

US Forum Connection

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US Forum

Chair

Darlene Cook, (OR)
dcook.dkg@gmail.com

Representatives

Beverley Johns, NE (IL)
beverleyjohns@gmail.com

Nancy Sheng, NW (WA)
nancyksheng@gmail.com

Linda Perl, SW (AZ)
chiscottsdale@gmail.com

Dr. Vivian Posey, SE (FL)
vivposey@gmail.com

Editor

Alyssa Woodley SW (TX)\
lyssawoodley@gmail.com

US Forum Mission

The mission of the US Forum is to serve the interests and concerns of its members.

a. The emphasis is on sharing information and ideas and exploring solutions to identified issues.

b. Participating US Forum members can engage with the issues of concern of all members at the US Forum sessions during international conferences and the international convention.

(US Forum Guidelines, 2021)

Advocacy Statement

The US Forum is dedicated to being an advocate for women, children, and education by implementing actions which enable change and improvement in social institutions, systems, legislation, and practices that impose hardships or impact negatively on individuals, groups, or families.

**DKG US Forum invites you to the
National Legislative Seminar.**

**March 10-13, 2024
Washington D.C.**

**Learn to make a difference.
Speak up, stand up, soar!**



Mark your 2024 calendars for an exciting opportunity to enhance your advocacy skills, learn from experts about federal legislation related to education, women, and children, speak with your legislators, and visit key historical sites in Washington, DC.

Legislation to Watch

House of Representatives:

1. H.R. 5 (Parents Bill of Rights Act). Sponsored by Representative Julia Letlow, (R-LA) passed in the House on March 23, 2023 and was sent to the Senate, where it has been referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions. This bill establishes various rights of parents and guardians regarding the public elementary or secondary school education (including secondary career and technical education) of their children. Local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools must comply with the requirements of the bill in order to receive federal education funds. Specifically, the bill requires schools to notify parents and guardians of their rights regarding the education of their children. These rights include the right to

- review (and make copies of at no cost) the curriculum of their child's school;
- know if the state alters its challenging academic standards;
- meet with each teacher of their child at least twice each school year;
- review the budget, including all revenues and expenditures, of their child's school;
- inspect the books and other reading materials in the library of their child's school;
- address the school board of the LEA;
- receive information about violent activity in their child's school; and
- know if their child is not grade-level proficient in reading or language arts at the end of 3rd grade.

2. H. R. 3872 (School Safety Drill Research Act of 2023). Sponsored by Representative Brittany Pettersen (D-CO), this bill was introduced on June 6, 2023. No further action at this time. The bill has bipartisan support. This bill requires the Secretary of Education to enter into an agreement with the National Academies to conduct a study on the possible mental health effects of a lockdown drill or active shooter drill in elementary and secondary schools and for other purposes.

Senate:

3. S. 388 Childcare for Every Community Act. Sponsored by Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), this bill was introduced on February 9, 2023. The bill has 10 cosponsors. This bill provides funds to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) for an affordable childcare and early learning program. Children who are not yet required to attend school may participate in the program regardless of family income, disability status, citizenship status, or employment of a family member.

4. S. 597 Social Security Fairness Act. Sponsored by Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH), this bill was introduced on March 1, 2023 and has been referred to the Committee on Finance. This is a bipartisan bill with 44 co-sponsors currently. This bill repeals provisions that reduce Social Security benefits for individuals who receive other benefits, such as a pension from a state or local government. The bill eliminates the government pension offset, which in various instances reduces Social Security benefits for spouses, widows, and widowers who also receive government pensions of their own. The bill also eliminates the windfall elimination provision, which in some instances reduces Social Security benefits for individuals who also receive a pension or disability benefit from an employer that did not withhold Social Security taxes.

US Forum in Tampere Finland

Fifty DKG members from the United States attended the US Forum Session in Finland. The session began with the Pledge of Allegiance and greetings from International President Debbie LeBlanc. Steering Committee Chair Darlene Cook shared information on the Forum, including the Purpose and Mission, and how members can be involved in the work of the Forum. Pending federal legislation affecting women, children and education was presented, and the results of the issues survey conducted last Fall were discussed. Darlene encouraged members to attend the National Legislative Seminar. She also asked participants to consider running for a position on the 2024-2026 Steering Committee.

Pat Bennett-Forman from Washington emphasized the importance of the Mental Health Resolution passed by the US Forum at the 2022 International Convention. She also presented information on H.R. 744, Supporting the Mental Health of Educators and Staff Act of 2023, that is currently in the House subcommittee on Health. Participants are encouraged to contact their legislators to convey their ideas. To support our advocacy efforts, Pat provided a "Hand"y guide for crafting an advocacy message and a "quick and easy testimony fill-in" sheet. Both can be found at dkgwa.org in the advocacy tool kit under resources.

During the second hour of the sessions, the European Forum hosted an activity for all three Forums: US, Canada, and Europe. In discussion groups with members representing different countries, participants were asked to incorporate the theme "The Well Being of Students and Teachers in the Future" by designing a "recipe" for either "A Happy Student" or "A Happy Teacher." Safety at school, good food and sleep, friendship, respect for both students and teachers, positive support from home, and a caring community were the ingredients most often selected. No matter the country, state, or province, the recipe is usually the same!



A Garden of Wellness in Detroit

What can members do in their own chapters or state to promote wellness? How can members improve connections with other members? How can they make a positive difference in the wellness of their chapter members? The audience of more than 90 DKG members from the US and Canada, got a multitude of answers to those questions during the US Forum session at the International Conference in Detroit! This session was skillfully presided over by US Forum Steering Committee members Bev Johns, (NE Representative) and Nancy Sheng, (NW Representative).

As members entered the session room, they were greeted with garden items including flower seeds, rocks, flowered pens, handouts, and other items related to the garden theme. The panel of speakers for the session included Dr. Liz Turner, Carol Linscott, Cynthia Moore, and Debbie Pajula. The panel event was moderated by Bev Johns. Key components of mental wellness that were discussed included the importance of connections, art, play, movement, and advocacy. Ideas for mental wellness programs were provided for attendees to take back to their chapter members whether they are currently teaching or retired. The wealth of knowledge shared by the panel was phenomenal, and the panelists are to be congratulated for their excellent presentations.

Following the panel discussion, members were given a choice of ten activities to participate in to improve mental wellness. One activity, conducted by Nancy Sheng, used stencils and brilliant powdered watercolor paints on watercolor notecards. Additional activities included a Zentangle activity with a flower theme, a journal writing experience, a mandala, a set of games using words dealing with mental wellness, a music activity, a movement activity, and a puzzle about the NLS. Handouts and supplies were provided for each experience, so attendees could share these ideas with members in their own chapters in the future.

In addition to the mental wellness activities, a report on the results of the October 2022 survey of DKG members was presented, and pending legislation and recent Supreme Court cases related to education were discussed. Attendees were encouraged to attend the US Forum sponsored National Legislative Seminar in Washington, DC on March 10-13, 2024.

The closing remarks included the awarding of door prizes, announcement of the winners of a gift certificate toward registration for the National Legislative Seminar, and a reminder to visit the Marketplace exhibit for additional information about the US Forum.



Afternoon at the Spa in Phoenix, Arizona

With a backdrop of beautiful desertscapes and the ambience of a luxury hotel, the ballroom of the Sheraton Grande Resort at Wild Horse Pass in Phoenix was the perfect place to host the US Forum meeting, "Afternoon at the Spa" on Friday, July 21st.

Hosted by Southwest Representative, Linda Perl and Southeast Representative, Vivian Posey, the meeting began with a welcome and flag salute by President Debbie LeBlanc and US Forum Chair, Darlene Cook. Following the opening remarks, attendees were treated to an inspiring presentation from award-winning Arizona high school teacher, Mr. Ashley Crose. Speaking about "Mental Wellness Through an Active Classroom," Mr. Crose described his experiences as a teacher during the pandemic and how his struggles to find ways to connect with students during that time made him an even stronger and more effective educator. Throughout his presentation, he shared many engaging and practical tips for teachers, along with recommendations for resources to support student mental wellness.

Following Mr. Crose's engaging remarks, attendees learned about the mission and purpose of the US Forum, the Mental Health Resolution that was approved by attendees at the DKG International Conference, (US Forum Session) in summer, 2022, and pending legislation related to mental health and education.

The meeting concluded with a presentation by legislative advocate and mediator, Jennifer Adams, titled "Strategies for Effective Advocacy," and a reminder about the National Legislative Seminar in 2024. After closing remarks concluded, the attendees selected a souvenir of their visit to the Spa, and were given an invitation to visit the Expo Table on Saturday for more reminders of their time at the spa.



SUBCOMMITTEE NEWS

NEWS FROM THE LEGISLATIVE UPDATE SUBCOMMITTEE

The newly formed US Forum Legislative Update Committee, chaired by Linda Perl, (AZ), convenes regularly to research, discuss, and inform all members about pending state and federal legislation pertaining to women, children, and education. Members of the Legislative Update Committee are Francoise Bell, (HI), Sheila Gaiser, (CA), Chris Shewczyk, (WI), and Angela Hill, (NC). At the June 15th meeting, committee members discussed the trends in recent state and federal legislative actions and their similarities and differences. One top issue of discussion was teacher recruitment and retention. The committee shared highlights of recently passed legislation in California, (CAB 677), Florida (SB 244, HB 1537), and North Carolina that address the critical need to attract and retain certified classroom teachers.

Other issues discussed at this meeting included the expansion of voucher programs for tuition and other expenses incurred by private or home school students, and changes to the current model for funding public education in North Carolina (SB 670).

Please contact Linda Perl, SW Regional Representative (chiscottsdale@gmail.com), if you are interested in receiving notifications of upcoming meetings or have legislative issues that you would like the committee to research and discuss. This is a great way to get involved and stay informed!

NEWS FROM THE MENTAL HEALTH SUBCOMMITTEE

Convened by co-chairs Bev Johns, (IL), and Nancy Sheng, (WA), the Mental Health Subcommittee met on May 13th. Members of this newly formed committee include Debbie Pajula, (MI), Chris Shewczyk, (WI), Pat Bennett-Forman, (WA), and Marge Lofstrom, (WA). US Forum Steering Committee Chair Darlene Cook, (OR), was also in attendance. The meeting began with each participant describing what it is about DKG that brings them joy.

Items that were discussed during this meeting included a report on the federal legislation, H.R. 744, (Mental Health for Educators and Staff Act of 2023). Marge Lofstrom shared a Power Point presentation on this topic and has made it available to any member for distribution to local chapters. The presentation is also available on the DKG Facebook public group page, or by contacting Bev Johns, (beverleyjohns@gmail.com).

Next, the committee discussed several webinars that have been presented during the year by the US Forum. They also began planning future webinars on topics such as the national teacher shortage, addressing learning loss of students due to COVID, legislative advocacy, and preventing suicide.

Plans for the upcoming International Conference presentations, including the "Grow Your Garden of Mental Wellness" session that is scheduled for Friday July 14th in Detroit were then discussed. Following the conference, the committee will make available the session ideas and activities to members who are not able to be in Detroit in July.

Finally, Darlene Cook reminded the members about the National Legislative Seminar that will be held March 10-13th, 2024 at the Holiday Inn Hotel in Arlington, VA. She gave several details about the seminar, including a Sunday evening opening and keynote speaker, and an optional group tour. On Monday participants can expect to engage with speakers on topics that have been identified by DKG members and have a chance to refresh their advocacy skills. On Tuesday, participants will meet with legislators from their home states during the Day on the Hill. This event is a great way to learn and grow as citizens and professional educators!

IMPROVING THE WELLNESS OF EDUCATORS THROUGH ADVOCACY:

A WEBINAR SPONSORED BY THE MENTAL HEALTH SUBCOMMITTEE

On Thursday, June 29th the US Forum Subcommittee on Mental Health sponsored a webinar for all DKG members that focused on practical strategies educators can employ to advocate for increased access to mental health services. The event featured a panel of DKG members who have been deeply involved in working with local, state, and federal officials on this critically important issue. Attendees at this event represented 23 states and 1 Canadian province.

Marge Lofstrom, (WA) presented an excellent overview of H.R. 744, ([Supporting the Mental Health of Educators and Staff Act of 2023](#)), a bipartisan bill designed to provide grants for states to use to improve mental and behavioral health among education professionals and remove barriers to accessing care and treatment. Pat Bennett-Forman, (WA), discussed strategies that everyone can use to make a difference and gave a step-by-step outline for writing messages and statements of testimony to legislators. Debbie Pajula, (MI) discussed the importance of using your voice to influence legislative decision-making, and ways to become more informed on what is happening legislatively in states and at the federal level. Finally, Chris Shewczyk, (WI) provided an example of an effective letter to members of Congress and made this letter available to all. The panelists for this event are members of the Mental Health Subcommittee of the US Forum. Bev Johns, (IL) chair of this subcommittee, thanked the panel members for sharing their expertise during this event, and also thanked the members who attended this outstanding and informative session.

If you need further information or access to the PowerPoint presentations or other resources that were shared during the webinar, please contact Bev Johns (beverleyjohns@gmail.com).