda. It's one thing to disagree over policy issues, but demeaning teachers in front of their students is totally unacceptable behavior by the state's chief executive. It raises serious questions about his character.

"Governor Christie clearly has a double standard," Keshishian noted. "Last April, he unjustly and inappropriately accused teachers of using students as 'drug mules' while

accusing teachers of telling parents how to vote in school budget elections. That was a blatant falsehood. And now he uses students for political purposes. Our members are justifiably outraged."

Keshishian said Christie's characterization of the NJEA Convention – the largest professional development event in the world for educators with over 300 workshops and seminars spanning two full days – is "particularly disturbing. He wouldn't even let his Acting Commissioner attend an annual session at the convention with NJEA members, and he clearly has no clue about what happens there," Keshishian said.

"He insults every school employee in New Jersey by telling students they are 'having a party' at the convention, and he owes each of them an apology for his reckless and cruel comments to impressionable young people."

*Reprinted from njea.org*

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## Ask the Cat in the Hat to visit your school

How would you like a visit from the Cat in the Hat to help your school celebrate NEA's Read Across America?

Well, NJEA members can now request a visit from the Cat himself right online. Visit [njea.org](http://njea.org) and request a visit from the Cat.

Visits begin in early February and continue through the end

of March. You will be notified in January whether your school will receive a visit. **The deadline for inviting the Cat is November 15.**

The Cat in the Hat program is a highlight for students and educators alike. Request a visit early. Be sure the Cat visits your school.

For more ideas on celebrating Read Across America visit [nea.org](http://nea.org).



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# Stress Alert!

If you or a family member is experiencing "STRESS" or struggling with a behavioral Health and/or substance abuse condition, you can contact your confidential, no cost referral service at 1-888-828-7826



## Congratulations and Best of Luck to Retirees

### ECEA Retirees:

**Janice Gaswind (Bloomfield)** - was ECEA Secretary from 1991 to 1999 and chair of the ECEA Member Services Committee from 1992 to 1997.

**Terri Weinstein (Bloomfield)** - took over being chair of Member Services from Janice in 1997 till her retirement in June 2010.

**Brenda Hofler-Battle (Newark)** - was Co-Chair of the ECEA Instruction & Professional Development Committee from 1986 to 1990 and the ECEA Congressional Contact Team from 1990 to retirement in 2010. Brenda was also president of the Newark Teachers' Association in the mid-eighties.

**Eileen Gilbert (Montclair)** - Eileen has served on the NJEA Delegate Assembly and was chair of the Professional Development Committee before her promotion to principal in Montclair.

**Geri Cohens-Headley (Orange)** - Geri was chair of the ECEA Urban Education Committee prior to her retirement in 2010, past president of the Orange Education Association, and Chair of the NJEA Affiliations Committee.