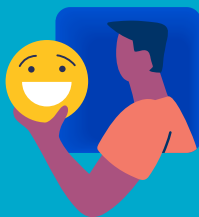


Ways to CELEBRATE and HONOR PSRPs





Randi Weingarten
PRESIDENT

Fedrick C. Ingram
SECRETARY-TREASURER

Evelyn DeJesus
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

OUR MISSION

The **AFT** 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.

Copyright © AFT, AFL-CIO (AFT 2024). Permission is hereby granted to AFT state and local affiliates to reproduce and distribute copies of the work for nonprofit education purposes, provided that copies are distributed at or below cost, and that the author, source, and copyright notice are included on each copy. Any distribution of such materials to third parties who are outside of the AFT or its affiliates is prohibited without first receiving the express written permission of the AFT.

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Defining the scope: What is your capacity for the event?	4
Ways to celebrate PSRPs!	8
Advocating for more recognition	16
Celebrate your favorite PSRPs on these days	18
Recognition matters	20



School and college support staff go by many names. At the AFT, we call them paraprofessionals and school-related personnel—or PSRPs. In other parts of the country, they are called classified employees, education support professionals or school-related professionals.

However you refer to school and college support staff, one thing remains the same—the work they do is critically important to our schools, colleges and beyond!

From the earliest moments of pre-K all the way to postgraduate school, PSRPs make an impact that reverberates widely. From the bright smile of the secretary greeting students when they first walk in, to the patience of the paraprofessional helping students distinguish between the letters “b” and “d,” to the compassion of the school nurse gently placing ice packs on bumps and bruises, to the thoughtfulness of the registrar making sure students have the classes needed to graduate on time, PSRPs care for their students—and the love and dedication they put into their work should be celebrated.

This toolkit is intended for anyone—from local unions and administrators to teachers and parents—to find ways to celebrate school and college support staff.

Celebrating workers, whether as individuals or as a group, shows them that their work matters and is valued. When we celebrate a group of workers, it acknowledges the value they bring to the community—and that they are part of that community. While no one goes to work expecting recognition, being appreciated is an important part of belonging.

A lot of people work in education. While some people's work is highly visible, there are other critical roles that are more behind-the-scenes. Regardless of how front facing a person's work is, all work that powers our schools and colleges is important and worthy of recognition.

Nearly everyone has heard of Teacher Appreciation Week or Administrative Professionals' Day, but there are so many more days and observances that go largely unnoticed and unrecognized. It is our collective responsibility to lift up the work of all PSRP members.

When we recognize and celebrate the value that PSRPs bring to our school and college communities, it has lasting positive effects on well-being, sense of community, job satisfaction and student outcomes.

Below are some simple steps to help you or your organization plan and implement a program to celebrate and honor the important work of PSRPs.

1. Define the scope of the celebration.
2. Brainstorm ideas to celebrate PSRPs.
3. Advocate for the expansion of state, regional and federal celebrations.



Defining the scope: What is your capacity for the event?

You know you want to have an event of some kind to celebrate all the PSRPs who make a difference every day, but where should you begin?

Start by building a planning committee. A planning committee could be as small as you and another person, or it could be much larger depending on the size and scope of the celebration you have in mind. It is important for the committee to be mindful of what they would like to do and what they can do given constraints such as time, budget and space. Below are a few questions to help your committee get started in the planning process:

1. What job classifications are you celebrating and when do you plan to do it?

- Is this celebration intended for a specific job classification? Is it intended to honor all support staff at once?
- Many school staff have national job classification appreciation days; you could lean into celebrating on that day and that day only, or you could decide to celebrate all school staff on a specific day of your choosing (days and observances are detailed below).

2. Who is throwing the celebration?

- It is always nice to be celebrated, and the more people who celebrate and honor you the better! Depending on what the plan is, it may not be possible to include everyone from administrators and the community to parents and students. When you are mindful of who is doing the celebrating, it will help you determine the best course of action.

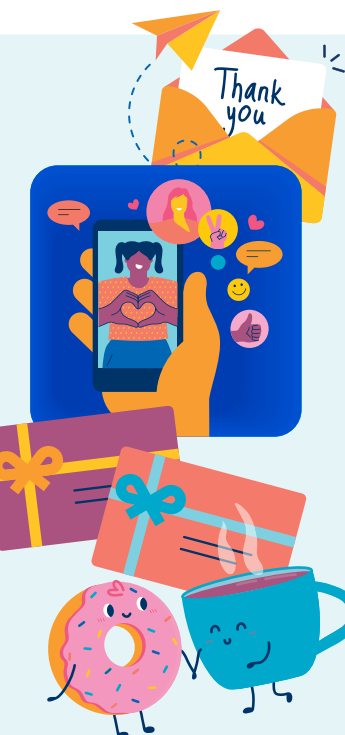
3. How big will the celebration be?

- Is this celebration for a single school or worksite?
- Is this a district- or campuswide event? If so, is it a single event at one location or will it be one event celebrated simultaneously at multiple locations across the district or campus?
- Are you participating in a statewide or nationwide celebration?
- Is your local event timed to coincide with a larger statewide or national celebration?

4. What about the budget?

- Who is funding the event?
- Will more than one organization provide resources, and what resources are available?
- Can you find partners willing to make in-kind donations?
- How much money are you willing to spend? Is this the only time this year you plan to celebrate these staff?
- Should this event be annual? How can you use your resources to maintain sustainability?

- There are ways big and small to celebrate school and college support staff. See below for more celebration ideas that can keep you under budget!



Free ideas

- Write thank-you notes (students, parents, co-workers, etc.)
- Show your appreciation on social media
- Make an announcement over the intercom

Ideas that require money or donations

- Gift cards or baskets
- Appreciation breakfast or luncheon
- Bonuses

5. How long should the event last?

- Are you planning a one-time event or celebration?
- Are you planning multiple things during a single day?
- Are you celebrating in various small ways throughout the week?

*Because there are so many classifications of school and college support staff, there may not be a one-size-fits-all celebration that works. Determining how long an event or celebration should last may depend on your staffing capacity or budget.

6. How will you amplify this event?

- Creating a communications plan to amplify the event before and after is important to ensure as many PSRPs as possible are celebrated and feel seen.

“Fast 5”

Five things to think about when amplifying your event:

1. Who do you want to come to the celebration?
2. How will you alert the people you are celebrating?
3. What platform do you want to use given the expected size of the event?
4. How far in advance of the celebration should you begin promoting it, and how long afterward should you continue celebrating the success?
5. What is your budget?



Five places to communicate your celebration:

1. School bulletin board
2. Classroom messaging apps (ClassDojo, Remind, Schoology)
3. School newsletter
4. School or districtwide emails
5. Ads in print or through social or news media



■ Student-driven ideas

-
- THANK YOU
FOR MAKING
OUR SCHOOL
SPARKLE**

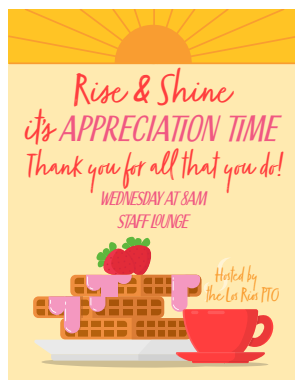
- **Award certificates:** Create certificates of appreciation to acknowledge the outstanding work of PSRPs. Students can present these certificates during a special ceremony or school assembly.
- **Share stories of how a PSRP positively impacted you:** Invite students and alumni to share their personal stories or memories of how PSRPs have positively impacted their lives. Compile these stories into a book or display them in the school.

■ Parent-driven ideas

- **Spotlight on social media:** This is a public-facing way to celebrate PSRP staff.
- **Appreciation wall:** Create a designated wall or bulletin board where staff and students can leave notes, messages or quotes of appreciation.



- **Solidarity days:** Chose a color for all school stakeholders to wear to show their support for school and college support staff.
- **Beautiful people pieces:** Collect names, pictures and quotes from staff members and create a poster that honors them and their commitment to the school. Put posters up around worksites.



- **Thank-you breakfast or lunch:** Host a meal and ask teachers, administrators or community members to volunteer to serve and thank the staff.

- **Parent-organized appreciation events:** Parents can organize appreciation events such as a potluck, breakfast or lunch. This allows parents to directly express their gratitude and build relationships with school and college staff.

- **Public recognition at events:** Recognize a staff member at a sports event, concert or festival.

- **Gift baskets:** Work with community stakeholders to create gift baskets. Gift baskets could have fun, creative themes ranging from relaxation to respect to gratitude.

- **Special clothes:** Create special “Support Staff Hero” shirts and distribute them.



■ Administration or districtwide

- **Shoutouts in newsletters or announcements:** By including a regular section for PSRPs in the school or college newsletter, workers will feel seen and appreciated.



- **Career day participation:** Invite support staff to participate in career day events, sharing their experiences and roles with students. This helps raise student awareness of the impact PSRPs have within the school community and helps students appreciate and value their diverse roles.



- **Employee of the month:** Establish an Employee of the Month program to recognize outstanding support staff members and highlight their achievements and contributions. This can be even more powerful if coupled with a schoolwide ceremony that includes multiple stakeholders.



- **Themed dress-up days:** Bringing joy to the workplace can help with employee retention. Organize themed days where staff can express their creativity and have fun. Encourage a school/college color day or encourage people to dress up as a unique take on the school/college mascot to make the environment more enjoyable.



- **Inclusive staff meetings:** Including PSRPs in regular staff meetings ensures they feel valued and informed. Making sure they are paid for that time is even more important in making PSRPs feel valued.
- **Involve them in decision-making:** Include support staff in discussions and decisions that affect their roles and responsibilities.
- **Professional development opportunities:** Identify paid opportunities for support staff to engage in professional development opportunities that enhance their skills.

- **Special clothes:** Create special “support staff hero” shirts and distribute them to the staff.
- **Bonuses:** Attach financial incentives to certificates, awards and/or employee recognitions.
- **Broaden the recognition to be citywide or countywide:** Work with town or municipal leaders to expand this celebration across the city or county with signs on buildings, branded mugs or fun events.



As we move on to suggestions for ways to celebrate school and college staff from a statewide perspective, most of the ideas above could still work, just on a larger scale. Rather than creating a school or district collection of “thank yous,” the Department of Education could encourage community members to write a note about the impact their favorite school or college support staff person has had on them and share it widely with all staff throughout the state.

Thank You!

We appreciate all you do to keep our college running.



■ State-driven ideas

- **Statewide PSRP Appreciation Day:** Advocate for an official statewide PSRP Appreciation Day. Lobby legislators to establish a day to honor and celebrate the hard work and dedication of school and college support staff.



Sec. 662.049. PUBLIC SCHOOL PARAPROFESSIONAL DAY. (a) The second Wednesday in May of each year is Public School Paraprofessional Day in recognition of education paraprofessionals including teacher assistants, instructional aides, educational trainers, library attendants, bilingual assistants, special education associates, mentors, and tutors.

(b) Public School Paraprofessional Day shall be regularly observed by appropriate ceremonies and activities in the public schools and other places to properly recognize the paraprofessionals who have made tremendous contributions to the educational process.



- **Awards and recognitions:** Create an annual statewide award program that recognizes outstanding school and college support staff.
- **Develop a process for submitting outstanding PSRPs** for consideration in the Department of Education's Recognizing Inspiring School Employees (RISE) Award. Invite media and community stakeholders to recognize and celebrate their impact and importance.
- **PSRP conferences:** Organize a free statewide event where PSRPs from different districts come together for workshops, panel discussions and networking opportunities.
- **Collaborative art projects:** Organize a statewide art project involving PSRPs and students. Create murals, paintings or other artworks that reflect the theme of appreciation for PSRPs and their roles in education.





- **PSRP appreciation swag:** Create posters, banners, stickers and badges that highlight the value school and college support staff bring to their worksites and communities.
- **Partner with businesses:** Partner with local businesses to offer discounts or special promotions to PSRPs.

■ National award

- **RISE Award:** The RISE Award is the only federal recognition of exceptional PSRPs in the country. It was created in 2019 by the Department of Education to honor preK-12 support staff. While this award is the exciting outcome of a lot of lobbying by PSRPs, it is not perfect and should be expanded in key ways, including:
 - **Creating an additional category** and recipient of the award to recognize PSRPs who work in higher education.
 - **Creating equity with winners of the Teacher of the Year award,** including a visit to the White House.

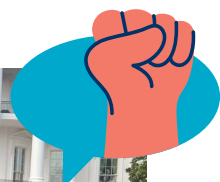
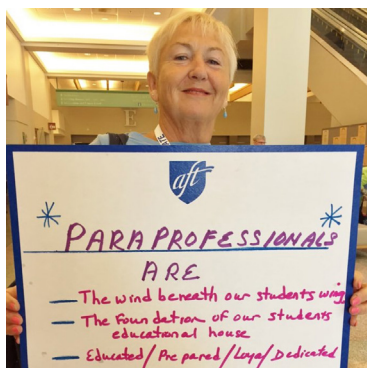


Advocating for more recognition

We know that PSRPs deserve more recognition at the national level. What follows are some additional ideas on how PSRPs could be recognized nationally.

- **Congressional awards:** Lobby for the creation of congressional awards or recognitions specifically for outstanding school and college support staff.
- **PSRP stories in the news:** Collaborate with media to feature stories and profiles of exceptional PSRPs. Highlight their achievements and contributions to education and the ways they impact and help their communities.
- **White House ceremony:** Advocate for a special White House ceremony or event dedicated to honoring PSRPs from across the country.
- **National PSRP conferences:** Like the state-level event but on a national scale.
- **PSRP education campaigns:** Develop national campaigns that educate the public and policymakers about the crucial role school and college staff play in supporting students' learning and well-being.

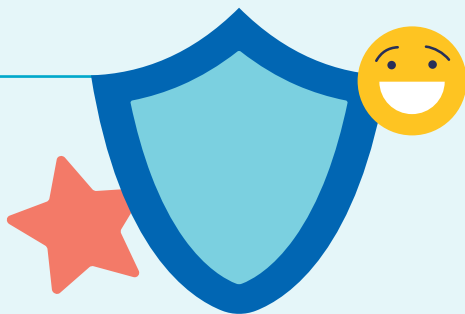
- **Federal PSRP task force:** Advocate for the establishment of a federal task force dedicated to addressing the needs and concerns of school and college support staff. This task force could conduct research, make policy recommendations and advocate for legislative changes that improve the work environment for PSRPs.
- **PSRP research and data collection:** Advocate for federal funding to conduct comprehensive research and data collection on the impact of school and college staff on student outcomes and school success.
- **PSRP inclusion in federal education programs:** Advocate for PSRPs to be explicitly included and supported in federal education programs, grants and initiatives.
- **PSRP day:** Advocate for a federally recognized national day to celebrate and honor school and college support staff.



Celebrate your favorite PSRPs on these days

FEBRUARY

- National School Resource Officer Appreciation Day: Feb. 15



APRIL

- Education Assistant/Paraprofessional Appreciation Day: First Wednesday of April
- Administrative Professionals Week: Last full week of April
- School Bus Driver Appreciation Day: Fourth Tuesday in April

MAY

- National School Nurse Day: First Wednesday in May
- School Lunch Hero Day: First Friday in May



SEPTEMBER

- **Public Safety/Security Week:** Third week in September



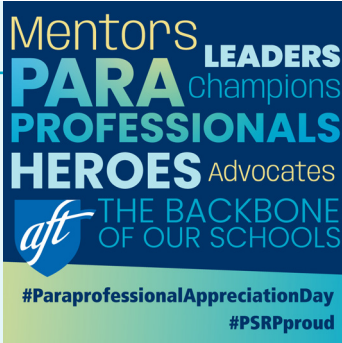
OCTOBER

- **AFT PSRP Week:** First week in October
- **National Custodian Day:** Oct. 2



NOVEMBER

- **National PSRP/ESP Day:** Third Wednesday in November





Recognition matters

This toolkit has offered thoughts and a place for a planning committee to begin as they build a program to celebrate school and college support staff. Whether it is administrators, teachers, students, parents, community members or politicians, we all have a duty to celebrate school and college support staff. PSRPs have traditionally been the unsung and often overlooked members of our educational team. Recognition alone does not make up for the structural inequities baked into the jobs that PSRPs do. Things like making a living wage, having safety on the job and being respected and treated with dignity are all vital—and we must continue to address these issues. But recognition matters.

While recognizing the hard work of school and college support staff doesn't fix structural problems, it does create a bright fabric of stories and goodwill that have the power to uplift those in the profession. And it reminds those with power that the work PSRPs do is essential and that schools and colleges don't function without the dedication, tenacity and effort that school and college support staff pour into their work each and every day.

If you want more information on how to implement a recognition program at your local or to send us photos of your celebration so that we can help amplify it, contact the PSRP Department at psrp@aft.org.



Education | Healthcare | Public Services

AFT, AFL-CIO | 555 New Jersey Ave. N.W. | Washington, DC 20001 | www.aft.org



aft.org



[AFTunion](#)



[@AFTunion](#)



[AFTunion](#)