



Fall 2024

<https://dkgusforum.org/>

U.S. Forum Connection

The Delta Kappa Gamma Society International

In this issue:

- Meet Your Steering Committee
- Looking Ahead to Forum Activities
- Webinar Announcement
- Legislation to Watch
- Final Report of 2022-24 Forum
- YOU are wanted!

U.S. Forum Steering Committee

Chair:

Pat Bennett-Forman

Area Representatives:

Sharon Welch, NE

Peggy Monroe, SE

Dr. April Coleman, SW

Tara Heikila, NW

Treasurer:

Linda McCrary

International President:

Dr. Beverly Hall-Maughan

CONTACT US:

dkgu.s.forum@gmail.com



L—R: Pat Bennett-Forman (chair), Sharon Welch (NE), Dr. April Coleman (SW), Peggy Monroe (SE), Insert: Tara Heikila (NW)

Meet Your U.S. Forum Steering Committee 2024-26

The 2024-2026 U.S. Steering Committee was elected at the Forum meeting held during the July 2024 International DKG Convention. Their task is to facilitate the work of the U.S. Forum in informing members of legislative issues and in training members to participate in the democratic process.

Chair Pat Bennett-Forman is a trainer for effective communication to legislators through the League of Women Voters Speak Up School and has provided a number of workshops on this topic at DKG conferences both at the state and international level. She was the lead from her state for the Mental Health Support for the Education resolution passed by the US Forum 2022 in New Orleans. Pat hopes more DKG members will become active in advocacy and speaking up for educators and that DKG will attract more young members because of the advocacy work it does on their behalf.

Northeast Regional Representative Sharon Welch is an educator of 23 years serving as Math Interventionist for Arlington Public Schools' central office math department. She recently completed a certification program in school leadership and management with Harvard Union Graduate School of Education and is currently enrolled in the Education Leadership and Policy Studies

(continued on page 2, Steering Committee)

SAVE the DATE!!



Zoom Webinar:

Jan. 11 7:30 pm EST

**“Now The Real Work Begins!
How to get organized for effective
legislative action”**

See details on p. 2

(continued from page 1, Steering Committee)

Doctoral Program at Howard University. Sharon is chapter president of Delta Chapter, Washington D.C. State organization, and an advocate for women and children’s issues.

Southwest Regional Representative Dr. April Coleman is the President of the Board of Directors for the Phoenix Union Foundation for Educators where she led her team to award \$350,000 in academic scholarships and mini-grants in a 3 year period. She is the instructional leader for Mathematics of the Academics of South Mountain High School in Phoenix, Arizona. A member of DKG Arizona's Alpha Delta Chapter since 2020, Dr. Coleman is currently the Legislative Chair for DKG Arizona, responsible for co-planning Arizona's Legislative Awareness day and for developing their 2025 Legislative Agenda.

Southeast Regional Representative Peggy Monroe is a retired elementary teacher of 39 years. She has been in DKG for 16 years and served as past legislative chair for the Tennessee State Organization. She continues to be active in advocating for education and women’s issues in multiple organizations. Peggy served as state president of a women’s political organization in Tennessee while advocating for many issues, including veteran’s rights and social security equity.

Northwest Regional Representative Tara Heikila believes learning has the power to change people and she passes that on to her students every day. She is a middle school math teacher and a doctoral student whose research has focused on teacher retention. Her first year at National Legislative Seminar in 2024 was an eye-opener that has made Tara committed to making sure our legislators “hear from us.”

The Steering Committee team is joined by **Linda McCrary**, TN, as its appointed treasurer. Linda has served in that capacity for multiple biennia. International **DKG President Beverly Hall-Maughan** serves on the Steering Committee as the liaison from International.

WANTED

Members are needed to serve on sub-committees of the Forum:

- (1) Legislative Tracking**
(to keep members informed of current legislation)
- (2) Mental Health & Bullying**
(to follow-up on legislation and provide training opportunities on past resolution topics)
- (3) Forum Guidelines Revisions**
(to draft revisions of the current U.S. Forum Guidelines) and
- (4) Forum Elections Committee.**
(to review procedures for elections of the Forum Steering Committee and carry out elections 2026).

Interested? Contact your Area Representatives by Jan. 1, 2025 or dkgu.s.forum@gmail.com



Zoom Webinar: **Jan. 11 7:30 pm EST**

“Now The Real Work Begins! How to get organized for effective legislative action”

The elections are “over” and regardless of who won, our work is just beginning. Join us for a 1 hour session that will help you to engage in the legislative process and to advocate for laws that support public education and the education profession.

We will discuss how to contact your legislators, how to follow legislation of interest, and how to amplify your influence through collaboration, and more.

Presenter: Dr. April Coleman, SW Area Representative

Registration information on the Forum Facebook pages and website: <https://dkgforum.org>

Looking Ahead to Forum Activities

In addition to sending out updates on legislation through the U.S. Forum *Connection* newsletter, the Forum website and its Facebook pages, Forum members (that is ALL DKG members from the United States) can look forward to:

1. webinar workshops each quarter via zoom, two covering priority issues and two providing training in advocacy best practices;
2. workshops at the International Conference in New Orleans on topics of interest as identified by members;
3. open forum times when members can come together to discuss and listen to each other regarding important common interests; and
4. dynamic preparation for YOUR participation in the National Legislative Seminar in D.C. in 2026.

Your Input Sought:

Issues Survey

Look for an important SURVEY coming out this fall asking for your input in identifying the priority issues the Forum should be following and addressing this biennium.

Last biennium over 2,700 members completed this survey. Let's increase that response rate. It is **YOUR** Forum and we want to work on issues that are critical to **YOU**.

The survey will be sent via Survey Monkey to all U.S. state organization leaders, linked on the International website and on International and Forum Facebook pages, as well as to state websites.

Legislation to Watch (and act upon)

With the recent hurricanes and destruction in the Southeastern states, students and staff have again experienced trauma and will need support for a variety of physical, emotional and mental health concerns. Members are encouraged to track legislation and communicate with their Congressional representatives and senators regarding legislation addressing these areas.

H.R. 744/S2530 Supporting the Mental Health of Educators and Staff Act of 2023. This is the bill based on the Mental Health Resolution passed by the Forum in 2022. It currently has 25 co-sponsors but is stalled in the House Subcommittee on Health Action. The bill will have to be reintroduced in the next Congress as will its Senate companion bill.

H.R. 82 Social Security Fairness Act of 2023. This bill aims to repeal the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and the Government Pension Offset (GPO) that are currently in place in provisions of the Social Security Program. This bill has over 300 co-sponsors in the House but is still in the House Ways and Means Committee.

There are over 4,981 bills related to mental health and education in the Congress at this time. It is unlikely they will come to the floor for a vote prior to the end of this session of Congress, meaning they will be dropped and have to be re-introduced in the next Congress.

These include **HR 9366 Early Childhood Mental Health Support** from Rep. DeSaulnier (CA), **HR 9684 Peer-to-Peer Mental Health Support** by Rep Beyer (VA) and its companion **S 3453**, introduced by Sen Hickenlooper (CO).

HR 3669 Expanding Student Access to Mental Health Services Act, authorizes grants to improve mental health services, specifically for identifying and disseminating best practices for mental health first aid, emergency planning, coordination of services and telehealth services. It was introduced by Rep. Allen (GA).

HR 5307 (previously HR 549), **STOP Bullying Act**, introduced by Rep. Krishnamoorthi (IL) seeks grants to reducing bullying in elementary and secondary schools. The **Danny's Law HR 3659**, on bullying prevention, passed the house in 2020 but has yet to see action in the Senate.

S 3266 Focus on Learning Act introduced by Senator Cotton (AR) and its companion bill in the House seek funds to study and report on the use of mobile devices in elementary and secondary schools, including their impact on student learning, achievement and educational outcomes, and student mental health, and will provide grants to schools to create mobile free environments.

For more information about these bills, or to find out about other bills of interest to you, go to www.congress.gov.

Final Report of 2022-2024 U.S. Forum Steering Committee

Darlene Cook, Steering Committee Chair

The 2022-2024 Steering Committee was proud to offer several new initiatives in its biennium and pleased to present new opportunities for Forum members. The following are a few of the opportunities for action the Forum provided during the 2022-2024 biennium to increase the Vitality, the Relevance and the Sustainability of our Society.

Vitality - A goal of the committee during the past biennium was to increase member participation and involvement in Forum activities. Two subcommittees were formed: the Mental Health Committee to support and make recommendations for implementation of the Mental Health Resolution, "Recognizing Mental Health Issues for Educational Staff," that was adopted by the Forum at the 2022 international convention; and the Legislative Update Committee to track federal legislation affecting women, children and education. Eight members in addition to the Steering Committee served on these two subcommittees. Members also participated on panels and as speakers at the three international conferences and the National Legislative Seminar. Several members recommended topics and presented at zoom webinars.

During this past biennium, the Committee also worked closely with the Canadian, European, and Latin American Forums. Members of the Canadian Forum attended the U.S. Forum program at the international conference in Detroit, where a Canadian Forum member served on the panel. A U.S. Forum Session was offered to United States members attending the international conference in Tampere, Finland. This was the first time the Forum has participated in a conference held in Europe. And this past summer the four Forums worked together to provide a zoom presentation at the international convention. It featured Marion Blumenthal Lazan speaking on her family's odyssey during the years of the Holocaust.

Relevance - The purpose of the U.S. Forum is to survey its members and to identify current issues of concern affecting women, children, and education upon which the U.S. members can take action. In the past, issues were identified only by members attending U.S. Forum sessions at international conferences and conventions. In October 2022 the Forum Committee conducted an issues survey online with 2,754 U.S. members responding. The survey results guided the work of the Forum throughout the 2022-2024 biennium. Several topics were identified. In addition to the resolution on mental health for educators, the main

concerns were safety from gun violence in schools and in the community; poverty, homelessness and food insecurity; working conditions, recruitment and retention of staff; censorship of speech, materials and books; social media and its importance on mental health; and retirement security and caregiving. After the issues were identified, the emphasis was on sharing information and ideas, and on exploring solutions to these identified topics.

To accomplish this goal several resources were utilized. Throughout the biennium, the Regional Representatives were active in communicating to their respective regions, any resources, federal legislation and information that impacted and increased the members knowledge of the issues. Webinars and zoom meetings, blogs, Facebook posts, the US Forum newsletter and website, and speakers and panelists at the 2023 international conferences and the 2024 National Legislative Seminar provided additional information and support. These in-person events, especially the NLS, gave members a chance to network, to discuss key issues, and to learn from experts in a variety of fields.

Sustainability - The US Forum is dedicated to being an advocate for women, children, and education. The international conferences and conventions and the National Legislative Seminars provide an opportunity for members to meet with other US members from across the United States to study and to discuss critical issues facing educators today. At the 2024 National Legislative Seminar, 68 members from 23 states learned about H.R. 744, "Supporting the Mental Health of Educators and Staff Act of 2023." This bill encompasses many of the objectives of the Mental Health Resolution and came about in part due to concerns expressed to Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici (CD1-OR) by DKG members at the 2022 NLS. At the 2024 Seminar, members also heard from experts and DKG panel members on advocacy skills and on topics that had been identified on the issues survey as priorities for action. Participants were able to visit their Members of Congress on Capitol Hill, to learn about the legislative process, and how to effectively engage with legislators and policy makers who will make critical decisions on important education issues.

By attending Forum events, DKG members gain skills critical to strengthening chapter and state policy or legislative committees, so that all members are better informed now and in the future.

The Connection is a publication of the U.S. Forum, Delta Kappa Gamma Society International. It is published quarterly and distributed to all DKG members in the United States. The U.S. Forum purposes are to inform members and to support desirable legislation in the interests of education and women educators. To submit articles or if you have questions, contact Peggy Monroe, 2024-2026 editor, at dkgu.s.forum@gmail.com.