As the 2020 session of the Utah Legislature hurtles to a close, I feel energy. Many of you have gotten involved. You came to the Capitol for UEA Educator Day on the Hill, or called or emailed your representative, or joined an event at your own school (be sure to check out the GEA Facebook page for incredible pics and videos, as well as going to GEA’s webpage for highlights). You made your voices heard. If you have not already done so, I encourage everybody to call your legislator. Use your teacher voice. Then, make sure you are registered to vote. You can read more about this activism on page two.

What do the funding needs look like in your classroom? On page 4 there’s a good example of a specific answer to this question from Suzette Boland, who teaches science at Cyprus High. Telling your story like this helps make the case for investment in education.

We have amazing rock star teachers in Granite. On page three, you will find five new National Board Certified Teachers, as well as a 2020 NEA Foundation Teaching Excellence Award Winner, and the Utah Governor’s Energy Educator of 2020. If you know one of these great Granite teachers, congratulate them.

The “AdvoCat” reminds us, on page 5, to take it seriously when the principal requests information in writing—pay attention.

We have changes to announce at the GEA office. Mary Jones, the face of the GEA office for the last 14 years, has retired. We are grateful for her years of service to GEA. Our new office assistant, Shana Ellington, has written a brief bio on page 8, as an introduction. Next time you call the office, say “hi” to Shana.

... Last, on a personal note: We stood outside Cyprus High at 6:30 a.m. in the dark and the cold, and wrote postcards to our legislators. When our pens froze, someone brought out pencils. Teachers keep going. You don’t quit. Thank you for letting me participate in your activism. I regard it as a privilege, and I count myself lucky to be able to work with you. You inspire me.
The legislature is still in session, and teachers have been speaking up! The annual 45-day session of the Utah Legislature always causes teachers some concern. The state budget has a very large influence over public schools. Things like class size, how many social workers and psychologists we will have, whether we are able to hire substitutes and aides, and ultimately whether we are able to pay teachers enough to keep them in the profession— all of these things depend on the funding that comes from the state. This is why the UEA, the Utah State Board of Education, and the School Boards Association are all asking the legislature to increase the ‘Weighted Pupil Unit’ (WPU) by 6%. The WPU is the unrestricted funding from the state to the districts, and is the biggest source of money to school districts. So, as you can see that state government is very important to education.

And yet, the part-time legislators who decide on the education budget are not all experts in what goes on in your classroom. Teachers are getting involved, and letting the legislature know what we need funding for. There are several ways that teachers have been getting involved, and things you can do during the last days the legislature is in session.

Teachers have written their legislators, attended Educator Day on the Hill events, participated in actions at their school, and attended the UEA Day of Action at the Capitol on February 28th.

To find out who represents you in the Utah Legislature, go to https://le.utah.gov/GIS/findDistrict.jsp and input your home address. When your representative and senator pop up, simply click on them to be taken to a page that has all their contact information, including their email address. Write a short note, telling them how funding affects the students in your classroom. Include your address so they know you live in the district they represent— legislators want to hear from their constituents.

Fridays during the legislative session, the UEA hosted “Educator Day on the Hill.” Teachers from all over the state met at 7:00 a.m. to learn how to have face-to-face conversations with their legislators. On February 14th, Granite’s ‘comp’ day for SEP conferences, 17 Granite teachers were among about 100 teachers from around the state who spent the first part of their long weekend at the capitol, talking to legislators about education issues. GEA’s been proud of the many educators who have attended by taking a personal day.

Many schools throughout the state, including nine schools in Granite, held “walk-ins” to raise awareness about the need for increased education funding. GEA building reps at Truman, Western Hills, Gourley, Diamond Ridge, Cyprus High, Crestview, Frost, Wilson, and Valley Crest put on great activities. Be sure to check out the GEA Facebook page for incredible pics and videos, as well as going to GEA’s webpage for highlights.

UEA Day of Action, February 28th, Capitol rotunda

UEA’s “Day of Action” was Friday, February 28th in the Capitol rotunda. The big event was a march from the Federal Building to the Capitol by the Salt Lake Education Association. The roar when these teachers entered the rotunda was deafening! There were rallies and activities to join all afternoon. Many Granite teachers came after school, and at 3:00 p.m. we heard from GEA members and leaders, C. J. Gebhardt, Caren Burns, and Taylor Layton. Thanks to all who came to show our support for funding for our schools.

And thank you all for using your “Teacher Voice” to advocate for students, teachers, and classroom resources.
Granite Teachers Recognized

National Board Certified Teachers from Granite District:

During the first week of the Utah State Legislature, teachers who had renewed or earned their National Board Certifications in the past year were honored.

This honor is not earned easily and can take one to three years to complete successfully. Granite School District has had its share of excellent teachers and this year the following were duly honored for this achievement:

- Julie Leri, Hunter Junior High, Science
- Scott Craig, Eisenhower Junior High, Math
- Anna Bessesen, Kearns Junior High, Math
- Jessica Moody, Olympus Junior High, Library Media Educational Technology Specialist
- Chad Farnes, Taylorsville High, ESL and Latinos in Action
- Audryn Damron, Cottonwood High, Resource

The 2020 NEA Foundation Teaching Excellence Award Winner, from Utah and GEA:

- Archer Birrell, Hillside Elem., Teacher of 4th Grade Students

The Utah Governor’s Energy Educator of 2020, member of the Utah Science Teachers Association, and awarded by the Governor’s Office of Energy Development:

- JoAnne Brown, Olympus Junior High, Science
Dear AdvoCats,
I had an verbal altercation with a parent of one of my students and now my principal has emailed me requesting a letter of explanation. Is this something I should be worried about?

Signed: Enough Said

Dear Enough Said

Anytime you receive a “Request for Information” from your administrator, you are entering the first step in corrective discipline. Principal’s may not believe this step is disciplinary and may express that they just need to get your side of the story, but technically, it is disciplinary and this is your first chance to shed a light on your side of the issue. So write up an explanation and email it to one of your AdvoCats at GEA. We’ll take a look and offer suggestions. Nobody is “purr-fect” but we don’t want to risk a teacher needlessly incriminating themselves.

Dear AdvoCats,
I heard that the professional agreement (contract) is totally open this year. What does that mean and how can I get involved?

Signed: Change Agent

Dear Change Agent:
Bravo to you for wanting to get involved and having your “cat sense” to the ground. Yes, the negotiated agreement between GEA and the Granite School District is “open” this year. Every three years, GEA and the Granite School Board can propose changes to any language within the contract. Although each year we negotiate together, we bring up language concerns and make temporary changes, the third year allows us to finalize necessary language changes in order to fix problems with processes, procedures, and stale language that needs updating.

GEA has a committee of established members, representing every assignment level which falls under the contract (general education teachers, special education teachers, counselors, CTE teachers, social workers, psychologists, Speech/ Language professionals, STS’s and LMETs, Instructional Coaches, all and any specially funded program teachers). This committee is named the Negotiations Development Committee and meets with GEA leadership and Star Orullian, GEA’s Executive Director to discuss and prioritize proposals for negotiations. If you have an idea or see a need, but are not on this esteemed committee, please forward your opinion and ideas to

GEA President Mike McDonough
(mike.mcdonough@myuea.org or Starleen.orullian@myuea.org)

The GEA and the GSD negotiations teams will be meeting beginning early April 2020.

Dear AdvoCats:
Stoked about this upcoming presidential election—I am “FEELING THE BERN” and put up a poster of Bernie Sanders, my candidate of choice in my classroom. I was surprised when my principal told me to remove it—because it is against school policy? Can democracy be shut down like that?!

Signed: Go Bern or Go Home

Dear Bernie Supporter:
Here’s the deal: we work in public schools. Governmental agencies must always remain bipartisan politically and school district policy disallows educators from sharing their political opinions within the classroom/school context. Unless you want to post a picture of President Donald J. Trump and extol his virtues along with Bernie’s, we suggest you keep your candidate swag at home.
Opinion: 2020 GEA’s Policy Ambassador

Patricia Shay, here meeting with Rep. Elizabeth Weight, is one of nineteen 2020 UEA Policy Ambassadors (courtesy UEA Under the Dome)

Standing in the Trenches While My Students Lose Ground – Legislative post by UEA Policy Ambassador Patricia Shay

I thought I was going beyond my duty to support education and my students when I willingly worked long hours. I was performing my job if I stayed late to meet with a parent, to counsel a child, to listen to one more “solve-it-all” training or to support another teacher trying to make a needed IEP happen.

I thought I was standing up for my chosen profession by venting with colleagues during professional development and reporting my concerns to administration during my yearly reviews. “All for the kids,” I kept telling myself when I sacrificed family time on weeknights and weekends trying to take care of what was humanly impossible to accomplish during the day.

I thought I was defending my students, like a hero standing in the trenches. Yet, just like a hero, here and there, in the heat of the battle, I started noticing the increasing cry of qualified teachers, some lethally wounded by the continuous attacks of testing bureaucracy, de-meaning remuneration and unfeasible expectations.

I thought I was doing my best by standing in the trenches while great educators showed clear signs of burnout, and “calling in sick” became the way to deal with work-related trauma and mental health issues.

After years, I started believing that my power and honor as an educator rested in staying in the trenches, ‘the last one to leave,’ proud of my persistence and sense of duty. And I would have remained in the trenches if I had not found that by doing so, my students were indeed losing ground academically, socially-emotionally and as global workforce contenders. For this reason, I decided to become a UEA Policy Ambassador.

We talk and talk about “closing the gap” for students and forget to address a greater gap – the gap between the decisions made at the Capitol and the students’ needs that we know well.

As an Ambassador, I had the opportunity to meet with state senators and representatives. Our conversations, awkward at the beginning, went from “I know: educators want more money” to “Why is this such a big deal for the students?”

As we sat down and exchanged contact information, we restored the channels between the ones who “understand by encountering the needs of kids” and the ones creating laws to address them. As we collaborated, we started indeed not only to close the gap but to move up and out of our trenches to find allies.

“Do I need to become an ambassador?” you ask. The truth is that you are already. What are some ways available to you to close the greater gap? Find out who is the representative for your area and share some of your ideas with them by email or text. You will be surprised at how much your input is valued and voice crucially needed!

—Patricia Shay, School Counselor, West Lake Stem, Granite School District.
Healthy Lifestyles: Granite District Wellness Clinic

Don’t Wait Lose Weight Competition. Who’s in? Who will win the “ROCK” this year? The “ROCK” is a beautiful traveling Granite stone trophy which the winning location gets to display proudly for one year. Registration began Monday, February 10, competition will begin February 14 and ends April 10. Rally your department or team to compete for the 7th Annual Rock Competition! For more information, open the link and click “The Rock 2020”.

Schedule an Appointment:
Download the My Premise Health app or visit mypremisehealth.com or call 801-964-WELL (9355)

Address:
4163 S. 3200 West
West Valley City, UT 84119

Hours of Operation:
Monday – Friday, 7 a.m. – 7 p.m.
Saturday, 8 a.m. – 1 p.m.

For immediate mental health services and crisis intervention, this link contains options and resources for you and your family. You’re not alone: reach out: support is waiting. https://www.graniteschools.org/hr/benefits/employee-resources/

GEA Members Speak Out

“In my science classroom additional funding would help provide lab supplies so my students can have a quality hands-on learning environment. It could reduce class sizes (most of my classes range from 35-40 students) so I can help more students one-on-one and increase lab safety in my classroom. It could also help my students get basic needs for school, such as paper and pencils.”

—Suzette Boland, Granite Teacher, Cyprus High School
In today’s politics, it’s easy to despair. Utah is still last in per-pupil funding and it’s easy to feel like citizens’ voices are ignored. At times, it feels like we are being led to despair, ushered by our news media into a never-ending carnival of things to be outraged and depressed by. No matter your political inclinations, there is something to be mad about happening four states over and there is someone to sell it to you. For that reason, it was easy to read Governor Herbert’s 2020 State of the State address as hopelessly naïve or blasé. Why be hopeful, Governor, when there is so much to be mad about?

As I’ve thought it over, however, I’ve come to see the truth in his perspective. For one’s own sake, it’s much better to be hopeful than despondent. Yes, we can sit and bemoan the climate crisis, sit and decry abuses of power and our weakening constitution, but does it really help anything? Or are we just trafficking in discontent? Personally, I checked the national news more than I ever have in the last few weeks and I have also been the most irritated—with politics, with myself, with my students. Maybe some rose-colored glasses would have been helpful.

But it’s not just for our personal mental wellbeing I recommend hopefulness. It’s the right political choice as well. I was struck listening to a New Yorker Radio Hour conversation with Jill Lepore on Democracy in Peril, a discussion, in part, of the rise of fascism in the 1930s. Not only does historical context ground me in a happier version of the present, but it guides me when something is amiss (and of course it is—optimism doesn’t mean ignorance). Her argument was that there is a balancing act in politics—when institutions falter, people engage to improve them. When a population feels divided, they try even harder to see one another. But that requires hope. It requires faith in our institutions and our country. If you stay in the quagmire of fatalism, you’ll likely never leave. Politics is not the weather, something to be planned around. We create it. Get out and make some sunshine.

Want some more hope in your life? Here are some things that help me remain hopeful and positively engaged:

1. Write your state legislators and find something to thank them for. Gratitude is important to practice, and it will set up a positive relationship for future lobbying and advocacy. No matter your representative, it’s possible. Think tax reform—teachers and citizens used our voices; they listened.

2. Come to Educator Day on the Hill! Being in a room with other active and passionate teachers is a great way to feel bigger than yourself. This year will mark my third time going and I always leave with a new friend, a new idea, and a renewed sense of hope for Utah’s children.

3. Push for a change in your school or school district. It’s easy to feel alienated with national issues, so start small. If you have a good idea, share it with other teachers, and you’ll soon find yourself an empowered coalition.

There’s room for all dispositions in politics and I don’t want to scold anyone for justified anger. Agitation is a crucial aspect to organizing. Just never forget, when there is a better future, it won’t be because the earth revolved and winter turned to spring. It will be because we made that future. And that makes me hopeful.

—Taylor Layton
Resource Teacher, Wilson Elementary, Granite School District
Opinion: 2020 GEA’s Policy Ambassador

Walking into the Copper Room where we meet for Educator Day on the Hill (EDOH), I always get this feeling of importance, that something great is going to happen in the next six hours. This year was no different. I walked into EDOH with a confidence that I have never had before. I knew I wanted to change something, or influence somebody, and hopefully that happened.

I had the privilege of going up to the Hill twice this year and talking to Rep. Steve Eliason both times, making myself super visible to him. This was the first time that I had met with Rep. Eliason and knowing that he is a supporter of education made it easier to hold a conversation with him. The first time we met, we talked about HB107 and that conversation went a little surface level. The second week, I noticed that he had a mental health bill, HB323, about how students should be screened every year and our talk went a lot smoother. I told him about how one of my students has been telling his parents that he wants to kill himself, but he acts totally different at school.

When I was done talking, first I almost started crying because I care so much about my kiddos, but second, he asked me to come and testify to his bill, to the importance of it. That was a really huge step for me, this wasn’t a situation that I would normally put myself in, and to come out of it with my Representative wanting me to testify was a big deal.

Starting EDOH three years ago as an Aspiring Educator has opened quite a few doors for me. I’ve become a caring human being and a quality educator. This experience, especially with this being my first year as an educator, has been transformational in my life. When educators step up, we can make a difference, and I’ve experienced that firsthand.


BIO: New Face at GEA Office

With Mary Jones retiring at the end of February 2020, GEA sought out someone to mirror her skills as the office assistant. Please help us welcome Shana Ellington as the “new face” in the GEA Office.

“I got the job I wanted!” Working within an education setting has been the ideal career for me. After graduating college in 2010, I obtained a position at Mat-Su College, Anchorage, AK, in the Marketing and Communications Department. In 2013 I left that position in Alaska to move closer to family here in Utah and I have experienced a variety of positions from eCommerce to pizza sales for Snowbird Ski Resort. While venturing out of an office environment and having fun in the mountains taught me how to “chill out” and not take life so seriously, I missed the challenges found in an academic environment. I needed to utilize my skills in marketing, accounting, and management which was timed perfectly with the opening at GEA. I was glad to able to work for two weeks with Mary to assist in the office staff transition.

Now, I look forward to working with everyone here at GEA and being part of such a Great Group doing Great Things for our teachers!
Navigate a Secure Future

Free URS Seminars held across Utah

Take the first step toward a more financially secure future by attending a URS seminar. To register, log in to myURS at www.urs.org and click “Education.” Space is limited, so reserve your spot soon!

2020

Early to Mid-Career Seminars 8:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.
Planning for a secure future
SLC - Granite ......... June 5
Cottonwood Heights .... Sept. 11

Pre-Retirement Seminars 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Critical if you’re within 10 years of retirement
SLC - Central ......... March 13
Draper ............... May 15
Santa Clara .......... May 28
Spanish Fork .......... June 1
Farmington .......... June 2
Ogden ............... Sept. 12
SLC - Central .......... Sept. 16
SLC - Granite ............ Sept. 17

Retiree Seminar 8:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Important tips and strategies for retirees
SLC - Granite ..................... Sept. 16

Seminar Locations:
Cottonwood Heights
City Hall
2277 East Bengal Blvd

Draper
City Hall
1000 East Pioneer Rd, (2400 South)

Farmington
Davis School District Offices
70 East 100 North
Kendall Building, 2nd Floor

Heber
Wasatch High School
590 South 500 East

North Logan
Cache County School District
Legacy Campus - Technology Building
2035 North 1200 East

Ogden
Weber Center
Commission Chambers
2380 Washington Blvd.

Provo
Utah County Health
and Justice Building
131 South University Ave.

Salt Lake City
Jordan Academy
for Technology and Careers
South Campus
1273 South Park Ave.

SLC - Central
Salt Lake City
Government Center
2001 South State St.
Commission Chambers
Room N100

SLC – Granite
Granite Education Center
250 South State St.
Auditorium A

Spanish Fork
Nebo School District
330 South Main St.
Board Room

Santa Clara
Santa Clara City Offices
2603 Santa Clara St.

Learn More: www.urs.org/us/seminars
Spouses Welcome!

We also invite you to check out our website:
WWW.GEA-UT.ORG

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Our page is: GEA

Vol. XLVII Issue 40