



Ivy cooling down in the water.



Ivy and Dee Williams



Ivy playing on the beach.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Dee Williams

WVEA member Dee Williams is a Science Teacher at Weir High in Hancock County. She teaches biology, anatomy and forensics as well as being part of the school's leadership team. Dee is also a dog lover, something we know a lot about here at the WVEA.

Dee has six dogs, three of which are working therapy dogs. Two of her dogs, Nessie and Birdie work as short-term therapy dogs. Nessie is five years old and Birdie is two years old. Another dog, Ivy, works alongside Dee as a specifically trained Crisis Response dog. Dee explains that while most therapy dogs can work one and a half to two and a half hours at a time, Ivy often works all day for several days. Ivy is a Rough Collie and has an excellent temperament for the work. She has worked several tragic events.

One of these tragic events involved a student suicide in Midland, Pennsylvania. Ivy proved to be a valuable asset in helping the recovery/healing process.

Recently, she and Dee visited Lewiston and Auburn, Maine in the wake of the mass shooting at the Lewiston Bowling Alley. They worked with students of all ages, from elementary to high school. They even spent some quality time with some students who were at the bowling alley where and when the shooting took place. "Sometimes the hardest part is to just step back and let the dogs do their thing," Dee tells us. "The dogs have great intuition; they know what to do." She further explains that you can just feel the anxiety reduce as students start to work with the animals. Ivy and Dee work as part of HOPE Animal Assisted Crisis Response.

Sometimes, Dee brings the therapy dogs to work with her. There she notices how they are able to connect with students and even get students that would typically not interact or communicate to do so. We at WVEA appreciate all the different ways our members help the community. Thank you, Dee!

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PAC dates

2/12/24

**Candidate questionnaires
are mailed out to candidates**

2/26/24

**Questionnaires due back
to WVEA**

3/1/24

**Questionnaires emailed
to locals**

3/11/24

Local endorsements due

3/15/24

PAC Steering meets

3/16/24

Full PAC Zoom

**WVEA
TODAY** EXTRA

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WVEA member survey complete

A big 'Thank You' to everyone who was selected to participate in the WVEA member survey that was conducted in November 2023. The survey is complete, and the pollsters are completing the final analysis of the responses. WVEA will be releasing the results in early to mid-January.

According to WVEA Executive Director Kym Randolph, the recently conducted survey is one of the most expansive member surveys done in recent years. "This is one of the larger sampling of members we have ever polled, and we asked a lot of pertinent questions. We asked for their concerns and recommendations regarding education and policy issues. We also surveyed job satisfaction, burnout, and the likelihood of leaving the profession," stated Randolph.

"We have seen the preliminary results of the survey, and the data pretty much matches up with what we hear from members every day," continued Randolph. "We look forward to releasing the data and working with policymakers to explore solutions to the concerns of our members. We can't forget that teacher working conditions are student learning conditions. Improving student achievement and making our public schools better is in everyone's best interest."

WVEA will let you know when the press conference to release the information is scheduled. Findings from the poll will be shared in the next issue of *WVEA Today* and posted on the WVEA website. Thanks again to all who participated.

PEIA plan approved for FY 25

The state Public Employees Insurance Agency Finance Board approved the plan for fiscal year 2025 on Thursday, December 7. The plan adopted at the Finance Board meeting was the same plan that had been discussed at the public hearings. The following increases would be for the fiscal year that starts next July 1.

- An average of 10.5% premium increase and no benefit changes for state employees.
- No changes in premiums or benefits for retirees who are eligible for Medicare.
- A 10% premium increase and no change in benefits for people who have retired but are not yet eligible for Medicare.

Keep WVEA updated with your changes

Retiring? Changing worksites? Moving to another county? Leaving the profession? Those types of changes impact your WVEA membership, but unless those changes are communicated to WVEA, we have no way of knowing. Often, members have dues taken out after they are no longer teaching, or payments are interrupted, and we cancel the membership when we shouldn't.

Here are a couple of things to keep in mind. First, contact the WVEA Membership Department if you have a change in your work status, location, etc. You can do that by emailing Staci Wallace at swallace@wvea.org or leaving a message for her at 304.346.5315 x124. Secondly, make sure you are getting the automated emails sent by our membership system. You may want to add this email address to your list to keep it from going into your junk folder – membership@email.nea.org. The system generates emails to you if there is an interruption in payment, an expiration date coming up, or an invoice that needs to be sent. That email is automated and is not monitored, so you will need to contact WVEA if you receive a notification.



PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

Thanksgiving and Christmas have passed, and a wonderful New Year is upon us. The holidays are a joyous time with family and friends, but they are also a time to reflect and to be thankful. I constantly say I am the luckiest man in West Virginia because I get to travel around the state and see the great job our students and educators are doing. I am blessed to be a voice for our members and for public education in West Virginia.

Let me point out a few of those great things. Dual credit for college courses is offered in all 55 counties and our students have a 97% pass rate. 90% of all Career and Technical school students were positively placed in employment, the military or continue their education. 43% of our CTE students who participated in the SkillsUSA competition ranked in the Top 10 nationally. West Virginia is 6th in the nation for access to high quality Universal Pre-K. We are first in the nation in our school breakfast participation and our fabulous cooks have served almost 47 million meals. Our bus drivers are exemplary and are taking second and third runs to make sure our students get to school. And West Virginia is in the top 15 states for the number of National Board Certified Teachers®.

My question is why are we the only ones touting these accomplishments? Why do we only hear the negatives?

The answer is simple. There are those who simply want to destroy public education. And they are having quite an impact. Education spending as a percentage of the total state appropriations has dropped from 44.95% in 2013 to 33.45% in 2023. Of our 250,049 students, 51.3% are considered economically disadvantaged. The number of students identified as homeless has grown from 8,323 in 2013 to 13,530 in 2023. Our students, families and schools are struggling.

We all know public education is the great equalizer, and every educator can cite numerous success stories. I am proud to tout the successes and share them every chance I get.

As we prepare for the second semester, we have many challenges we must address. Last year there were 1,544 positions in West Virginia without a certified teacher. This year that number has grown to 1,705. Add to the mix a substitute shortage and that means our educators are covering classes during their planning periods and doubling up classes nearly every day. As I stated earlier, our bus drivers are doing second and third runs, and our aides are covering extra students and classes.

The legislature addressed a severe shortage in our corrections, calling it a “crisis situation.” I am here to tell you we have a “crisis situation” in our public schools, and we must do something about it now! The stress and burnout among the remaining education employees is at a critical point.

Additionally, we must address the emotional state of our students and the discipline issue in our schools. We have been speaking at the West Virginia State Board of Education meetings since August expressing your frustration over discipline. We must address the discipline issue and your voices must be heard.

In early January, we will be releasing member polling data (see page 2) and calling on you to help get your concerns heard by policymakers.

I will close with a huge thank you! I know you are doing everything you can to help your students succeed. That is why I am so proud to be an educator and the luckiest man in West Virginia.

Dale Lee

2024 LEGISLATIVE TALKING POINTS

Our voice is our power. Because many battles are won or lost before they are fought, now is the time to discuss the vital issues we're facing in our schools with legislators. Let them know what the issues are and what needs to be accomplished to improve public education in West Virginia.

Educators have the knowledge, and we must make sure our voices are heard by the legislature before they rush into making decisions impacting you and your students. What we can accomplish locally with your senators and delegates will impact what happens statewide. If they won't listen and act, we must elect others who will! Among the many topics, discuss the following with your legislators and colleagues to bring these issues to the forefront of conversation and make them a priority for lawmakers.

Academic Freedom

- West Virginia educators teach the West Virginia College and Career Readiness Standards developed by West Virginia educators for West Virginia students in each academic area.
- Our educators teach students to become critical thinkers. A student must be presented with all sides of an issue to be a critical thinker. These issues, again, are set forth in the West Virginia College and Career Readiness Standards.
- Our educators are professional experts in their classrooms and know their students best. They should have more decision-making into the policies of their worksite.
- Politics and political buzz words have no place in West Virginia classrooms.

Public Schools Funding and Support

- Our public schools provide an opportunity for all students to succeed and prepare for adulthood. Our school employees are committed to their students and go above and beyond to ensure that our children achieve their full potential.
- Without highly qualified com-

mitted employees in our school system, student achievement could be compromised. We must work to ensure the retention of our current employees and work to make sure careers in public education are desirable so we can adequately fill vacancies in our systems. We must make teaching a respected and valued profession if we are to provide highly trained employees in our schools.

- The problems of society greatly impact our students and those issues impact student achievement. We must provide our students with adequate resources to assist with mental health and trauma.
- Research has shown us what is needed to improve student achievement. Smaller class size, greater student support, wrap-around programs and parent resources have proven important in increasing achievement.
- We will continue to oppose proposals that take money away from our public schools. Programs that entice parents to remove their children from public schools also take much needed resources away from our schools and the students that remain. We must ensure that funding for public schools

does not decline. Our school systems are already financially strapped to provide all that our students need. We need to increase funding to make sure all students thrive.

Salary Increases are critical for Public Education in WV

- With skyrocketing vacancies in our schools, significant salary increases are imperative to ensuring a high-quality education to our students. Token raises that don't keep up with inflation, or that are recycled just to pay for PEIA premiums, will not fix our long-term crisis of vacancies.
- Adequate compensation not only recognizes the dedication of educators but also attracts and retains the high-quality employees our state desperately needs and is losing to neighboring states who all pay substantially more than WV.
- At a time when education employees are reporting an all-time low in job satisfaction, improved salaries can enhance morale, reduce turnover, and ultimately benefit students by ensuring a stable and motivated education environment. These problems will only continue to increase the longer salaries are

Continued on page 5

not made the highest priority by the legislature.

PEIA

- The compensation package is a huge factor in employment decisions. Without stable/affordable health care, an individual's compensation level falls as they bear the burden of increased out-of-pocket expenses. Such expenses factor into the recruitment and retention of employees.
- Attempting to offset PEIA premium increases with salary increases is simply a shell game. We need to reduce the hard line on the 80/20 premium split and change it to...the state shall pay no less than 80% and employees no more than 20%. This will allow the state to add money to the plan without employees being required to contribute each time.

Retirees

- Retirees are living longer but never see a cost of living increase. West Virginia must continue to follow the needed funding requirements in order to fully fund the Teachers Retirement System (TRS). By doing so, participants can see guaranteed optimum benefits, including a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) in the future.
- Increase the monthly minimum pension for retirees with more than 20 years of service.
- Provide adequate funding for projected PEIA increases for retirees. Control PEIA prescription drug and health care costs.

Income Tax

- West Virginia voters spoke loudly when they soundly defeated Amendment 2. Their message was that public services, including funding public schools, are more important than tax cuts. Roads, police, senior services, schools, first responders and more could once again be put at risk if the state's revenue is not adequate to support them.
- Expensive tax cuts enacted by the legislature will hurt the state over time, costing nearly \$818 million per year with triggers that seek to eventually eliminate the personal income tax entirely, at an annual cost of over \$2 billion, or about 40 percent of the state's general revenue budget. The personal income tax is the state's single largest source of general revenue. This revenue must be replaced, or programs and services will be severely cut.
- The volatility of energy prices makes revenue from the energy sector highly unpredictable. Nearly half of the state's surplus is from severance tax collections, which are the result of high energy prices due to factors outside of West Virginia's control and are expected to decline in the coming years as energy prices continue to decline, leading to lower severance tax revenues.
- Income tax cuts typically benefit wealthy individuals. An income tax reduction would continue to shift the tax burden from the highest earners to

working West Virginians.

- Other states have gone down the path of reducing income tax, and it has proven disastrous for their state's economy, resulting in cuts to public services, lost jobs, and decreased funding for public schools.

Safe Schools

The Safe Schools Act was passed over 20 years ago to ensure a safe learning environment for our students and a safe work environment for our educators. Increasingly, students are affected by trauma, poverty, unstable situations at home and are acting out more and more in schools. We must find better ways to handle these situations. In order to keep our students and staff safe, we must:

- Continue to strengthen the language on suspensions and expulsions and increase the list of offenses for mandatory expulsions or suspensions. Expand new mandatory removal language to include Pre-K through 5th grade.
- Create a discipline review committee at each school to annually review the school's discipline plan and give them the power to make changes when that plan is not working.
- Require a "consequence" section for each behavior plan that would outline progressive discipline for students who have IEPs.
- Increase access to more alternative education settings beginning with Pre-K.



Leslie Haynes and WVEA ODS Catricia Martin



Spencer Hill, Lesley Hill, Leslie Haynes, Emily Okes, and Tina Hamilton



Spencer Hill, Emily Okes, and Tina Hamilton

Kudos to Jackson County members

Back in November, Jackson County Education Association (JCEA) sponsored a self-defense class for educators at the Ripley Family Martial Arts Center. Master Spencer Hill and Instructor Lesley Hill both taught a three-hour class on how to be prepared in a dangerous situation. They covered the small self-defense items that can be used, such as pepper spray, tasers, stun guns, and other types of weapons. The class mainly focused on learning how to quickly react with your body when an attack is underway.

90% of all fights eventually end up on the ground.

JCEA members practiced falling safely on the mats and were shown different ways to fight while on the ground. They learned what to do if an attacker is after your purse, phone, or even tries to corner you. JCEA members were also shown how to get away if the attacker has you by the neck. The key takeaways to being safe are to be alert, aware of your surroundings, and always trust your gut.

This event was part of WVEA's Bullwinkle Project, which assisted with member engagement and activity. Kudos to JCEA who planned an amazing event!

Become a Bullwinkle Project local

Throughout the year, we've showcased our Bullwinkle Project, which runs April 1st–March 30th. As our current locals are entering their final months of the project, we are looking for more locals who are interested in participating in next year's project, which begins April 1, 2024.

The 13 participating locals have focused on new ways for recruitment, retention, and engagement. As a result, these locals have increased overall membership, offered new opportunities for their members and students, and have developed new partnerships within their communities. They have also traveled to participate in NEA conferences across the country to bring back more resources and tools to their locals.

Our staff will be working with the current project teams to revamp and make the upcoming project year even more successful. We will have openings for new locals to participate, while some current locals may continue to stay in the project.

To participate, your local will need a committed team of six to eight members, a willingness to create and explore new ideas with extra resources from WVEA, and an ongoing drive to make your local stronger and an even greater asset for your members. Speak with your local leadership to discuss being a project local and decide if you want to take advantage of this amazing opportunity.

If you want to provide your members with more resources, offer new engagement opportunities with current and potential members, and create a better environment for the students in your county, contact your ODS or Director of Field Services, Mike Hennessey, at mhennessey@wvea.org to be considered for the new project year!

WVEA delegates will vote on proposed constitutional amendments

The following amendments to the WVEA Constitution were proposed during the 2023 WVEA Delegate Assembly and will be voted on at the 2024 WVEA Delegate Assembly. In accordance with the WVEA Constitution, proposed amendments must be printed in two all-member publications of the WVEA. All amendments to the Constitution become effective at the close of the Delegate Assembly, during which they are passed. The new language is underlined and a strike-through is shown to omit a sentence in the proposed amendments below.

Proposed Constitutional Amendment #1

ARTICLE V--DELEGATE ASSEMBLY

Section 3. Each local affiliate as described in Article IV, Section 1, shall be entitled to at least one (1) delegate and one additional delegate for each fifty (50) paid memberships or major fraction thereof. Education support professional active members who are not members of local affiliates as described in Article IV, Section I, shall be entitled to one (1) delegate for each fifty (50) paid members or major fraction thereof. Higher education active members who are not members of local affiliates as described in Article IV, Section I, shall be entitled to one (1) delegate for each fifty (50) paid members or major fraction thereof. Retired members (WVEA-R) shall be entitled to one (1) delegate for each one hundred and fifty (150) paid members or major fraction

WVEA
DELEGATE
ASSEMBLY
2024

JUNE
10-12
2024



FOUR POINTS BY
SHERATON CHARLESTON
600 KANAWHA BLVD E
CHARLESTON, WV 25301

SAVE
THE
DATE

thereof. ~~Local affiliates with fewer than twenty-six (26) members may cluster for the purpose of representation with other affiliates of like numbers.~~ Each local delegation shall be entitled to a minimum of one (1) delegate. All the aforesaid memberships are to be certified by the executive director of this Association to the affiliated Associations, based upon membership enrollment in the West Virginia Education Association as of January 15 preceding the annual Delegate Assembly. The Student Education Association shall have two (2) delegates with voting rights.

Proposed Constitutional Amendment #2

ARTICLE VI--ELECTED LEADERSHIP

Section 11. No person shall be elected to each of the executive offices of President, Vice President or Treasurer more than three times.

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