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Ohio Paraprofessional Named Education Support Professional of the Year

NEA President Lily Eskelsen García: Even in the worst of times, heroes shine through

WASHINGTON— Andrea Beeman, a special education paraprofessional at Maple Heights High School in Maple Heights, Ohio has been named the 2020 National Education Association’s Education Support Professional (ESP) of the Year.

“NEA applauds Andrea and her commitment to helping students succeed in the classroom and beyond,” said NEA President Lily Eskelsen García. “Even in the worst of times there is always some light, something to celebrate, heroes who shine through. Andrea is one of those heroes.”

As COVID transforms public education, ESP are providing support services and advocating for public schools at a time when the whole world is reminded just how important our schools are to every community.

“ESP members are the glue that holds our schools and communities together,” said Beeman. “Never in the 21st century have we ever experienced anything like the COVID 19 pandemic. I want our nation to remember that education support professionals worked tirelessly when our students needed us the most.”

Handling the unique challenges of students with severe developmental disabilities is demanding work, but Beeman not only derives tremendous satisfaction from her position, she calls it “an honor” to work with special education students.

“I believe it is our responsibility as educators to maintain a sense of dignity, confidentiality, and to keep students safe, and I strive to do that every day,” Beeman said. “I am dedicated to filling my students’ days with fun, laughter, learning and an occasional Soul Train line.”

Each year, one ESP receives the NEA ESP of the Year Award in recognition of their outstanding contribution to their schools, communities, and profession. Usually announced at the annual NEA ESP Conference, this year’s announcement was made by Eskelsen García in a tele-townhall.

“I have been fortunate to know and work closely with Andrea for many years,” said Ohio Education Association President Scott DiMauro. “She is an incredible leader who has used her skills as an organizer to advocate for what’s best for students, the adults who serve them, and our public schools at the local, state and national level. She has devoted her life to breaking down barriers to student success and has been relentless in working toward that goal in and out of the classroom. Her determination is a model for all of us.”

“Caring, compassionate, and caregiver are all words that can be used to describe Andrea,” said Shay Price, Maple Heights High School principal. She is the epitome of a paraprofessional, a professional and a colleague.”

For the past 19 years, Beeman has worked with students with severe developmental disabilities. On top of accompanying students to inclusion classes, modifying assignments, helping with physical, occupational, and speech therapy, she even chaperones students at homecoming and prom, giving them a sense of belonging and freedom and easing their parents’ worry.

Beeman is a leader among her ESP colleagues. She was instrumental in advocating for several pieces of important contract language, including requiring bus monitors – a second adult -- to be on school bus routes with kindergarten and all special needs students. She also obtained language that required the district to provide lifts in developmentally disabled units with non-ambulatory students. She was instrumental in bringing union solidarity and protections to her district’s food service workers who were excluded from the bargaining unit. In 2013, she was elected association president.

As 2020 ESP of the Year, Beeman will represent NEA and education support professionals at national education conferences, media events and other community occasions. She also will deliver a speech this summer at the NEA Representative Assembly in Atlanta.

“This pandemic is the start of our new normal and we need to be informed and active in decision making,” said Beeman. “My priority as ESP of the Year is to organize members because elections matter to every facet of our lives. This crisis a clear window into how elected federal and state leaders respond to crisis and who truly has the backs of American families and the children of this nation.”

Education support professionals, who work in schools and on college campuses, are categorized into nine career families: paraeducators; clerical services; custodial services; skilled trades; technical services; security services; transportation services; food services; and health and student services.

The nation’s public schools employ more than 2 million school support staff, comprising one-third of all public school employees. More than 70 percent of education support professionals live, shop and vote in the communities in which they work. For more information on education support professionals, visit: www.nea.org/ESP. Follow [@NEArESPEct](https://twitter.com/NEArESPEct) on Twitter for the latest news.

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