

## Support and respect for education professionals

From cafeteria workers and bus drivers to school nurses and teachers in classrooms, Pennsylvania public school professionals' top priority is helping our children succeed. Gains in multiple indicators show that their efforts have been successful.

However, while learning always is their main focus, the job of school employees is not solely focused on academics. Education professionals also function as caregivers, sociologists, psychologists, confidants, and a multitude of other roles. They show their never-ending dedication to children by instilling confidence in those who face various adversities in life, searching for new and creative ways to meet students' differentiated academic challenges, and by keeping up-to-date on best practices.

The 191,000 members of PSEA believe that respect for the professional application of these human skills and their public service should result in professional salaries and fair benefits, including health care and a secure retirement.

Yet over the last decade, average educator salaries have not kept pace with inflation. In fact, the cost of salaries and benefits – as a total percentage of district budgets – has declined. The pension system into which professionals have faithfully contributed has been harmed by artificially low employer contributions. Action on a statewide healthcare plan that would reduce costs and ease contract negotiations has stalled in the General Assembly.

Academic progress will not continue without a high-quality, stable, professional workforce. Any long-term erosion of educator salaries and benefits could devastate the profession. Benefit reductions, long hours, low status, and unprofessional working conditions will send warning signals to prospective educator candidates and halt Pennsylvania's progress in its tracks. That is why PSEA members are counting on elected officials and policymakers to show how much they value education professionals by supporting the working conditions necessary to recruit, attract, and retain the best educators in the nation.