



NSTOY-PA NEWSLETTER

A Message From Your NSTOY-PA President

by Jolene Barron

NSTOY-PA President

A few months ago, stuck deep in the trenches of yet another difficult school year, I wasn't sure if we would ever get to the end of the year. Somehow we have all managed to make it to May, despite the challenges we continued to face more than two years after the start of the pandemic. I wish I had kept track of how many times I have heard colleagues both in my district and across the Commonwealth say that this year has been harder than last year. The challenges of last year have created new challenges, and some of the obstacles we had last year seemed to loom even larger. I have felt the weight of these challenges deeply many times throughout the year, and it has been comforting to know that it wasn't just me carrying that weight on my shoulders.

About a week ago, in the midst of a particularly frustrating couple of days dealing with major behavior meltdowns (with the students, not the teachers), state testing, an overwhelming workload, and a schedule with very little time to get anything done, I heard these lyrics that almost brought me to my knees.



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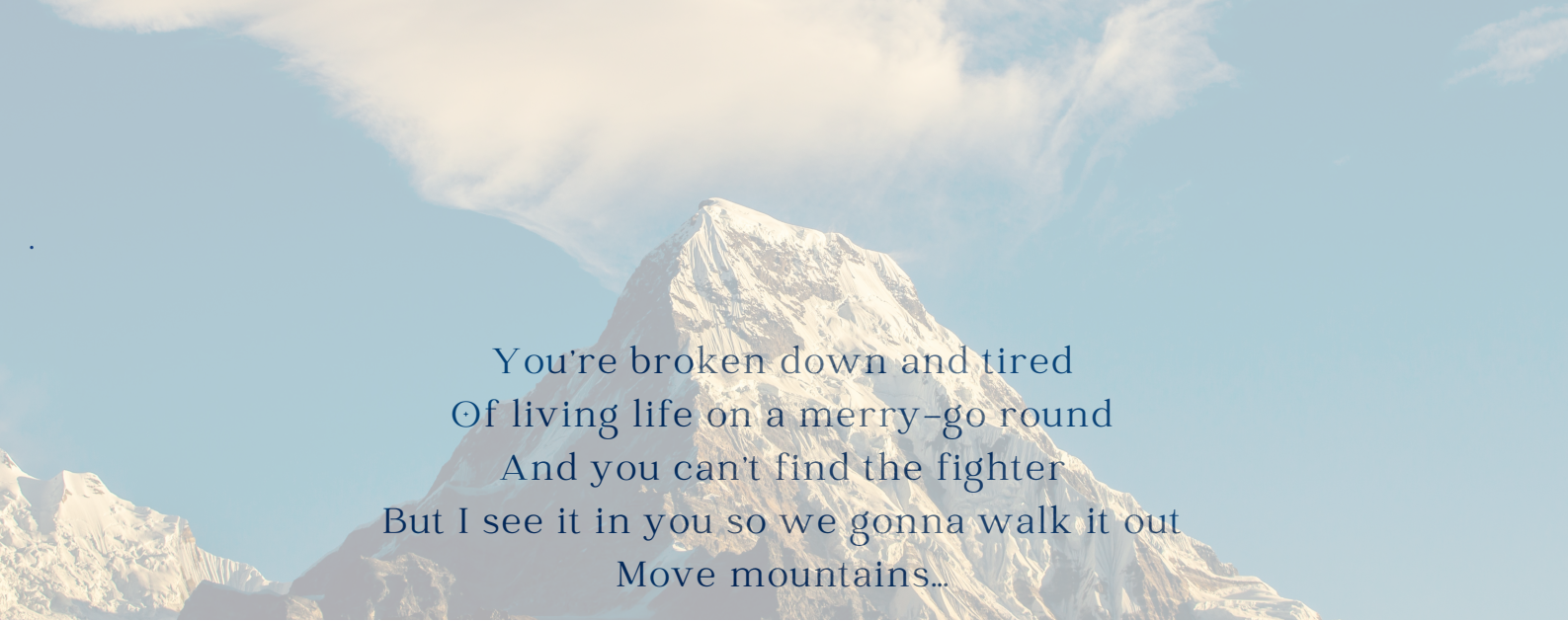
ELIZABETH RAFF, 2022
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LESSONS FROM WASHINGTON WEEK

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STEAM FAMILY ENGAGEMENT NIGHT

YOUR HELP IS NEEDED



You're broken down and tired
Of living life on a merry-go round
And you can't find the fighter
But I see it in you so we gonna walk it out
Move mountains...

How many times have you felt like this during the 2021-2022 school year? If I had to guess, I think it's safe to say we have all been there at least once this year. Despite the challenges and the emotional turmoil this year has carried, teachers have proven yet again that we are resilient. We might bend with the wind, but we don't break and we keep showing up. Not only do we show up, but we Rise Up for our students. Each day, no matter what is weighing on your mind and in your heart, it all takes a back seat the minute your students walk through your classroom doors.

And I'll rise up
I'll rise like the day
I'll rise up
I'll rise unafraid
I'll rise up
And I'll do it a thousand times again
For you...

Our students are the number one reason we are still showing up and fighting to make this year matter. They never cease to make us laugh and make us smile. They often surprise us, and they make us proud. Sometimes you don't see it immediately, but eventually, your students show you just how much you've impacted their lives. Last week, our school was lucky to have our High School Jazz Chorale and Drama Club Students come to put on a performance for the elementary students. When the performance was over, many former students came to me to say hello and

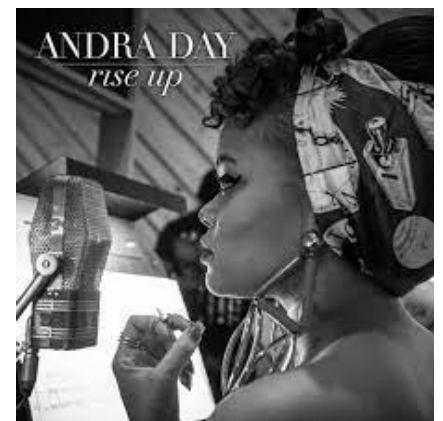
"And I'll Do It A Thousand Times Again For You"

some even asked for photos. As we walked back to the classroom, one of my current students said, "Mrs. Barron, I always knew that you were famous." It was adorable and it made me laugh, but it also warmed my heart. Nine years after sitting in my classroom, those students made a point to go out of their way to come see me, and the current students noticed. Those of you who know me well know that I firmly believe that building relationships with students is the most important thing we can do as teachers. When students know you care about them, they will move mountains to make you happy and make you proud.



I don't want to sound cliché, but almost like a phoenix from the ashes, NSTOY-PA is also rising up for all of you. In December, we returned to an in-person SAS Conference, and we were able to finally celebrate the Finalist Class of 2022. NSTOY-PA has had discussions with PDE representatives to increase the involvement of NSTOY-PA members during the 2022 PDE/SAS Conference. The Finalist Class of 2023 was announced during Teacher Appreciation Week earlier this month. PA Teachers of the Year Joe Welch (2022) and Elizabeth Raff (2023) are being sought for in-person speaking engagements. A few of your NSTOY-PA Board Members will be meeting with PDE this summer for the first time since the summer of 2019. While the past two years have been extremely difficult, I feel confident in saying that our organization is coming out of this pandemic stronger and with renewed passion for celebrating and recognizing teachers across the Commonwealth. Thank you for never giving up, and for always rising up when it's needed most. Enjoy what is left of your school year, and savor every minute of your well-deserved summer break! Be well until we meet again,

Jolene Barron
NSTOY-PA President
jobarron@ptd.net





Teacher Dreams

by Elizabeth Raff

NSTOY-PA 2022 Teacher of the Year

As many educators are counting down the days to a much deserved summer vacation, my countdown looks a bit different these days. After a flurry of exciting events, speaking engagements, and various teacher of the year duties during January and February, the busyness came to a screeching halt in March. We welcomed our second child, Emma Lynn Raff, and were tossed deep back into the throws of sleep deprivation, spit up, and an overabundance of love for this tiny human.



Suddenly, the weight of IEP meetings, grade book updates, seating chart revisions, and lesson plan edits melted away. New challenges of course crept up, as our four year old was in love with his baby sister, but not such a fan of sharing mommy and daddy. The days were long but as we got into a routine, the baby fog began to lift.

In between diaper changes and feedings, I started to feel my disconnect from the classroom become something I needed to fill. Although bingeing the show Abbott Elementary was a good option, I knew that my time outside of the classroom was going to be beneficial to reframe and reignite my passion for learning. I'm a bit of a dreamer, and I started to imagine what education would look like if we put our dreams into reality. What would the education system look like if we supported educators fully so that they could support students in their entirety?

As Teacher Appreciation Week approached, I thought about the systems we could create that would honor the expertise of our educators. How could we imagine a sustainable profession that our students and teachers deserve? I know that teachers are feeling stretched thin right now. The busyness of the end of year testing, activities, field trips, special events, and paperwork is overwhelming. What



How could we imagine a sustainable profession that our students and teachers deserve?

would it look like to create a profession that is sustainable, that endures through the challenges that we face each and every day?

Of course, compensation and respect seem to be the number one answers but what are the tangible actions that we can advocate for that will ultimately impact teacher morale, teacher workload, and overall job satisfaction? As I made a list of ideas (and I'm sure you're making a mental one right now) a headline caught my attention. "How a school district is bringing mental health support directly to teachers where they work." (Newhouse, 2022) The article discusses how a district hired two therapists that solely support teachers and their own well being. Teachers can meet with them for free during their prep period or before/after school. Not only is this a practical way to support teachers in a high stress environment, but it communicates to teachers that they are valued, seen, and affirmed.



Obviously this is just one small move among many that need to be made to reorganize our educational system but I was impressed with the practical nature of this decision and its positive effect. I am committed to the advocacy work needed in order to make our dreams a reality. I hope you will imagine what this world can look like with me. As I continue to take care of my small humans and transition back to the classroom this fall, I am eager to continue this conversation with you. Wishing you all a much deserved summer vacation, a time to unplug, reenergize, and imagine a new sustainable path.

Congratulations to the Raff Family

Welcome Emma Lynn!

With Love,
Your NSTOY-PA Family



Reference

Newhouse, K. (2022) "How a school district is bringing mental health support directly to teachers where they work." Mind Shift from KQED. <https://www.kqed.org/mindshift/59323/how-a-school-district-is-bringing-mental-health-support-directly-to-teachers-where-they-work>

Lessons From Washington Week: Networks are at the Heart of Teacher Leadership

by Joe Welch

NSTOY-PA 2020/2021 Teacher of the Year



As April turned to May, I arrived back in Pittsburgh following a week in Washington, D.C. as part of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) annual “Washington Week.”

Throughout the week, I was prompting myself with continuous reminders to slow down, take in the experience, and appreciate the opportunities that NSTOY-PA made possible for this long-anticipated chance to meet the other State Teachers of the Year from around the United States and Territories. While I expected to meet amazing people with inspiring stories, I did not anticipate how quickly the bonds would be formed, friendships developed, and support systems put in place for each other. During this weeklong venture around the nation’s capital, a fact was made clear to me once again: teachers are better leaders when we have our networks to lean on when things might not be going our way, celebrate with when we have those moments of joy worth sharing, to trust when we are uncertain about the next step, or maybe even to vent to when frustration might be getting the best of us. Whether it is a group of teachers in our hallway, or a group that connected at a conference, a group that has become like family in NSTOY-PA, or a group of teachers that all come together or a common interest in supporting each other and our students, there is such power in sharing spaces with teachers who foster our individual and collective leadership abilities, allowing us all to grow together.

Washington Week opened with my most important “network” member, my wife, as we were lucky enough to attend the week’s festivities together. Unlike the Washington Week of years in the past, the 2022 cohort of teachers had never had the opportunity to meet each other in person until this point, so there was a great buildup of anticipation. From the start of the check-in process, those zoom screen hellos became hugs and handshakes. Those nervous conversations in breakout rooms became laughs and smiles. And that “cohort” in name became a network of friends. Admittedly, I



"Teachers are better leaders when we have our networks to lean on..."

was so excited for the itinerary each day, I forced myself to go for a morning run each day around the White House to refocus myself and to remind myself to be fully present.

I could write for days about the inspiration and learning that occurred during the week, but my words still would not do it justice. Thus, I decided to go with my "3 Highlights of the Week."



TEDx Event: 2020 and 2021 State Teachers of the Year

Thanks to Google for Education, a CCSSO Sponsor, our Monday afternoon activity was a TEDx style event that invited back four previous teachers of the year to deliver their live Ted Talks that were part of the TEDx Master Class program that they had completed during the previous year. The event was hosted by the amazingly engaging Jonathan Juravich, the 2018 Ohio Teacher of the Year, National Teacher of the Year Finalist, and an Emmy Award winner for his local PBS broadcast of "Drawing with Mr. J." (Coincidentally, Jonathan, who grew up within 5 miles of where I currently live in Pittsburgh, was incredibly supportive to me as a past Finalist as we awaited the official release of the NTOY Announcement.) We heard from Takeru "TK" Nagayoshi, 2020 Massachusetts State Teacher of the Year, deliver his talk, Teachers are Just Like YouTubers, as he highlighted how teachers constantly look to engage, use feedback, and give voice to our learners. Following TK was Becky Jo Oglesby, 2020 Oklahoma State Teacher of the Year, with her talk, Tornadoes and Heroes, who reminded us to embrace the little moments each day and shared the trauma she experienced as a Tornado ravaged her school and community. Nathalie Roy, 2021 Louisiana Teacher of the Year, masterfully delivered The Magical Power of Objects, sharing with us the stories and emotion that can be present with the physical objects of our lives. The day concluded with Anthony Swann, 2021 Virginia State Teacher of the Year, bringing everyone to tears with his TEDx Talk, The Power of a Teacher. Anthony shared how his elementary teacher supported him in his darkest moment and would not give up on him, even as he faced continual challenges. It was an afternoon filled with emotions and brought to light how each of us have a story worth sharing with each other, our students, and communities.



"Each of us have a story worth sharing with each other,
our students, and communities."

Smithsonian Day

Thanks to Smithsonian Education, we spent our Tuesday exploring the Smithsonian Castle together as a cohort. After being placed into smaller groups, we had the opportunity to have an in-depth visit with the education staff at one of the Smithsonian Museums. I was fortunate enough to be assigned a museum that I have visited several times before with my



students, the National Museum of American History. However, it was such a unique experience as we learned several strategies about using Smithsonian resources to facilitate discussions with students. Within the Museum of American History, we were able to enter the Dibner Library of the History of Science and Technology and examine several rare books, including three works from the 1860s about hot air balloon flights. What this discussion led to, however, was about how incorrect and non-factual information takes hold, as each of these works, we were examining were fabrications based on misinformation, biases, and for-profit motives. When we returned to the Smithsonian Castle, we had an opportunity to participate in a listening session during which museum educators listed to suggestions, commentary, and feedback about the resources offered by the Smithsonian Museums.

The Department of Education and White House Visit

This was the most anticipated and anxiety-causing event for all of us during Washington Week. On Wednesday morning, each of us was called to complete Covid-19 testing to be eligible to visit both the Department of Education during the morning and the White House in the afternoon. We had luck on our side as every state teacher of the year and our guests tested negative! We were addressed by United States Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona at the Department of Education and also were given the chance to interact with different members of the Department to both listen to the projects that they are currently working on and to offer suggestions and insights of our thoughts.

During the afternoon, we boarded our buses with our destination on Pennsylvania Avenue, the White House. Upon entering the East Wing of the White House, I had such a sense of pride for educators and experienced a feeling that I had never before experienced as that pride mixed with gratitude, emotion, reflection,

and just an overall sense of “is this really happening?” The very first state flag we approached was the Pennsylvania flag and I could hear Ashokan Farewell, being played in the distance as soon as we entered. I have listened to this song many times with my students as it is a mainstay within PBS’ and Ken Burns’ The Civil War documentary. Within about fifteen minutes, we were joined by our guests and awaited the chance to meet Dr. Jill Biden in the Blue Room. Approaching Dr. Biden with my wife, she smiled and remarked “You’re from Pittsburgh”, which, if you know me, filled me with even more pride. After our group photo with President Biden and First Lady Dr. Jill Biden, we entered the East Room to honor our 2022 National Teacher of the Year, Kurt Russell. Kurt is the teacher that all of us aspire to be and is the voice that is needed for educators, students, and communities. As we listened to him address the nation, his genuine care for children radiated through in his conviction.



Following the formal ceremony, there was a reception throughout the East Wing that was again filled with hugs of our fellow teachers of the year and photos to capture the moment. What was again evident was the amount of joy that teachers have for each other, how we were all experiencing this opportunity together, and that we are better leaders when we march forward together.





Family Engagement Night

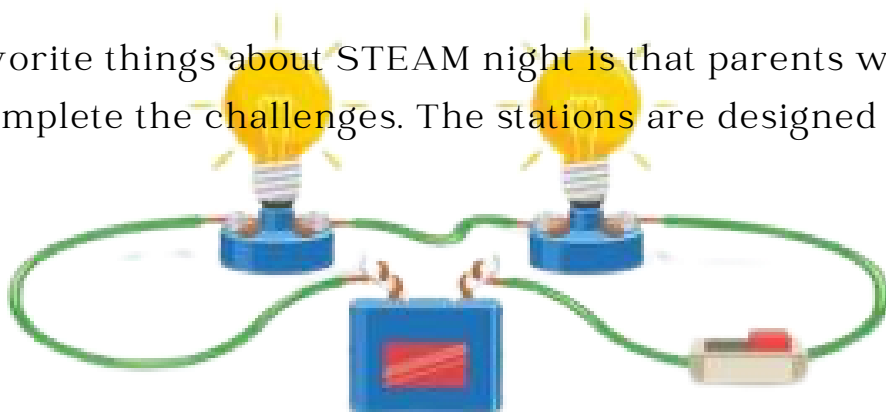
Bringing Community, Family & Students Together

by: Nicole Darroch

2022 Finalist

One of the highlights of the 2021–2022 school year for me was the STEAM Family Engagement Night that I planned and implemented for my elementary school. This event brought the community together while providing unique opportunities for families to interact with STEAM concepts. I tailored the stations to meet the needs and interests of the students. The first station was entitled “World Traveler”. In this station, families worked together to complete a puzzle of the United States, used classic 1980s View Masters to explore countries around the world, and played World Map Tangle which is a game similar to Twister. The second station was the “Pig Lung” station. Families used a pump to blow up an actual set of pig lungs. The lungs were on loan from GASP of Pittsburgh. Students learned about lung capacity and the importance of keeping their lungs healthy. The third station was “Electric Circuits”. Families worked with a local business owner to build an alarm system. Students as young as pre-kindergarten were pleasantly surprised to learn that they could make an alarm of their own. The fourth station was “Osmo Pizza Shop”. Students managed a virtual pizza shop by taking orders, making change, and building pizza pies. The fifth station was the “Big Bad Wolf”. Families used Lincoln Logs to create a house for a pig. The Big Bad Wolf Hairdryer huffed and puffed and blew many of the houses down. The sixth station was “Spaghetti and Marshmallow Towers”. Families used their design and engineering skills to build a tower using only spaghetti and marshmallows. The unusual supplies gave families an opportunity to let their creativity flow. The final station was “Fossil Discovery”. Students selected fossils and carefully cleaned them and used magnifying glasses to identify the fossil.

One of my favorite things about STEAM night is that parents work with their children to complete the challenges. The stations are designed to encourage





collaboration within the families. Throughout the evening, parents and students were actively engaged together. I consider this a win for everyone! Another one of my favorite things about STEAM night is the joy that is evident on the students' faces. I believe joy boosts the potential for learning. Families were building, designing, exploring, and learning with smiles on their faces.

This event drew over 200 people. This is double the attendance at the school's STEAM Family nights held prior to Covid. Our school's PTO partnership helped to increase attendance. The event was made possible through a \$2000 grant from the Beaver County Educational Trust (BCET). I was able to use this money to buy the supplies for the stations. Many of these supplies are non-consumable and I will be able to continue to use these supplies in my STEAM classes in upcoming school years. The event was a success and I am looking forward to building on the success for next year's event.



A local business owner volunteered his time to help families build electric circuits at this year's STEAM Family Night.

National State Teacher of the Year Organization



Pennsylvania Chapter



Pennsylvania Teacher of the Year 2023 Finalists

Chris Grouzes, Rose Tree Media School District

Ryan Hardesty, Blackhawk School District

Julie Hussey, Cumberland Valley School District

Brooke Menzen, Jersey Shore Area School District

Jackie Miller, New Hope Solebury School District

Mary Beth Moslak, West Branch Area School District

Abbey Nilson, Shaler Area School District

Ashlee Peters-Roberts, Burrell School District

Kristin J. Slota, Pennsbury School District

Liz Taylor, School District of Philadelphia

Jason Turka, Bethel Park School District

Melissa Unger, South Fayette School District



NSTOY-PA Teach Mentor Program

Our program is looking for a few good mentors to work with pre-service teachers.

Mentors will...

1. Meet with their mentee at least 4 times over a period of 4 – 6 months. Each meeting will be on a different suggested topic (or topics that you come up together) We do have some ideas for you! These meetings can be virtual or in person.
2. Record a summary of your meeting in the Google folder provided.
3. Guide your mentee as they work through the process. Check in with them to see how they are doing.
4. Discuss topics, answer questions, listen, give encouragement, and offer guidance
5. Participate in an online meeting with other mentors and mentees on a particular topic if you can.

What do you get out of this program?

1. Leadership skill development.
2. Strong communication skills.
3. Development of delivering feedback.
4. Development of asking questions.
5. Becoming a good listener.
6. Exposure to new and different perspectives.
7. Networking and friendships



To volunteer for this worthy program, please click the pencil below and fill out the survey:



PA-East Mini-Conference Chairperson Needed

Our TEACH Committee runs mini-conferences in the fall and spring of each academic year. These conferences are hosted by colleges and universities that we partner with. We invite pre-service teachers, graduate students, teachers, and professors to this fun and exciting event. We provide keynote speakers, a variety of break-out sessions, mentoring, and door prizes.

Jeff Kuntz has done an excellent job running these conferences in different parts of the state. It is a lot for one person to coordinate across Pennsylvania. The committee has decided to look for a second conference chairperson for the eastern side of the state while Jeff would stay on to coordinate the western side. Some responsibilities for this position would include working with the TEACH committee to organize the event, choose the theme, schedule keynote speakers and presenters, and set the agenda for the day.

Jeff has graciously volunteered to mentor the new conference chairperson. The committee will support this person as well. If you are interested in this position please contact Colleen Reiner at teachnstoyopa@gmail.com.

UPDATE: NSTOY-PA TEACH Mini-Conference

By Colleen Reiner, NSTOY-PA TEACH Liaison

Our spring conference was scheduled for Saturday, April 2 at Lock Haven University. Unfortunately, we were not able to get the minimum number of participants so we had to cancel the conference.

The next NSTOY-PA Mini-Conference is scheduled for Saturday November 12, 2022 at Marywood University in Scranton. The theme for this conference is Teach Like a Champion. A Save the Date notice has been sent out to all surrounding colleges and past participants.

Our spring TEACH Mini-Conference is scheduled for Saturday April 1, 2023, at La Roche University in McCandless, PA.

These mini-conferences usually take place on a Saturday from 10:00 – 3:00. Our general agenda includes a welcome, introductions, STEM/Minute to Win It activities, keynote speakers, 2 breakout sessions, Speed Mentoring, door prizes, wrap-up and thank you!

We will be looking for presenters for the fall conference and the spring conference. An email will go out this fall requesting volunteers. Please consider being a presenter for this conference. If you would like more information on this great opportunity, please contact Jeff Kuntz at jkuntz@punxsy.k12.pa.us or Colleen Reiner at mcreiner@comcast.net.



News From the TEACH Mentor Program

By Colleen Reiner, NSTOY-PA TEACH Liaison

NSTOY-PA's Mentor Program Ready to Present More Badges



This year our program has three pre-service students who are working on completing or have completed their bronze badges. Students in this class include Danika Moose (Clarion University), Jessica Riordan (Lycoming University), and Kristina Shope (Lock Haven University). These students have met with their mentors at least 4 times and completed a variety of tasks to meet the requirements of a bronze NSTOY-PA badge. Congratulations to Jessica who has completed her bronze badge. Danika and Kristina are very close to finishing up. Our hope is that they continue with the program to earn their silver and gold badges. A special thank-you goes out to Angela Homan, Kristen Moose, and Colleen Reiner who selflessly gave of their time and expertise to be mentors to these awesome students.

If you would like to volunteer to mentor a student, please click on the apple below for the link...



Dues & Professional Development

By Ellen Burke, NSTOY-PA Membership

NSTOY-PA Dues Update

It is **June** which means it is time for dues to be collected!!

Notices have been sent about paying annual NSTOY-PA dues. Dues are to be paid in June and are needed no later than July 1, 2022.

Annual dues are \$30.00.

Life Membership is \$200.00.

Celebration Award

Please consider making a donation to the Celebration Award! Our STOEY greatly appreciates your help! This donation from our members is collected to help defray the costs experienced by our TOY.

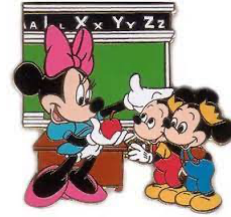
Checks for dues and the Celebration Award should be made payable to NSTOY-PA. Please send checks to:

Ellen G Burke
12 S Pheasant Street
Cleona, PA 17042-3268

Education Summit 2022

Coronado Springs
Walt Disney World

Shared by: Les Nicholas



I'm looking forward to attending the Education Summit 2022 at the Coronado Springs Resort in Walt Disney World from June 26th to the 29th. Registration for the conference includes breakfasts, lunches, and at least one special supper. Rooms are \$199/ night and can be shared by two teachers. You can book additional days before or after the Summit. Discounted Disney tickets are available to conference attendees.

They are providing a 50% registration discount to NSTOY-PA members! Use Coupon Code Springs50.

Registration Link:

<https://www.pegasussprings.org/2022-education-summit-registration/>



Welcome

The NSTOY-PA Board is excited to welcome Matthew Binder and Amanda Connell as the new NSTOY-PA Awards Co-Chairs. Both Matthew and Amanda are members of the Finalist Class of 2020.

We would also like to extend a warm welcome to Greg Mason, class of 2018, as our new NSTOY-PA Technology Chair.



Matthew Binder



Amanda Connell



Greg Mason

DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEAS FOR THE NEXT NEWSLETTER?

Contact the Newsletter Editor,
Michele Bittner at

NSTOYPANewsletter@gmail.com

Submissions for the Fall issue are
due by August 13th.



We, the **National State Teachers of the Year– Pennsylvania**, a service organization representing educators, believe that education is that part of the democratic society which contributes to the continued improvement of humankind. Supporting the principles upon which the United States was founded, we endeavor: to encourage professional educators, to promote the image of education through public awareness, to stimulate the personal and professional growth of our members, and to be actively involved in the recruitment of young people into the education profession.

NSTOY-PA BOARD MEMBERS

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Newsletter Editor

Michele Bittner

2022 PA-STOY

Elizabeth Raff

2020/2021 PA-STOY and 2022 STOY

Joe Welch