



***FEA ONBOARDING GUIDE
FOR NEW STATESIDE DODEA EDUCATORS
AND SUPPORT STAFF***

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Welcome and Overview

Congratulations on your new position and welcome to your new school and to the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) system. With 160 schools, both Overseas and Stateside, serving military-connected children, DoDEA is a unique system quite unlike any other school system in the United States.

Given this uniqueness, there are many important aspects to know about the system, including benefits, understanding your rights as an employee, protecting your pay, and much more. This guide serves to introduce new educators to DoDEA, particularly to work and life in the Stateside Region of DoDEA and Guam. **This document was created by the Federal Education Association (FEA), the union representing most DoDEA employees.** It is our hope that this guide will help you understand how the DoDEA system works, maximizing the benefits of your employment while protecting yourself and your pay, so you can focus on the important work of educating the children of military-connected families.

Let's start with a quick overview of FEA, its mission and benefits, and how educators in the DoDEA come together to fight for each other and their students.

The Federal Education Association- Stateside Region: The Union of DoDEA Educators and Support Professionals



The Federal Education Association (FEA) is a member-driven organization representing faculty and staff in the Department of Defense school system.

With its headquarters in Washington, D.C., FEA is a global organization, representing thousands of Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) employees in Europe, Asia, the United States and its territories. Our members include educators and certified staff, Education Support Professionals (ESPs), and retirees.

In addition to FEA's Washington, D.C. headquarters, members in their respective locations are directly served by:

- ***FEA Stateside Region***
 - ***FEA Europe***
 - ***FEA Pacific***

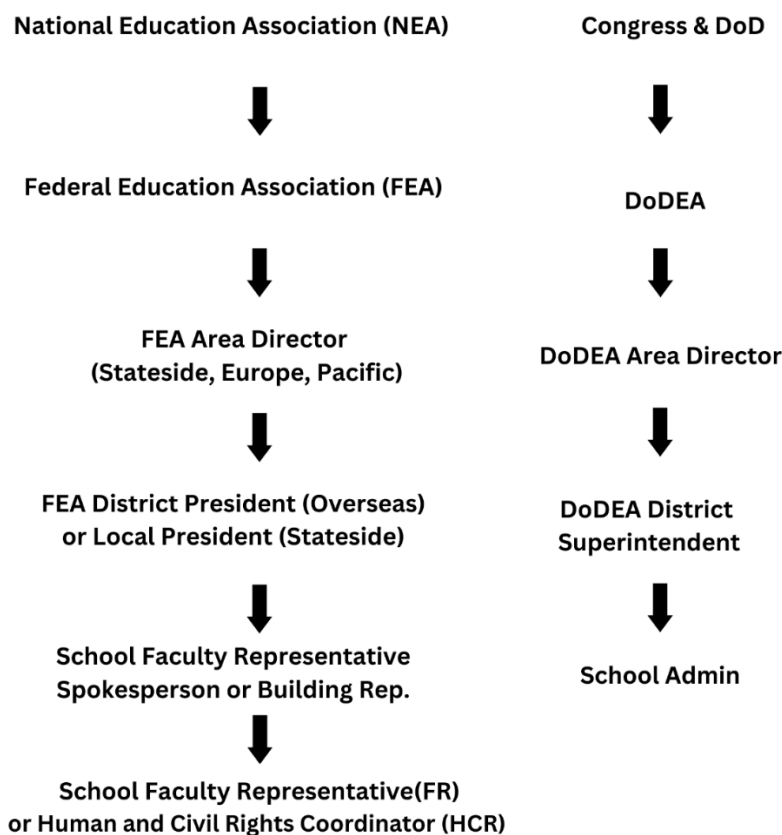
FEA advocates for the rights and benefits of its members, so they can educate and inspire the children of military families throughout the world of DoDEA.

FEA is a state affiliate of the National Education Association (NEA): www.nea.org

FEA Stateside Region Organizational Structure

FEA is comprised of thousands of members – educators just like you – that support each other and their students, and fight for dignity in their work. The structure of FEA is as follows:

FEA & DoDEA Structure



Role of the Local President in FEA's Stateside Region

- Meets regularly with the Superintendent
- Sole Negotiator for local association
- Can sign-binding agreements (educators/association)
- Communicates with the FEA-SR Area Director and Association Attorneys

For more information on the role of Faculty Representative/Building Rep, see page 7.

Why Belong?

There are so many benefits to being a FEA Member. Along with our parent organization, the National Education Association (NEA) and through our Local and Area affiliates, FEA fights to improve your pay and benefits, protects your legal rights, promotes your career growth, and works to see that you are treated as a professional. FEA's fantastic member services and benefits include:

Collective Bargaining

Professional Development

Legal Support

Member Communications

Advocacy

Human and Civil Rights Program

Professional Liability Insurance

**Education Support Professional
Resources**

Grants

Retirement Benefits

When you join FEA, you also gain access to the full range of **Member Benefits programs** (www.neamb.com) NEA has prepared for all its members, including:

- Automatic coverage of \$1 million in professional liability insurance.
- Life Insurance Protection
- Retirement Planning
- Multiple insurance and financial programs you can take advantage of
- Numerous discounts on office and classroom supplies, shopping, cell phone plans, and more
- Giveaways and online tools available exclusively to NEA members and their families.

Learn more about FEA Membership here:

<https://www.feaonline.org/membership/>

To join, speak to your school's FRS about the sign-up process!

DoDEA Employee Resources

Many DoDEA employee resources are found online at <https://www.dodea.edu/offices/human-resources/work-dodea/employee-resources>. These resources include:

- MyPay, a self-service system provided by the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS), DoDEA's payroll provider. You may make changes to pay information, change your address, and view online Leave and Earnings Statements and Travel Vouchers. You can also print W2 forms.
- The Global Service Desk, the help desk ticket system.
- Travel Order Processing System (TOPS), the system for requesting travel
- Grievance Tracking System, a system for employees to track grievances they have filed with management.
- Speak to your DoDEA customer service rep for more information and correct forms if you have difficulty finding them.

Employees should also contact the Human Resources department to access their electronic Official Personnel Folder (eOPF), which contains information the Government uses to make accurate employment decisions throughout your federal career.

Federal Employee Benefits, Rights and Restrictions

Benefits

You can find a summary of benefits on the DoDEA Employee Benefits page: <https://www.dodea.edu/Offices/HR/benefits/index.cfm>. Since DoDEA employees are federal employees, benefits may include the following, depending on your employment status:

- Civil Service or Federal Employees Retirement System
- The Thrift Savings Plan
- [Federal Employees Health Benefits Program \(FEHB\)](#)
- [Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program \(FEDVIP\)](#)
- [Federal Flexible Spending Account Program \(FSA\)](#)
- [Federal Employees' Group Life Insurance Program \(FGLI\)](#)
- [Federal Long Term Care Insurance Program \(FLTCIP\)](#)

Late every year there is a Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHB) Open Season (<https://www.opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/open-season/active-federal-employees/>). During the annual FEHB Open Season, anyone eligible to participate in the FEHB Program may enroll, change health plans or options, cancel your FEHB enrollment, and change participation in [premium conversion](#) (waive or begin participation).

Rights

As a federal employee, you are entitled to certain rights and protections. According to U.S. Office of Special Counsel, these include protections that prohibit:

- Discrimination (including discrimination based on marital status and political affiliation).
- Taking a personnel action against any employee because of the exercise of an appeal, complaint, or grievance right.
- Taking a personnel action against an employee which violates a law, rule, or regulation which implements a merit systems principle.
- And several other protections. To see the full list, search online for ‘Your Rights as a Federal Employee – OSC.GOV’

Understanding Your Contract & Protecting Your Pay

Stateside Certified and Classified Contracts

Stateside school employees have two contracts, one for certified employees (educators) and one for classified employees (Education Support Professionals).

The classified contract can be found on the FEA website here: <https://www.feaonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Classified-MLA.pdf>

The certified contract can be found here: <https://www.feaonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Master-Labor-Agreement-between-FEA-SR-Profess.pdf>

Stateside Salary Schedules

Whereas Overseas educators have one salary schedule, DoDEA’s Stateside schools have several different schedules. These schedules can be viewed at: <https://www.dodea.edu/offices/hr/salary.cfm>.

Your Leave and Earnings Statements (LEs)

Keeping your own solid records can make the difference at critical times such as retirement or debt allegations by management. The DoDEA MyPay system does not make copies of Leave and Earnings Statements (LEs), your pay statements, available past one year. These records are critical when an educator receives the dreaded alleged-debt letter. In several cases, educators have had trouble proving their years of service without copies when DoDEA claimed not to have those records.

Currently, LEs do not show a detailed breakdown of why DoDEA may add or deduct some pay from a paycheck. For example, employees may be reimbursed for a cost or charged an amount

they owe DoDEA. FEA is fighting for management to implement a new ‘Smart LES’ that shows this information and employees can clearly understand why they are paid certain amounts.

As part of every year’s membership materials, FEA distributes folders for members to use to keep their LESs and other important pay and work-related documents. Please use your folder to save your records and don’t lose track of them. You never know when in the future you may need them. It is also important to keep copies of all employment records, such as SF50s.

Also note that every year employees are given three days of **Any Purpose Leave (APL)** in which they do not need to give a reason for the leave. However, they do need to give notice (see article 21 of the Overseas agreement). If you have any questions about leave, speak to your FRS.

Resolving Pay Problems

DoDEA educators may, and often do, experience a range of pay problems. These include erroneous alleged debts, failures to make pay step pay lane step changes, and more. Educators have the right to question the validity of debts. Importantly, **DO NOT use any of the DFAS forms or hearing procedures referenced in the debt letter.** To invoke your rights to investigate this debt, you must fill out a form, *FEA-SR Form Invoking Rights*. FEA Stateside Region’s legal team will assist you in this process and if necessary, include you in an Association Grievance seeking relief for any money collected. For more information, contact your school’s FRS.

Requesting Pay Lane Changes After Completing Additional Higher Education

If educators complete at least 15 credits of additional higher education credits or attain a higher academic degree, your salary lane may change, resulting in an increased salary. See your respective salary schedule for which lane corresponds with which salary. To request a pay lane change you must fill out an [application form](#) and submit it to your principal.

There have been instances when DoDEA educators have completed enough higher education credits to be admitted into a new salary lane, but management did not recognize their credits. In certain instances, FEA has helped educators get retro pay for academic credits they were not properly recognized by DoDEA. If this situation occurs to you, reach out to your local FRS to get your case elevated up the chain.

FRS/Building Reps: Your School's Union Representative

The school's Faculty Representative Spokesperson (FRS) (also known as Building Representative) is the union (FEA) representative in your school who provides information to educators, assists with navigating issues, and communicates educator issues to their school's administration. These individuals perform a number of tasks, including:

- Listening to educators' school-related issues and providing guidance;
- Elevating educator issues up the FEA chain of command so members can receive assistance from the FEA UniServs or other leaders;
- Communicating common educator concerns to school principals both informally and formally at the regularly scheduled District/School level consultations (previously known as Joint-Cooperation Committee meetings);
- Being present with educators in management meetings which could result in disciplinary action.

In the Stateside Region, these individuals are referred interchangeably to as Building Reps and FRSs. In Stateside schools, the complex elected representative is the local President. Local Presidents serve on the Stateside Area council.

Schools also have Human and Civil Rights reps (HCR-FRs) whose role is to promote Association participation and leadership opportunities for ethnic minorities and other underrepresented groups.

As a new educator in your school, be sure to know who your FRS is and get their personal, non-DoDEA contact information in case you need to contact them.

Extra-Duty Assignments (EDAs)

An educator may be assigned an extra-duty assignment (EDA), which means leading or coaching an afterschool extra-curricular program for students. Important considerations regarding EDAs are:

- Extracurricular duty assignments shall be open to all bargaining unit employees (which includes you).
- The Agency must post a list of all extracurricular activities which shall include the following information: (1) The specific assignment;(2) The amount of compensation;(3) The closing date for receipt of applications; and (4) The approximate date selections will be made.
- An employee may submit a recommendation for an unlisted extracurricular activity to his/her supervisor.
- An employee selected to perform an extracurricular activity will execute the Agreement.

- Compensation for performing extracurricular activities will be processed following completion of the activity, will be in accordance with its respective pay schedule and will be paid in a single payment.

FEA Tips on EDAs:

- Be sure to check that a compensation amount is listed for your EDA.
- Inquire about accommodations if your EDA involves travel

Adverse Action by Management and Knowing your Rights

Union Representation During Investigatory Interviews

Educators' 'Weingarten Rights' guarantee an employee the right to union representation during an investigatory interview by an employer. If the interview could in any way lead to the employee being disciplined or terminated, or affect their personal or working conditions, he or she should respectfully request that a union representative or officer be present at the meeting. Without representation, the employee may choose not to answer any questions.

Filing a Grievance

In certain cases, educators may file a grievance with DoDEA over an issue to get a resolution. These issues might be one of many topics such as: DoDEA incorrectly alleging the educator owes a debt; DoDEA refusing to issue backpay owed the educator after higher education credits were completed and a pay lane change should have been implemented; or discipline taken against the educator when they were not at fault, to name a few.

The Federal Education Association assists educators in certain cases by advocating for them and filing grievances when necessary. To get assistance from FEA's legal team in filing a grievance, please contact your FRS so they can connect you with your Area UniServ.

Recertification

DoDEA educators are required to recertify every six years. A summary of the process and requirements can be found at <https://www.dodea.edu/offices/human-resources/work-dodea/licensure>. As stated on the DoDEA page:

Educators must complete six semester hours of undergraduate or graduate level course work taken at a U.S. regionally accredited educational institution **after** the date listed on current certificate.

- Courses are to be taken in areas related to the current teaching position or administrator assignment or divided among subject areas the educator is teaching if teaching more than one subject.
- Three of the six semester hours may be earned in subject areas that will qualify the educator for another position category within DoDEA.
- Effective January 1, 2006, up to three semester hours of course work taken during the final four months of a renewal cycle that are not needed for that cycle may be carried over to the next renewal cycle. Hours for a single course may not be split between two renewal cycles.

To fulfill the recertification requirement, educators can take online courses tailored to DoDEA employees for discounted tuition at the University of San Diego
(<https://pce.sandiego.edu/certificates/project-read-for-dodea-intl-school-educators-series/>).

As of 2022, DoDEA lists describes the Procedures for Recertification process as:

- Complete the DoDEA Certification/Recertification Worksheet Request and check “B-Recertification.” The request form is found here: <https://www.dodea.edu/offices/human-resources/work-dodea/licensure>.
- Email a completed application and official transcripts signed as "true copy" by the building administrator to your HQ Licensure Analyst.

Tips for Beginning Work and Retirement for Federal Employees

Things Every New Federal Employee Should Do

Learn as much as you can about your specific job and agency. There are many complex laws, policies, and regulations that come with work in federal agencies. Read as many relevant reports, manuals, flow charts and budgets as you can. If you have questions or concerns, ask your administrator or colleagues as appropriate.

Get to know your colleagues and find a mentor. Your fellow employees can be invaluable in helping you get adjusted to your new role. Take up opportunities to chat with your colleagues during breaks, work social events, and more. See if there are some who are receptive to answering questions and consider setting up an informational interview with them.

Review, understand, and keep your Leave and Earnings Statements (LES). Important numbers to note will be your bi-weekly pay, deductions for taxes, as well as the cost of your health insurance, life insurance, and other benefits, if applicable. You should also see the number of sick days and annual leave you have remaining.

Maximize your contributions to your Thrift Savings Plan (TSP). For 2022, the maximum an employee can contribute is \$20,500. If you are over age 50, an additional \$6500 can be contributed, bringing the total to \$27,000.

Take advantage of FSAFeds healthcare and dependent care savings accounts. A Dependent Care FSA (DCFSA) is a pre-tax benefit account used to pay for eligible dependent care services, such as preschool, summer day camp, before or after school programs, and child or adult daycare. It's a way to save money while taking care of your loved ones so that you can work. A Health Care FSA (HCFSA) is a pre-tax benefit account that's used to pay for eligible medical, dental, and vision care expenses - those not covered by your health care plan or elsewhere. The Federal Flexible Spending Account Program (FSAFEDS) is sponsored by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management and administered by HealthEquity, Inc. Learn more: www.fsafeds.com/

Fill out and submit beneficiary forms for your federal benefits. These forms include: Form TSP3 (TSP Beneficiary); Form SF 1152 (Unpaid Compensation and Unused Annual Leave); Form SF 2823 (FEGLI Life Insurance)

Take advantage of FEGLI life insurance. New employees can enroll in the government's life insurance programs without having to answer any health questions. New hires are typically auto enrolled in the Basic plan. However, you must sign up for any Optional plan within 60 days of hire. Learn more: <https://www.opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/life-insurance/>.

How Federal Employees Can Prepare For Retirement

Know your financial retirement needs and create and follow a savings plan. If you have 10 or more years of service, you can retire at the Minimum Retirement Age (MRA), which depends on your year of birth. Experts estimate that you may need 70 to 90 percent of your preretirement income to maintain your standard of living when you stop working. As a federal employee, you should choose an age that you plan to retire, and plan to take advantage of multiple programs available. The Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) is a retirement plan that covers eligible Federal civilian employees and provides benefits from three different sources:

The Basic Benefit Plan (a federal pension). Employees are automatically enrolled to contribute 0.8% of their pay to the Benefit Plan (but may contribute more) and the employer contributes at least 10.7%. The amount of the annuity a retiree receives is calculated using length of service and an employee's "high-3" average salary, the highest pay earned during any three consecutive years of service.

Social Security. As part of FERS, employees pay into Social Security via tax deductions from each paycheck, just like employees in the private sector.

The Thrift Savings Plan (TSP). The TSP tax-deferred retirement savings and investment plan that offers Federal employees the same type of savings and tax benefits that many private corporations offer their employees under 401(k) plans. Federal employees are automatically enrolled when hired, but the contribution rate varies depending on date of hire.

Learn more: <https://www.opm.gov/retirement-services/fers-information>.

Meet with your agency's HR office to review the retirement process. Review your Official Personnel Folder (OPF) and all employment records are complete and accurate, verify all federal service, and confirm your health and life insurance coverage is documented.

Understand your health insurance options. According to the Office of Personnel Management, when you retire, you are eligible to continue health benefits coverage under the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Program if you meet the following requirements:

- you are entitled to retire on an immediate annuity under a retirement system for civilian employees (including FERS MRA + 10 retirements); and
- you have been continuously enrolled (or covered as a family member) in any FEHB plan(s) for the 5 years of service immediately before the date your annuity starts or for the full period(s) of service since your first opportunity to enroll (if less than 5 years).

Additional FEA Tips for Retirees

Our FEA Retired Representatives recommends that members considering retiring soon should review our Tips (and to-do's) for Retirement for Stateside members:

Stateside: <https://www.feaonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/FEA-SS-Retirement-Packet-2022.pdf>

Useful Resources and Links

Contracts for Stateside Region Classified and Certified Employees:

<https://www.feaonline.org/resources/contracts/>

DDESS Salary Schedules: <https://www.dodea.edu/Offices/HR/Salary.cfm>

Pay Problem Package: <https://www.feaonline.org/resources-for-pay-problems/>

DoDEA's List of Acronyms: <https://www.dodea.edu/onboarding/acronyms.cfm>

Your Rights as Federal Employee:

[https://osc.gov/Documents/Outreach%20and%20Training/Handouts/Your%20Rights%20as%20a%20Federal%20Employee%20Handout%20\(Prohibited%20Personnel%20Practices,%20Whistleblower%20Disclosures,%20and%20the%20Hatch%20Act\).pdf](https://osc.gov/Documents/Outreach%20and%20Training/Handouts/Your%20Rights%20as%20a%20Federal%20Employee%20Handout%20(Prohibited%20Personnel%20Practices,%20Whistleblower%20Disclosures,%20and%20the%20Hatch%20Act).pdf)