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# The RISE Award

## Recognizing Inspiring School Employees

From the Recognizing Achievement in Classified School Employees Act (H.R. 276)

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### WHAT

The Recognizing Achievement in Classified School Employees Act, which was passed by Congress in March 2019, directs the U.S. secretary of education to establish a national award program recognizing the excellence exhibited by public school non-teaching employees (called paraprofessionals and school-related personnel, or PSRPs, at the AFT) who provide services to preK-12 students. The act:

- Was sponsored by Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.) and Rep. Dina Titus (D-Nev.).
- Passed with overwhelming bipartisan support in the House of Representatives and Senate.
- Creates the first national U.S. Department of Education award of its kind.

### WHO

Paraprofessionals and school-related personnel, who make up:

- One-third of the public school education workforce.
- Total nearly 3 million staff members in U.S. public schools, colleges and universities.
- About 370,000 PSRPs represented by the AFT in upward of 1,500 local unions across the United States.

### WHY

To celebrate school support employees as the unsung heroes—the “living infrastructure”—of America’s public schools. They engage with students on the bus and in the classrooms, cafeterias, health rooms and hallways of America’s public schools. Their unique professional skill sets range from classroom and library assistant, school health aide, bus driver, mechanic and school guard, to cook and baker, janitor, school secretary, vision and hearing tester, accounting control clerk and much more. They work closely with students every day, keeping them healthy, safe, engaged, supported and challenged so that learning can take place.

To educate the public on the important, and often invisible, educational support rendered by some of the hardest-working people in our schools. In short, to remind the public school community that it takes a team to ensure student success.

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The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

Randi Weingarten  
PRESIDENT

Loretta Johnson  
SECRETARY-TREASURER

Mary Cathryn Ricker  
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

## ELIGIBILITY

School employees working in the following areas:

- Paraprofessional;
- Clerical and administrative;
- Transportation;
- Food and nutrition;
- Custodial and maintenance;
- Security;
- Health;
- Technical; and
- Skilled trades.

Nominated PSRPs should demonstrate excellence in the following areas:

- Work performance;
- School and community involvement;
- Leadership and commitment;
- Local support; and
- Enhancing the image of PSRPs in the community and school.

## NOMINATION PROCESS

The U.S. secretary of education shall solicit nominations from the governor of each state by Nov. 1 each year.

Governors shall consider nominations submitted by the following:

- Local educational agencies;
- School administrators;
- Professional associations;
- Labor organizations;
- Educational service agencies;
- Nonprofit entities;
- Parents and students; and
- Any other group determined appropriate by the secretary of education.

## WHO DECIDES

Prior to May 31 each year, the U.S. secretary of education shall consider the nominees and select a PSRP to receive the Recognizing Inspiring School Employees (RISE) Award.

## AFT'S ROLE

As a partner in writing, lobbying and ushering in the Recognizing Achievement in Classified School Employees Act through Congress, the AFT and its state and local affiliates will spread the word about the rollout of this new federal awards program.

We will:

- Monitor the development of the application process at the Education Department.
- Lobby the secretary of education to implement, launch and publicize its creation.
- Educate governors on its possibilities.
- Inform local education agencies, school administrators, parent groups, students and families of the opportunity to nominate worthy PSRPs.
- Seek out and nominate our own worthy RISE Award candidates among our local union activists.