

TEACH

The teaching and learning journal of the Tennessee Education Association

Kindergarten portfolio fight moves to the courts with TEA lawsuit



One of the many benefits of membership is knowing that when you need help most, TEA Legal Services

can be there in times of professional crisis. The much-maligned portfolio system used to evaluate pre-k and kindergarten teachers has been just that for countless educators.

After two consecutive years of successfully supporting the passage of hold-harmless legislation meant to protect teachers from harmful effects of the rollout of the portfolio system, there were still teachers being negatively affected. That's when TEA Legal went to work.

A lawsuit has been filed on behalf of members and the Metro

Portfolio lawsuit
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While progress is made, more to be done to improve Tennessee teacher pay

With \$72 million in this year's state budget for teacher raises, and \$430 million over the past five years, there would be an expectation that all teachers would see improvement on their pay stub.

TEA salary data shows that in previous years the amount of additional funding would have led to substantial increases in average teacher pay. Yet the state comptroller found what TEA and teachers already know—the average salary increase was little more than half that figure.

There have been recent notable victories in teacher raises across the state. After months of #RedforEd demonstrations, job actions and packing council meetings, association leaders in Nashville won a 4.5% raise for teachers, while Knox County association leaders pushed and achieved 4%. However, this year's raises vary widely across systems.

After years of TEA advocacy on salaries, the Lee administration and General Assembly know something must be done. Recently passed legislation now

requires school systems to account for how they use salary funding increases, transparency that will be helpful at the state and local level. And the comptroller's report, which TEA assisted with, is seen as a call to action on salaries and benefits.

"Many teachers across the state have not seen the benefits of state increases," said TEA President Beth Brown. "The comptroller's report found what I knew in my own county: we haven't gotten a raise in years."

For the first time, Tennessee teachers have a higher average salary than Alabama, going from 39th to 35th in state rankings, but Tennessee still lags behind some other neighboring states.

"Our 'Beat Bama' campaign worked. Now we need a 'Beat Kentucky' effort. It will take more than \$200 million in the state budget for salaries to beat our

Teacher salary
cont. page 7



When professional livelihood is on the line, members count on TEA's team of legal experts to have their back

No teacher ever expects to be in the position of their license being in jeopardy. Unfortunately, as a result of a combination of factors, TEA has seen a 200% increase in member licensure cases since 2017.

For TEA member Jason Smith, his problems began with bureaucratic red tape. When he was recruited to teach in Metro Nashville, his Oklahoma teaching license was to be transferred and he was to

be placed on the salary schedule with credit for his more than 15 years of teaching in Oklahoma and Japan.

When MNPS and the state did not follow through, Jason enlisted the help of then-TEA UniServ Mary Campbell and TEA's Legal Advocacy team. It took almost two years of consistent pressure from TEA before the state properly transferred his teaching license and MNPS adjusted his pay to

the appropriate salary step. In addition, the settlement reached by TEA lawyers included thousands in back pay for the time he was paid as an entry-level teacher.

"The support and expertise of TEA staff kept me calm and confident during a very

State Board licensure
cont. page 8

TEA's Legal Advocacy team won thousands of dollars in back-pay for TEA member Jason Smith.



Emerging Leaders School, Rising Star program train next generation of educators, association leaders

As teacher turnover rates continue to rise and enrollment in teacher preparation programs drop, TEA is committed to supporting and empowering early career educators.

Participants in TEA's Emerging Leaders School are early-career educators who have not held association leadership positions and who are eager to help other educators just entering the profession. They also share a passion for improving public education for all Tennessee students.

"Every experienced educator will tell you that the first year on the job is the most overwhelming," said TEA President Beth Brown. "It can be incredibly challenging and confusing, and can make you question your decision to go into public education in the first place. But it can also be joyful and inspiring, and the difference lies almost entirely with your professional support system – or lack thereof."

Emerging Leaders
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THE PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION OF TENNESSEE

A lone voice isn't as important as a collective voice

By TEA President Beth Brown



As a high school English teacher, I have always operated under the philosophy that every student loves to read: reluctant readers simply haven't yet found what it is they like. In my effort to spark their love of reading, I spend countless hours and innumerable conversations trying to discern exactly what it is that my students care about. The same is true for most educators, I think. When planning learning opportunities for our students, we search for ways to connect students' learning with their experiences, values, and interests.

As association leaders, we must do the same thing. Margaret J. Wheatley, a writer who specializes in theories of change, leadership, and organizing, said, "There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about." The 2019-2020 school year is upon us, and our association is quickly approaching the date by which we hope to accomplish two important goals: eliminating high-stakes decisions based on standardized tests and increasing student funding to at least the southeast average. In order to accomplish these goals by 2020, we must ask ourselves, "What's important to our communities? How are their priorities connected to our 20/20 Vision goals?"

Just as I helped my students fall in love with reading, we need to work at the local level to help the members of our various communities fall in love with advocating for their public schools.

A new school year brings new communities: new groups of students, new colleagues, new parents, new members of your local association, and new elected officials. Of course, there are some communities in our lives that are more constant, such as our faith communities, civic and Greek organizations, and—not to be forgotten—our friends

and family members. Do these communities care about standardized testing? Do they care about education funding? I would daresay that the answer for most of them is a resounding yes. So how do we get our communities involved in helping us reach our 20/20 Vision goals?

First, we must realize that our efforts to influence legislators' and policy makers' decisions about public education in Tennessee cannot be limited to the duration of a legislative session, the halls of the statehouse, or the offices of the Department of Education. Moreover, we must acknowledge that some decision-makers don't prioritize what we, the educational experts, have to say about Tennessee's public schools.

With that understanding, we must work to have strong local associations, with strong ties to our various communities. Just as I helped my students fall in love with reading, we need to work at the local level to help the members of our various communities fall in love with advocating for their public schools.

Florida Congresswoman Lois Frankel said, "A lone voice isn't as important as a collective voice." Colleagues, we cannot be the lone voice for our students. We need our communities to join us in our ongoing fight: a fight that will last until we can say that all students have a great public school that prepares them for success in a diverse and interdependent world.

TEA, we are fighting for the schools our students deserve. Thank you for what you do each day for your students and for our great profession.

Set students, colleagues up for success from Day 1

By TEA Executive Director Carolyn Crowder



First impressions matter – especially on the first day of school. Students arrive with a mix of emotions. Most, however, are nervous. The reasons vary from child to child, but kids tend to feel anxious about starting school.

This is not necessarily a bad thing; some anxiety is normal, even healthy. As educators, we can do a lot to ensure their school environment is safe and welcoming on the first day of school.

Following is some advice a wise mentor of mine once gave me that I found helpful and have shared with others over the years:

First, don't just give a basic introduction - tell your students your story. Many of you have likely attended association trainings where you practiced your "Story of Self." It is important to share with your students why you became an educator and why you are passionate about your work.

Second, look for and eliminate any potential for public humiliation or frustration. This can take the form of assigning seats to avoid someone being shunned or keeping basic supplies like pencils or paper available for students who come to class without the resources they need.

Third, establish clear rules and routines from the very first day. Students' anxiety often comes from a feeling of uncertainty or worry about doing something wrong. Ease these fears immediately by giving detailed expectations for your students on everything from where to turn in assignments to how to handle bathroom breaks.

We should put the same effort into supporting and encouraging our colleagues. This is a tough profession we chose. It is important to lift one another up and look for ways to help.

My mentor also pointed out that we need to put the same effort into supporting and encouraging our colleagues - from those early in-service days before the school year even starts to the very end of the year.

This is a tough profession at times. It is important to lift one another up and look for ways to help.

Some of these ways could include: inviting new colleagues to have lunch together; reaching out to faculty members in your building to both offer and ask for ideas and advice on best practices, new resources or a challenges you may be facing. It helps to share your favorite professional development trainings or suggestions on how to keep up with PDPs. Finally, don't forget to invite coworkers to learn more about the statewide network of support you have in your local association and TEA.

Connecting with other educators in your building can improve morale for all, which will foster a better teaching and learning environment for both educators and students.

Students are at the center of everything we do. One of the most important pieces of student achievement is teacher morale. No one succeeds when educators do not feel valued and supported.

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TEA scholarship contributions invest in future of profession

The Don Sahli-Kathy Woodall Scholarship Fund was established to honor Dr. Donald G. Sahli, former executive secretary of the Tennessee Education Association, and Kathryn C. Woodall, former TEA president. The Fund has grown from awarding one scholarship to 10.

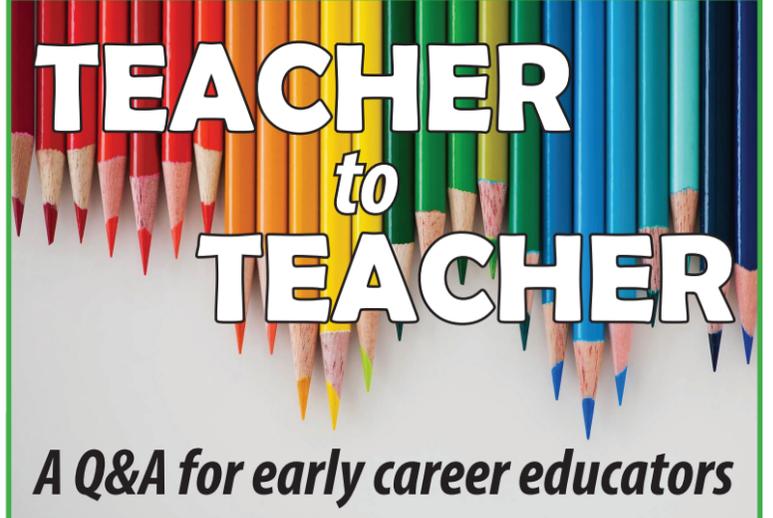


Scholarships are awarded to students studying to become teachers, TEA members earning advanced degrees and children of TEA members planning to study education.

To learn more about the scholarships offered or to make a donation, please visit TEAteachers.org/don-sahli-kathy-woodall-scholarship.

DON SAHLI-KATHY WOODALL SCHOLARSHIP CONTRIBUTIONS 2018-2019

Cavit & Mary Evelyn Cheshier <i>in memory of Al Mance (former TEA Executive Director)</i>	\$100
Cavit & Mary Evelyn Cheshier	\$100
Terrance Gibson <i>in memory of Diane Riggs (Galen Riggs wife)</i>	\$50
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Terrance Gibson <i>in memory of Carolyn Summerford (Gera Summerford's mother)</i>	\$50
Terrance Gibson <i>in memory of Ronald Clemmons (TEA retiree)</i>	\$50
Henry County Education Association	\$50
Knox County Education Association	\$300
Rutherford Education Association	\$200



Q: Do you have some tips for gathering student data and using it effectively?

A: There are an endless number of ways to gather student data. The way you choose to collect student data will ultimately depend on the type of data you want to gather.

For example, if you want to measure student growth in letter recognition over the course of a semester, you could create a bar graph tracking sheet for each student. Along the side (y-axis) set an interval for the number of letters the student recognizes (perhaps 5's or 10's). Along the bottom (x-axis) create spaces to record the dates you assess. Each time you assess a student, shade in the bar for that date, noting how many letters the student recognized. Within 2-3 assessments, you should be able to visually see if the student is making progress.

If you're more of a visual learner, one of my favorite blogs, We Are Teachers, has inventive ideas for collecting student data, along with pictures. You can find the post here: weareteachers.com/16-teacher-hacks-for-making-data-collection-a-piece-of-cake/

But wait! You cannot stop with just collecting data on your students. The point of collecting data is for it to be used to inform your instruction. One way to make sure you're using the data you collect effectively is by creating SMART goals. SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Action Oriented, Realistic and Time Bound.

Q: What are some good strategies for educators and students to deal with stress?

A: Stress management is so important in this profession. Your students depend on you to be at your best every day. Unchecked stress can lead to low energy and headaches, and even weaken your immune system, making you more susceptible to colds and infections. Stress affects our students in the same ways and can impact their academic performance. Below are some ideas you can use in managing stress for yourself and your students.

Prepare for the Next Day

Nothing is more stressful than being unprepared. Get organized so you're ready for the next day, taking a few minutes to make a to-do list and clean up before you leave. Knowing you've got everything covered means you'll be less likely to fret about work in the evenings. When you come in the next morning, you'll have the sense that you're in control of the situation and can handle it.

Focus on your senses

Try taking a short walk and pay attention to your senses—what you see, feel, hear, smell. This can make a huge difference in your emotional and physical well-being. This is something that can be done with your students as well. Even if you don't have the ability or time to take your students outside, you can dim the lights, have them close their eyes, and meditate for just a few moments before starting the lesson.

Identify at least one good thing that happened today.

Most of us are guilty of this. We come home from school and start venting to our family or friends about the day. Instead of creating a negative atmosphere the minute you walk in the door, try starting off the evening by exchanging good news. Something good happens every day; you just have to take time to recognize it. This strategy can also be used as a closure to the day with your students. Before dismissal have each student share out one good thing that happened during the day or something they're looking forward to the following day to help end each day on a positive note.



Teacher-to-Teacher questions may be submitted to TEACH@tnea.org. Answers are provided by TEA New Teacher Board Member Hope Shields. Ms. Shields is an instruction technology coach in Bartlett City Schools.

2019 New Teacher Retreat Natchez Trace State Park



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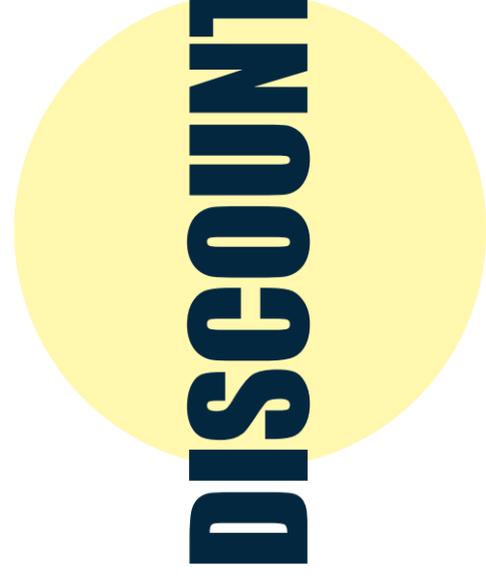
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Teacher salary from page 1

neighbor to the North, but it is an achievable goal when looking at state revenue collections. We will all need to keep up our advocacy to meet our 20/20 goals on funding,” Brown said.

Often the most important work on salary improvement is done locally, as Nashville and Knox County have shown. Whether a local association is negotiating an MOU through conferencing or wants to apply pressure to boards or commissions for better compensation, TEA and its staff are working to assist members. Some helpful resources are available to all members, including:

- TEA fact sheets on additional state salary funding for each system, the number of instructional personnel in the system, and what salary increases in dollars per staff would have occurred had all state salary funding gone to instructional salaries;
- TEA Comptracker, the state’s most comprehensive list of system salaries and benefits to help members compare their system with similar or neighboring systems; and

- TEA training on collaborative conferencing (more than half of all Tennessee teachers are covered by an MOU) focusing on what is possible for salary increases.

“As more systems engage in collaborative conferencing, we are starting to see a real impact in how it helps not only getting state dollars into paychecks but help spur local governments to match those increases in funding,” Brown said. “Our state relies on local funding more than most of our neighbors, and conferencing often raises the bar on what local governments should do.”

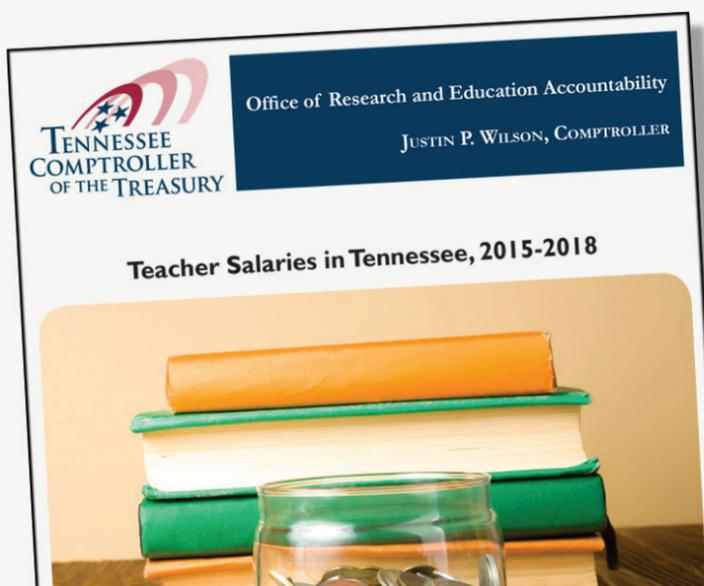
TEA UniServ play a critical part in conferencing and stand ready to help any local that wants to start the conferencing process.

However, state action is clearly necessary to improve overall educator compensation, and TEA is the only organization in the Capitol fighting for a fix in state law.

“We are already engaged in raising expectations and advocating for common sense action. Tennessee has one of the largest gaps between teacher salaries and similarly educated peers, and that must not continue,” Brown said.

TEA has been highlighting the 2004 effort of the Bredesen administration and the General Assembly, engineering one of the largest teacher-pay hikes in state history, reducing the pay gap between rural and urban teachers while providing raises for all. It is a recent example of where there is a will there is always a way.

On April 30, the Tennessee Comptroller’s Office released a report examining how money intended to boost teacher salaries has been used by local school districts. To read the entire report go to comptroller.tn.gov/OREA/



TEA Legal steps in to ensure members are not harmed by flawed portfolio evaluations

Portfolio lawsuit from page 1

Nashville local that seeks to allow the local school system to implement fixes for evaluations of teachers that had been blocked by the state department of education.

Several teachers received an automatic score of “1” on certain collections due to mismatching of evidence that was submitted. Teachers were not alerted to the mismatch, and there was no personal review of the collections triggered that could have found the mistake.

Teachers followed their local grievance procedure upon discovering the scores, and MNPS agreed that the scores were a clerical error and sought permission of the TDOE to recalculate the overall evaluation without the collections. TDOE, however, denied the request and advised MNPS that it could not change the evaluations. That is when TEA Legal got involved.

“When the careers of teachers are being damaged, it is sometimes necessary to seek relief through the courts,” said TEA Legal Services manager Steve McCloud. “Teachers deserve to be evaluated on the quality of their practice, not a computer glitch.”

All TEA members have access to Legal Services and should reach out to the Uniserv if they have an employment-related issue with which they believe they may need legal assistance.

Emerging Leaders from page 1

That support system is exactly what TEA has been building through programs like the Emerging Leaders School, Rising Star program for aspiring educators and other initiatives designed for early career educators.

These programs are building a growing network of TEA members fresh out of college or for whom education is a new career choice, seeking and offering help, sharing ideas and having a great time together.

“During my first year as a teacher there were

moments when I felt completely overwhelmed, but I was lucky to have an experienced teacher as a mentor,” said Erika Martin of Hamilton Co. EA. “One day she noticed I was about to cry, and pulled me out of my classroom into hers. Those five minutes will stay with me forever.”

Martin knows first-hand what research tells us: many good educators will leave the profession within the first three years if they don’t have the support they need.

“These educators have the knowledge, skills and passion, but they often have no support or avenue to put these things to use. We need to do

everything we can to provide opportunities to connect and collaborate, so they don’t feel like an island,” Martin said.

Attending TEA’s Emerging Leaders School in Franklin and an early career engagement training in Houston, Texas, gave Martin lots of good ideas to share with her colleagues in Hamilton County.

“Sometimes it’s small things, like inviting teachers’ families to an association event, that can make a big difference,” Martin said.

Attendees brainstormed ideas about engaging their colleagues statewide based on personal experiences as a new educator.

“The field of education is constantly changing, and these trainings helped me realize every generation deserves its own support network. It’s up to me to help build it in my local,” said Ginna Winstead of Clarksville-Montgomery County EA.

During the last school year, CMCEA hosted six events catering to early-career educators and education support professionals. The association also sponsored a graduation party for Austin Peay STEA members to welcome them into the association.

“All of these events were extremely well attended and prove that if we do reach out and help each other, we’ll grow stronger as an association, which will result in stronger schools and better education for all students. It’s a no-brainer,” Winstead said.

For more information about early-career programs, please contact your TEA UniServ.

TEA’s inaugural Emerging Leaders School was held this summer with educators from across the state in attendance.



State returns to Pearson for TNReady assessments

The state of Tennessee has renewed its relationship with testing magnate Pearson, after the department of education announced in May the company would take over administering TNReady in the 2019-2020 school year.

The change makes the third vendor in the last five years - years that have seen a bevy of issues with the transition to online testing. The problems were so severe in 2017 they prompted hold harmless legislation from the General Assembly that passed in the final hours of that year's legislative session.

Prior to the transition to TNReady, the state discontinued its earlier relationship with Pearson when it withdrew from the PARCC consortium in 2014. Numerous other states followed suit and there are now only two states and the District of Columbia that administer the test in their public schools.

The return to Pearson is sure to raise some eyebrows, as there were concerns raised by some parents and legislators about the

company's involvement in the Common Core standards prior to discontinuing the PARCC assessment. This time, though, the company will be administering the TNReady assessment, which is aligned to the Tennessee state standards and will eventually have test items written by Tennessee teachers.

"Confidence in the test is what's most important for teachers, students, and parents, and right now, there is none," said TEA President Beth Brown. "We hope a new vendor can administer a reliable, transparent test that parents and educators can see and use to meaningfully improve how our kids are learning."

The Pearson contract was awarded after the only other bid was produced by outgoing vendor Questar. Commissioner of Education Penny Schwinn advised the State Board of Education the contract would be considerably cheaper than Questar.



State Board overreach in licensure actions makes association membership even more critical

State Board licensure from page 1

stressful period of uncertainty for my family," said Smith. "They not only resolved these issues for me, but they were patient and transparent with me every step of the way, ensuring I understood the process and how they were fighting for me and my family."

In Jason's case, and in many of the new cases coming in to TEA, the member has a great administrator, and the licensure issues they are facing are outside of the control of school leaders.

In the past two years, the State Board of Education has increasingly overridden district-level licensure decisions and imposed suspensions.

"Having strong, supportive school administrators and directors of schools has a significant impact on teacher morale and longevity in this profession," said TEA President Beth Brown. "Teachers can have a false sense of security with supportive leadership at the school and district level. The increase in State Board licensure actions in recent years, particularly in cases where the local decided against any action, proves that teachers need the assurance of TEA's expert legal team looking out for their best interests."

The 200% increase in licensure cases TEA Legal has recorded only reflects the member cases filed with the association.

Members may contact their TEA UniServ coordinator with any concerns or questions about licensing.

An exclusive benefit for TEA members



TEA Attorney Referral Program supports members outside the classroom

As a member-driven organization with more than a 150-year history, TEA listens to the needs of members, regularly adding services that make educators' lives easier both in and outside of the classroom.

TEA's Attorney Referral Program (ARP) is the newest benefit added this year, providing members with legal advice on personal matters. The exclusive benefit entitles TEA members to two free 30-minute consultations during each calendar year, and reduced rates below participating attorneys' usual fees if additional legal help is needed.

"TEA has perhaps the most respected, experienced team of education attorneys in the state, but in today's complex world, simply having legal help for employment-related matters is not enough," said TEA President Beth Brown. "That's why we launched the TEA ARP in partnership with NEA, which entitles every member to affordable legal advice through a network of participating attorneys."

TEA members, along with their spouses, domestic partners and dependent children, can receive legal help in Tennessee or any state offering this benefit through a growing nationwide attorney referral network. The TEA ARP benefit covers five core areas: wills and estates, real estate, domestic relations, consumer protection, and traffic violations, offered at a 30 percent discount off of participating attorneys' normal rates.

"To contact a participating attorney in your area or if you need help outside of Tennessee, please contact your UniServ coordinator," Brown said.

Before attorneys may participate in the TEA ARP, they must be approved by both the NEA and TEA, and they agree, when possible, to provide legal services to members at times that are convenient to our members outside of the normal work day.

"Participating attorneys also agree to discuss fees before they render services, and to accept payment of their fees by installment payment plan or by credit card," said Steve McCloud, TEA assistant executive director and chief legal counsel.

To take advantage of this exclusive, new benefit, contact your UniServ coordinator at TEAteachers.org/staff for a list of ARP participating attorneys and law firms.

"You would then be free to contact any participating attorney directly — identifying yourself as a TEA member who is taking advantage of the TEA ARP," McCloud said. "It's important to note that during the two free 30-minute consultations in every calendar year, members can discuss any legal matter except income tax preparation."

For more information and details regarding areas of law covered under the TEA ARP benefit, please visit TEAteachers.org/tea-attorney-referral-program.

