

# The VOICE

Nebraska State Education Association • December 2023

## DEBT RELIEF TRIUMPH

**Financial Liberation:  
\$80,000 in Student Loans Forgiven**

*Also inside:*

- LB753 Report Card
- NSEA District seats up for election
- Plans underway for Delegate Assembly '24



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**Volume 77, No. 4**  
 ISSN Number: 1085-0783  
 USPS Number: 000-369

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Official publication of the Nebraska State Education Association, 605 South 14th Street, Lincoln, NE 68508-2742. Periodical postage paid at Lincoln, NE, and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: send address changes to NSEA Voice, 605 S. 14th Street, Lincoln, NE 68508.

Published 10 times yearly according to this schedule: September, October, November, December, January, February, March, April, May and August.

Payment of annual NSEA membership dues entitles Nebraska educators to receive *The Voice*. Total cost of producing 10 monthly issues of *The Voice* each year is less than \$2 per member.

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## What's going on in the legislature?

Nebraska's 109th Legislature will convene on January 3, 2024. The 60-day session is expected to cover a wide range of proposed bills that will affect all Nebraska public education, our public schools, students and staff.

Every decision made regarding education is a political decision. From funding to teaching certificate requirements, from the number of students in your classroom to the standards you teach to, from your curriculum and the resources you can access, to the amount on your paycheck – all are tied to legislative action.

The NSEA's Government Relations team monitors legislative activities and advocates for the best interests of our members, students and public education. Legislative bills change quickly throughout the session, and NSEA works to keep you in the loop about how your job as an educator or education support professional may be affected.

Stay up-to-date about legislative activity and decisions affecting public education with NSEA's Capitol Update, sent to your personal email inbox each week of the legislative session. Subscribe to the Capitol Update at [www.nsea.org/subscriber](http://www.nsea.org/subscriber).

## Would You Like to Write for The Voice?

Would you like to write an item for *The Voice*? Perhaps an opinion column or an article on what is working in your classroom? Submissions can be classroom-related, humorous, inspiring or otherwise teaching related. Submit your questions about the process, and your topics to us at:

[thevoice@nsea.org](mailto:thevoice@nsea.org)

**On the Cover:** Nebraska NEA Director and Omaha Education Association board member Edward Ventura received more than \$80K in student loan forgiveness with the assistance of NEA Member Benefits. See the story and photos, pages 7-8.

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

JENNI BENSON

## THANKFUL, GRATEFUL, BLESSED: IT IS A LOT!

The holidays this time of year have many different meanings for each person. Our beliefs, traditions, and practices are not the same for everyone. We are all free to celebrate as we believe.

As I decorated my tree for my first Christmas without my husband Mike, who passed in January, I was transported down memory lane. Ornaments I made as a kid, hand-crafted treasures from my children and grandchildren, mementos of trips, and memories of loved ones no longer with us, all came together to envelop our tree in love and beautiful memories. I am not going to lie, it is a tough journey of grief for me.

As I added my "Support Our Troops" ornaments I paused to think of my son, Major Jacob Absalon, who is deployed in Poland for 9 months. I am thrilled to be going to Germany soon to meet him for his leave with my daughter-in-law and two grandchildren. I know other families are feeling the ache of missing their loved ones as they serve across the globe.

A LOT is happening in the world right now. We are called upon to

make judgments based on the media and our own connection to events. We must use and teach critical thinking skills to prepare our students for the future.

We are also called upon as educators to be mindful of our students and families. All that is happening affects their everyday lives. Holiday breaks may not be joyful for many who are struggling. Beliefs and traditions vary greatly for our families across Nebraska.

Our responsibility is to make every effort to help every student learn and grow. Building relationships takes a lot of work, effort, and care. It is good for us to also learn and grow as we accept and understand our students and families.

I am grateful for each of you and what you do to make a difference in the lives of ALL students. I am thankful for public schools in our communities meeting the diverse needs of our students from PK through Higher Education. I am blessed to be your NSEA President and to be learning and growing with you.

It is A LOT but together we are stronger!



# Support Our Schools Nebraska



## Dear Neb. Lawmakers, No More Voucher-Scheme Bills

When lawmakers return to the Capitol for the 60-day session in January, it will be the first convening of the full legislature since thousands of Nebraskans signed the Support Our Schools Nebraska (SOSNE) referendum petition. In fewer than 90 days, public school supporters gathered 117,415 signatures in more than 60 counties, sending a clear and strong message to the Governor and state lawmakers: Nebraskans want to vote on the issue of diverting public tax dollars to pay for private schools.

### The Second House Will Have a Say

Polling consistently shows a majority of Nebraskans oppose measures that divert public dollars to private schools, with 55% of likely voters in favor of repealing LB753. Nebraska is currently the only state with a school privatization referendum on the ballot in 2024.

“Nebraska voters care about their tax dollars and they care about their local public schools, educators, and the students who attend those schools,” said Jenni Benson, a sponsor of Support Our Schools Nebraska and president of the Nebraska State Education Association. “The overwhelming success of this petition has driven the conversation back to

what I have always known to be true about this great state: Nebraskans support their public schools.”

The controversial bill was signed into law earlier this year after numerous failed attempts.

“George Norris, the architect of the Unicameral Legislature, knew there would be times when state lawmakers would pass bad policy, which is why he believed the people of Nebraska should serve as the second House,” said Tim Royers, a sponsor of SOSNE

and Millard Education Association president. “The public referendum process provides a check on elected officials. I believe Nebraskans will do what the legislature should have done: Say ‘no’ to LB753.”

The Nebraska Secretary of State’s office announced in October that the repeal of LB753 will be before Nebraska voters on the November 2024 ballot.

Watch for updates on the status of this ongoing effort in *The Voice*.



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# THE LB753 REPORT CARD

Under LB753, the private schools benefiting from taxpayer-funded scholarships are not held to the same accountability and reporting requirements as Nebraska public schools.

## ACCOUNTABILITY. ~~X~~

**F**

Provisions in LB753 will leave students, their families, and the state in a precarious position with **no ability to gauge whether the funds are being used effectively** or appropriately. <sup>1</sup>

There is no requirement in LB753 that the SGOs or Department of Revenue provide information on the racial/ethnic distribution of scholarship recipients. Voters have signaled their concerns that **racial discrimination is a likely outcome of LB753.** <sup>2</sup> **?!?!!**

In Iowa, **private schools hiked their tuition prices—making them inaccessible to low-income families.** <sup>3</sup> There are no provisions in LB753 that would prevent private schools in Nebraska from increasing tuition costs to pocket even more public tax dollars while exacerbating discrimination for low-income families. Unlike public schools, private schools are not required to admit a student, even if that student was awarded a scholarship. <sup>1</sup>

**In other states, similar voucher tax scheme programs have led to "pop-up schools,"** new private schools that open and close at an alarming rate. In Wisconsin, 41% of schools participating in a Milwaukee-based school privatization program closed between 1991 and 2015. <sup>4</sup>



**F**

## ACHIEVEMENT.

### OTHER STATES:



Indiana:



LB753 lays out only **minimal academic standards** for a school to be eligible to receive public dollars. There's no requirement in LB753 that the private schools in Nebraska provide information on the academic performance of recipients. <sup>1</sup>

In other states, evidence that students "do better" when they receive the scholarships is mixed at best. Much of the research on the performance of school privatization programs is supported by the private school industry. Rigorous independent research of these programs, however, reveals examples where **academic achievement has suffered.** <sup>5</sup>

In Louisiana, academic results in a statewide school **privatization program were described as "catastrophic," with test score drops** larger than Hurricane Katrina's impacts on academics in New Orleans. <sup>6</sup>

A study of elementary and middle school students in Indiana revealed that **those in their first year of attending a private school lost ground in mathematics** when compared to their public school peers. <sup>7</sup>

In 1990, Wisconsin enacted a school privatization scheme that, 30 years later, showed reading and math scores in private schools in Milwaukee were no better than the scores in Milwaukee's public schools. <sup>4</sup>

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7. Waddington, R. Joseph, and Berends, Mark, "Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 'Impact of the Indiana Choice Scholarship Program'" August 2018, accessed at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/pam.22086> on Nov. 30, 2023.



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NEA Director and Omaha Education Association Board member Ed Ventura sought loan forgiveness through the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program (PSLF) and received more than \$80,000 in debt forgiveness. Photo: Ventura inside the Forest Station Elementary School library.

# DEBT RELIEF TRIUMPH: More than \$80K in student debt forgiven through Public Service Loan Forgiveness

There was a time, not so long ago, that Nebraska NEA Director and Omaha Education Association Board of Directors member Edward Ventura owed more in student loan debt than he did for the mortgage on his house in Bellevue, Nebraska.

Ventura is a 24-year veteran educator serving as a Library Media Specialist at Forest Station Elementary School in Omaha. Ventura was the first generation in his Latino family to attend college, so he navigated the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) on his own.

“My parents didn't have much money. So, for my undergraduate, I applied for and received a Federal Pell Grant,” said Ventura.

But the grant didn't cover all of Ventura's expenses while attending an out-of-state college at New Mexico Highlands University in Las Vegas, New Mexico. To help cover costs, Ventura took out student loans.

“I never really thought about how much money I was borrowing. I just signed the paperwork and got back to my classes and homework,” he said.

Ventura graduated with a Bachelor

of Arts in Mass Communications with an emphasis in print journalism in 1994. He went on to earn his endorsement in secondary education and eventually moved home to Nebraska and began teaching.

## Navigating Changes

Ventura earned his master's in curriculum and instruction from Peru State College in 2007 and began teaching at Omaha Public Schools' Castelar Elementary as a technology teacher.

“Technology is everywhere in education—and technology is always evolving. I was always looking for avenues within the ed-tech field to stay on pace with my students' learning and that's how I ended up earning a second master's degree from the University of Nebraska-Omaha through its school library program,” Ventura explained.

With the rising cost

of higher education, Ventura found himself under a mountain of student debt. And he's not alone—nearly half of all educators took out student loans to pay for college. Among them, one in seven still owes more than \$105,000, according to National Education Association (NEA) research. Ventura estimated he had around \$120,000 in student debt.

“The interest just kept building and building. I felt like every time I paid, I was still two payments behind,” he said.

## Roadblocks to Relief

Due to economic challenges during the pandemic, most borrowers received student loan payment pauses. In the years following the pandemic, the federal relief plan has undergone several iterations through actions of the Biden-Harris Administration, Congress and even the U.S. Supreme Court. Through this confusion, scammers

**“The interest just kept building and building. I felt like every time I paid, I was still two payments behind.”**  
— Ed Ventura  
Omaha Education Assoc.

## On the Cover

have targeted loan holders, adding to the chaos. Amid this confusion, Ventura turned to his professional association for help.

### Patience is Key

Ventura sought loan forgiveness through the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program (PSLF). The program was created in recognition of the many ways public service workers—like public educators—give back to their communities. Under PSLF, any remaining balance of federal student debt would be forgiven for workers who provided 10 years of public service while making 120 monthly payments on their federal student loans. The premise was easy enough to understand but the application process was tedious and plagued by mismanagement. Ventura found PSLF support through the NSEA and NEA Member Benefits. NEA Member Benefits Affiliate Relations Specialist Susan Estes encouraged Ventura to use NEA's Student Debt Navigator and answered his questions through the application process. Ventura applied for loan forgiveness through a company called Savi, which is free for one year for NEA/NSEA members.

“Having Susan available to answer my questions was very helpful and then from there it was just a waiting game with the U.S. Department of Education,” he said. “They had to consolidate some of my loans and that process took time. Patience is key.”

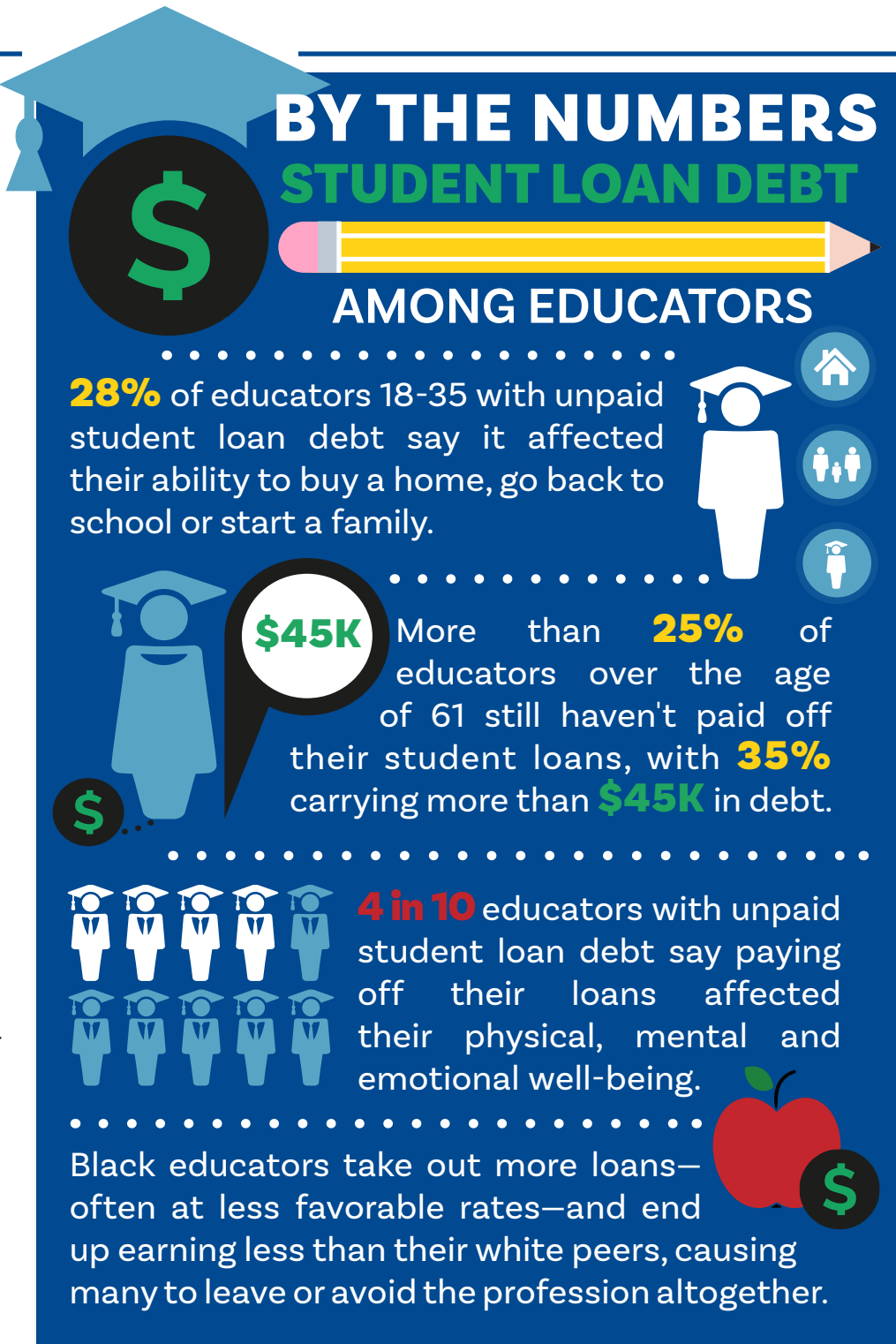
### Debt Relief Triumph

Good news for Ventura came in the form of an e-mail and then in formal letters.

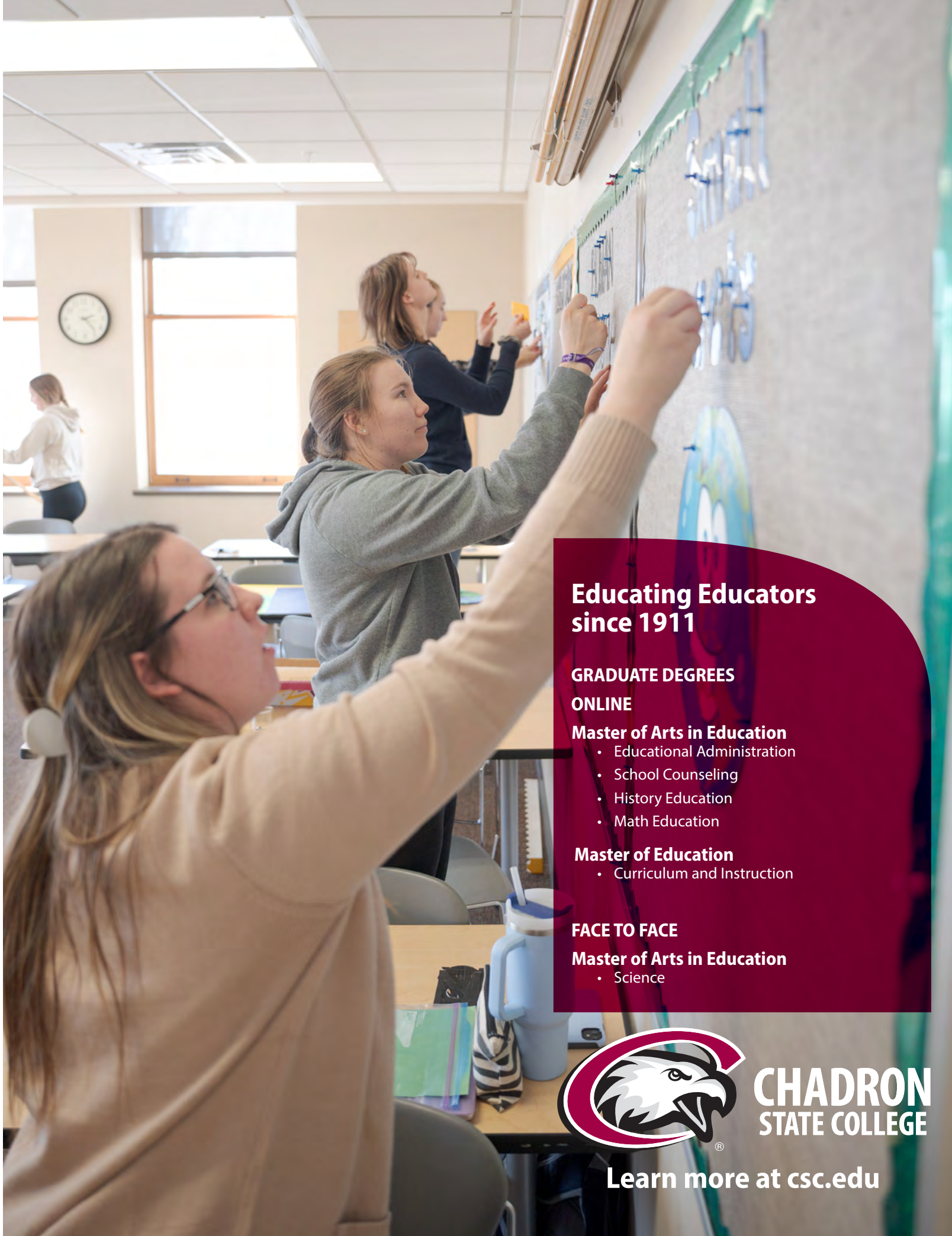
“I had \$40,000 forgiven and then they forgave another \$40,000 for a total of \$80,000,” said Ventura. “It was a huge relief. I thought I would die with my student loan debt but what I have left is much more manageable.”

Ventura is an active member of the Omaha Education Association and is currently serving as a Nebraska representative on the NEA Board of Directors. As a leader, Ventura touts the program and his personal loan forgiveness as a benefit of NSEA membership.

“Anytime I have a chance to talk with new or potential members, I tell them about my experience with PSLF, NSEA and NEA Member Benefits.”







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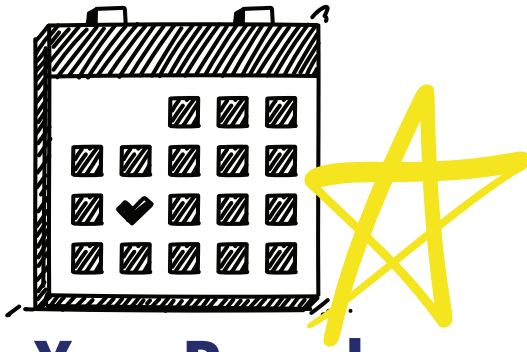
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## Year-Round Collective Bargaining

### DECEMBER To do list:

Check in with your NSEA Organizational Specialist (OS). They will complete a Reporting Settlement Sheet on behalf of your local.

Let your OS know if you will need assistance with bargaining. The OS will notify NSEA if a Resolution Officer is needed.

Recruit School Board Candidates

# EHA 2024-25 Insurance Rates

Nebraska educators know that keeping high-quality healthcare benefits affordable is an important part of negotiations. In November, the Educators Health Alliance (EHA) Board of Directors announced the rate and benefit change decisions for the 2024-25 contract year effective September 1, 2024. There will be an overall increase of 1.99% in premiums next year for the medical and dental insurance plans used by nearly every Nebraska school district.

Many agreements contain a copy-and-pasted version of the 2023-24 premium/coverage table to supplement the specific language that details the

terms of the benefit provided by the district. NSEA advises locals to be thorough when proofreading this section of the agreement. See rate changes below or visit [ehaplan.org](http://ehaplan.org).

### Follow the Calendar

Provisions in Nebraska law require negotiations to adhere to tight timelines as bargaining nears the end of January, so working closely with your NSEA organizational specialist throughout December is important. Locals that have met to bargain at least four times and have still not reached agreement should be in regular consultation with their NSEA organizational specialist by January.



Medical rates for all Active Employee plans will increase by 1.99%.



Medical rates for all Early Retiree plans will increase by 1.99%.



Dental rates for all participants will increase by 1.99%.



The combined increase for medical and dental coverage is 1.99%.

## KEEP YOUR HEART HEALTHY

With your EHA health insurance benefits, you have access to a program that can help you:

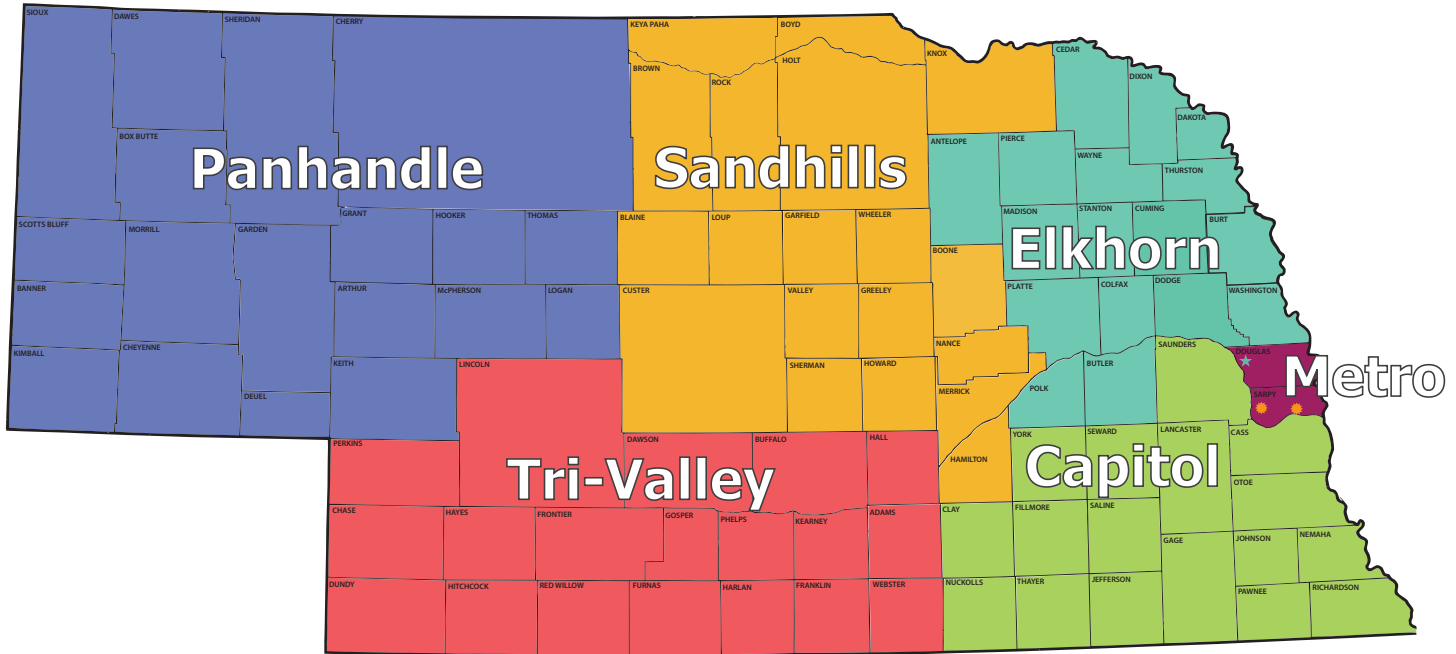
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BlueCross BlueShield Nebraska

Health benefits for EHA are provided by Blue Cross and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska, an independent licensee of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association.



In order to comply with NEA guidelines, the ● Gretna Education Association and ● Springfield/Platteview Education Association will be included in Capitol District, and ★ Metro Community College Education Association is included in Elkhorn District.

## Your leadership is needed!

Several NSEA leadership positions will be up for election in 2024, and members are asked to consider the role they could play as a leader in the Association.

The window for filing for the 23 open positions on NSEA district boards and the NSEA Board of Directors will begin on Monday, Jan. 1, and will close on Sunday, Feb. 4.

Election of members as at-large delegates to the NEA Representative Assembly will occur during the same timeline. Elections for NSEA President and NSEA Board of Director At-Large positions will take place at Delegate Assembly 2024. Watch the January digital edition of The Voice for details on that filing process.

NSEA members will vote for District positions beginning at 12:01 a.m. on Friday, Feb. 16. Voting will close at midnight on Sunday, March 10.

To file, visit [nsea.org](https://nsea.org) and click on "2024 District Elections." Select your district, then choose the office you seek. Candidates will need their 10-digit NSEA membership number. Your number can be found above your name on the mailing label of The Voice. Call NSEA if you have questions: 1-800-742-0047.

The filing process allows candidates to post a 50-word statement for voters

to read. Type the statement in a Word or other text document and then paste the statement into the appropriate box during the filing process.

NSEA encourages minorities to seek office at all levels. NSEA's Minority Involvement Plan says, "It shall be the goal of the Association to seek minority representation on governing and appointive bodies at least equal to the percentage of minority membership for that appropriate level."

Members can elect the next round of NSEA leaders by casting a ballot in the Association elections.

Voting opens on Friday, Feb. 16. On that date, members with valid email addresses on file will receive an email detailing the process.

### Email Address Needed

NSEA members without a valid email address on file will receive a postcard explaining the voting. If you do not receive a postcard or an email from NSEA by Friday March 8, call 1-800-742-0047.

Update your e-mail address with NSEA by calling 1-800-742-0047 or sending an email to [membership@nsea.org](mailto:membership@nsea.org). Members should use a personal email account, not a school-issued one.

## Vacancies

A statewide look at NSEA leadership opportunities for 2024-25:

### CAPITOL DISTRICT

- Treasurer
- Secretary
- One seat on executive committee
- One seat on NSEA Board

### ELKHORN DISTRICT

- Vice President
- Two seats on executive committee
- One seat on NSEA Board

### METRO DISTRICT

- President
- Three seats on executive committee (subdistricts 2, 5 and 8)
- One seat on NSEA Board

### PANHANDLE DISTRICT

- Vice President
- Two seats on executive committee (areas 2 and 5)

### SANDHILLS DISTRICT

- Vice President
- One seat on executive committee
- One seat on NSEA Board

### TRI-VALLEY DISTRICT

- President
- Two seats on executive committee (one East, one West)
- One seat on NSEA Board



AT THE MIC: Nebraska Education Association President Jenni Benson smiles as she prepares to convene the April 2023 Delegate Assembly.

# April Delegate Assembly to decide direction of NSEA

Delegate Assembly is NSEA's annual business meeting. Members from across the state, representing local associations large and small, urban and rural, are elected to attend and represent the NSEA's 26,000 members. These delegates manage the business and set the future course of the Association. Plans are underway for the 2024 Delegate Assembly – the 164th assembly in NSEA history. The Assembly will be held as an in-person gathering April 19-20 at Lincoln's Embassy Suites Hotel.

A keynote speaker, discussion of educational issues and consideration of updates to NSEA Bylaws and Resolutions are all part of the assembly action. Watch for details in upcoming editions of *The Voice*.

The event also features an awards presentation, recognizing the Early Career Educator of the Year, Educational Support Professional of the Year, Teaching Excellence Award recipient, and NSEA's 2024 Friend of Education, and more. See award details and deadlines in the right-hand column on this page.

Members must be elected by their local association in order to attend as a delegate to the assembly. To make your interest in serving as a delegate known, contact your local association president, your local association building or faculty representative or your NSEA organizational specialist.

NSEA's first such meeting was held as the Nebraska State Teachers Association in Brownville, NE on Oct. 16, 1867, just months after Nebraska gained statehood. NSEA is the state's oldest professional association and has held a Delegate Assembly almost every year since, and in some cases, twice a year.

## NOMINATE COLLEAGUES FOR TOP HONORS

Any NSEA member may nominate a member teacher, Education Support Professional or deserving group. Members are eligible for:

- **Early Career Educator:** To honor a teacher who has excelled in their first five years of teaching.
- **Award for Teaching Excellence:** Honors a teacher who has excelled in the classroom over a period of time.
- **Education Support Professional of the Year:** Honors an ESP who has excelled in their job. Finalists will be notified in March, with winners announced at the Assembly. Recipients receive a \$250 cash award.
- **Community Service:** Honors NSEA members or local associations involved in volunteer work outside of classroom hours.
- **Local Public Relations:** Honors local associations for outstanding internal communication.

Members can also nominate individuals or groups for these awards:

- **The Great Plains Milestone:** Honors an individual or group for promoting human and civil rights.
- **Administrator of Excellence:** Honors a public school administrator who strives every day to help students and staff be successful.
- **Friend of Education:** NSEA's highest honor is presented in recognition of an individual or organization that has made a statewide contribution to education or to Nebraska educators.
- **Outstanding Media:** Honors a newspaper, television or radio station for coverage of education issues and promotion of public education.

Nominations may be submitted online at [www.nsea.org/DA](http://www.nsea.org/DA), or mailed to NSEA Awards, 605 S. 14 St., Lincoln, NE 68508-2742. All nomination materials must be received at the NSEA office no later than 5 p.m. on February 16, 2024.



Voices in Education: Lincoln Education Association (LEA) member Matt Erb in the Neb. State Capitol following his testimony in support of the Child Tax Credit Act in March.

# Apply now for the 2024 Belz, Lynch, Krause Grants

Good teachers are always looking to improve their skill set, and the NSEA makes learning easier with an award from the Belz, Lynch, Krause Educational Grant Fund. The 2024 application deadline is Friday, March 1.

Grants are awarded for projects related to improving a local association, development of instructional materials or for staff development for individuals of a local association. Eligible recipients are any NSEA member, group of NSEA members or any NSEA local association.

The application must include an abstract of the project (not to exceed four typed pages) including the following information:

- need;
- how the project will address that need and relate to professional growth goals;
- project description;
- timeline;
- a budget statement; and
- methods of evaluating project success.

Applications must be submitted online by 11:59 p.m. CST on March 1, 2024. Recipients will be notified in March.

A letter describing and evaluating the project must be submitted by the recipients to NSEA's Scholarship and Grants Committee within three months of project completion.

The grants are named for John Lynch, NSEA's executive director from 1959 to 1974; Paul Belz, executive director from 1974 to 1984; and Helen Krause, NSEA president in 1966 and the first Nebraskan to serve on NEA's Executive Committee.

Further details and the application form can be found at [www.nsea.org/BLK](http://www.nsea.org/BLK). For questions, contact Chris Garcia at 1-800-742-0047 or email [Chris.Garcia@nsea.org](mailto:Chris.Garcia@nsea.org).

## LEA Member Matt Erb Awarded 10/11 News Golden Apple

Lincoln Education Association (LEA) member and Kooser Elementary music teacher Matt Erb received a Golden Apple Award in October.

Each month during the school year, 10/11 News (KOLN) and Doane University present a Golden Apple Award to a deserving teacher.

A surprise presentation of the award was delivered by 10/11 News anchors Jon and Taryn Vanderford.

Erb has taught at Kooser since the elementary school opened in northwest Lincoln in 2009. He took

a break for five years to work for the Lincoln Education Association and returned to the classroom because he missed the students.

### Golden Apple Winners

Other notable 2023 Golden Apple Award winners include: LEA member Anthony Schmidt, a Lincoln High School social studies teacher; Syracuse Education Association member Sarah Burr, a middle school history teacher; and LEA member Trevor Shalon, a social studies and reading teacher at Moore Middle School.

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Supporting Educator Effectiveness through Development

# Nebraska's Innovative Approach to ESSA Implementation

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is a pivotal piece of legislation aimed at enhancing student academic success and ensuring equitable access to quality education for all students, regardless of their backgrounds. In Nebraska, educators are taking proactive steps to implement ESSA effectively, with a particular focus on supporting teachers and principals.

## Tracking Disadvantaged Students' Access to Quality Education

Title I districts in Nebraska are reporting on the presence of disadvantaged students in classrooms led by teachers facing challenges such as inexperience, teaching outside their area of expertise, or being deemed ineffective. The U.S. Department of Education defines disadvantaged students as those who encounter economic hardships or belong to racial and ethnic minority groups. This data collection initiative serves as a critical tool to identify areas where additional support may be needed.

## Redefining "Ineffectiveness" for Greater Impact

Nebraska has demonstrated a commitment to flexibility in defining what constitutes an inexperienced, out-of-field, or ineffective teacher. Initially, this included a focus only on advanced degrees, which was viewed as a temporary solution. Since 2017, Nebraska has been sharing this data with the federal government and through the Nebraska Education Profile. As of May 2023, access to these reports is now available through the NDE ADVISER portal.

Nebraska's commitment to educator excellence has led to a new definition of an "ineffective" teacher. Rather than focusing only on advanced degrees, Nebraska schools will now define ineffective educators as those who score at the lowest tier of a district's local evaluation system. This revision is more than a mere compliance measure; it serves as a collaborative opportunity to align educator evaluations with the values and standards that genuinely promote growth and effectiveness. This shift underscores the importance of providing teachers and principals with the necessary dialogue, support, and development opportunities to provide effective instruction to all students as a transformative step forward.

## Creating Consistency Across Nebraska School Districts

Nebraska emphasizes the importance of data-driven decision-making in education. The NDE Office of Coordinated School and District Support is at the forefront of collecting data with a clear purpose: to inform systematic decisions regarding education. This approach extends beyond student data, encompassing teacher and principal data to gain a comprehensive understanding of student needs. Collaboration among school districts, Educational Service Units (ESUs), Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs), and other educational organizations is fundamental to this process.

Recognizing the variability in evaluation methods and support systems across districts, Nebraska has established the Supporting Educator Effectiveness (S.E.E.D) team. This team collaborates with the state's colleges and universities, ESUs, educational associations, and school districts to promote consistency and coherence in educator evaluation and support. The goal is to ensure that every educator receives the support needed to thrive.

Nebraska's ESSA Plan supports Nebraska's dedication to elevating educators and ensuring that students receive a high-quality education. By raising the bar for instruction and evaluation, Nebraska is recognizing effective educators based on a comprehensive assessment of their abilities. As we look ahead, the lessons learned and the foundation established will serve as springboards for future initiatives to continue to nurture and develop Nebraska's educators.

## Reflection Questions:

1. How does your evaluation system align with your district's teaching methods and help achieve your educational vision?
2. How does your evaluation system empower teachers as professionals?
3. How does using evaluation data promote a sense of shared effectiveness?
4. How could a revamped evaluation system enhance this sense of collective achievement?



About the authors: This article was coauthored by Dr. Julie Downing and Ryan Ricenbaw. Dr. Downing is an Educator Effectiveness Specialist with the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE). Ricenbaw is a Leadership and Learning Network Specialist with NDE.

## Turn to the NSEA Children's Fund



Where there is a child in need, there is likely a teacher willing to help by opening his

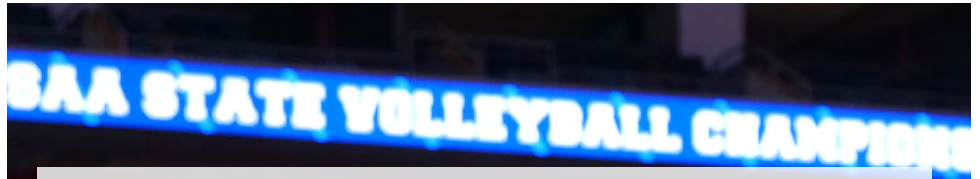
wallet or her purse.

Teachers frequently spend their own hard-earned dollars to help these children. But a teacher can't assist every child encountered during the school day, much less during the school year. That is why NSEA created the Children's Fund. Since 1994, donations to the Children's Fund have provided hundreds of thousands of dollars to help children in need.

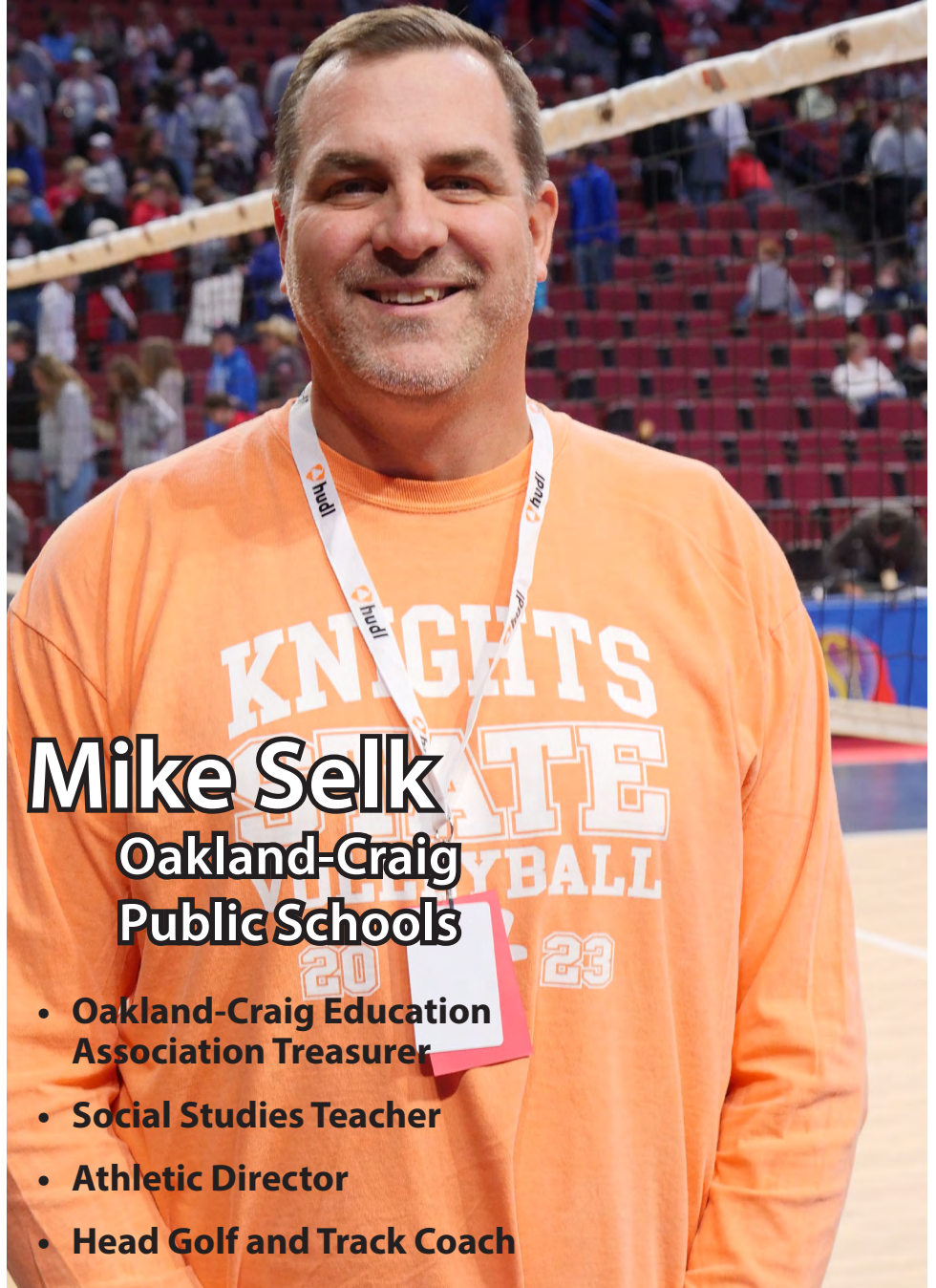
The generosity of Children's Fund donors has helped to pay for glasses, warm clothing, medical and dental needs of children; provide assistance to a family whose home and belongings were destroyed by fire; purchase a bus ticket for a child with no other means to get to school; and more.

Local associations are encouraged to brainstorm fundraising ideas; to challenge other local associations; to collect change; host a jeans day fundraiser; or consider other ways to contribute toward the fund.

There is never any red tape or lengthy delay for members wanting to use the fund to help a student. A call to Karen Hunt at the NSEA (800-742-0047) is usually all that is needed. For more information, visit [nsea.org/childrensfund](http://nsea.org/childrensfund).



*I've been a member of both the NSEA and NCA for 25 years. Membership in both associations has given me the opportunity to advocate for educators and students.*



### Mike Selk Oakland-Craig Public Schools

- Oakland-Craig Education Association Treasurer
- Social Studies Teacher
- Athletic Director
- Head Golf and Track Coach

**Belonging to NSEA and NCA helps you be the best educator and coach you can be. Find out more, and join today: [www.nsea.org](http://www.nsea.org)**



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**TRISH GUINAN**

**1940**

At the 1940 Delegate Assembly, the NSTA Committee on Hospitalization reported that the members were considering whether there was a need for a hospitalization plan in Nebraska.

**1941**

In 1941, the legislature passed LB430 (supported by the NSTA), which authorized group hospitalization plans for non-profit groups.

The 1941 Delegate Assembly directed the establishment of local hospitalization groups. The Blue Cross Hospital Service Plan of Nebraska became a part of the Association's service for teachers.

**1960**

With the introduction of collective bargaining in the late 1960's, formal agreements included provisions for districts and employees to share the cost of the insurance premiums.

**1967**

NSEA developed a health care plan that today insures nearly every Nebraska teaching professional. It is now called the Educators Health Alliance.

**1998**

NSEA opted to share management of the Educators Health Alliance health insurance program with the Nebraska Council of School Administrators (NCSA).

**2000**

Coming to an October 2000 agreement that benefits the entire education family in Nebraska, NSEA opted to share management of the Educators Health Alliance health insurance program with school administrators and school board members.



# Message from the Executive Director

## A Long History

The NSEA has a long history of promoting exceptional health coverage for educators and their families. This history dates back decades (see an abbreviated timeline to the left). Many individual local associations had already established their own hospitalization groups before 1940, but the Educator's Health Alliance (EHA) evolved from a statewide healthcare plan the NSEA founded in the 1960s.

The Educators Health Alliance is a non-profit corporation representing the Nebraska Association of School Boards (NASB), the Nebraska Council of School Administrators (NCSA) and the Nebraska State Education Association (NSEA). This September, I was elected EHA Board Chair, taking over for former NSEA Associate Executive Director and Comptroller Sheri Jablonski. NSEA remains an influential majority on EHA's board. Six of the 12 voting members on the EHA board are NSEA representatives, including myself.

## A Big "Risk Pool"

The concept of health insurance is to combine the resources of a large number of people to provide for the few who, at any given time, may need medical care. It protects districts from the financial effects of a major healthcare case—not unlike when past Fremont Education Association (FEA) President Doug Sheppard learned he would need a liver transplant. The story of Doug's journey and recovery was included in the September issue of *The Voice*.

As a member of the EHA, Doug knew he was in good hands. For all members, there is an obvious advantage in belonging to a large

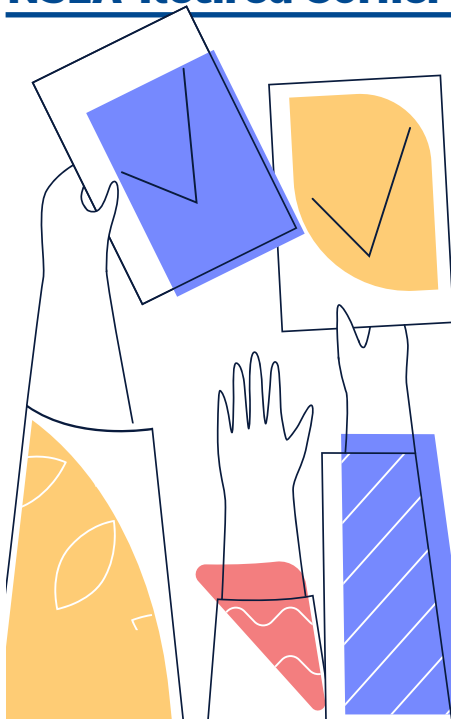
group, known in the insurance field as a large "risk pool." With 80,000 members in the plan, EHA has the largest risk pool in the state – and that allows more predictability and stability in insurance rates. So, when a member—like Doug—needs major surgery, insurance premiums will not spike for districts and individuals and their families. In fact, when the 2024-25 rates were released in November, the overall increase was 1.99%—significantly below the projected national average of 8.5%.

## It All Connects

The rates set by the EHA Board are for the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska (BCBSNE) healthcare plan used by more than 400 public school districts and affiliate groups in the state. Because I spent time as the Fremont Education Association president and as a negotiator representing our members at the table, I know this low premium increase will benefit local negotiators as they bargain for salary increases and retirement benefits throughout December.

Increasing teacher compensation is critical to effectively recruit and retain educators and education support professionals in Nebraska public schools. It is important to remember that a competitive compensation package achieved through collective bargaining benefits both our school employees and our students. As chair of the EHA board, I will continue to listen to and advocate for our NSEA members and their families.

Visit [www.ehaplan.org](http://www.ehaplan.org) to learn more about your health care benefits.



# ELECTIONS AHEAD!

Consider running for one of the leadership roles in NSEA-Retired.

Candidate filing for the upcoming elections will be available online at [nsea.org/retired](http://nsea.org/retired) by Jan. 5, 2024. Filing deadline is Feb. 5, 2024.

## Open Seats

NSEA-Retired leadership opportunities for 2024-25:

### METRO-1 DISTRICT DIRECTOR

- 3-year term
- Term begins Aug. 15, 2024

### CAPITOL-2 DISTRICT DIRECTOR

- 3-year term
- Term begins Aug. 15, 2024



**NSEA-Retired Fall Conference:** 1. (Left to right) Terri Marti, De Tonack, Ruby Davis, Pat Etherton, Walta Sue Dodd and Chris Martin 2. Sarah Brown at the raffle table. 3. An exhibit inside Stuhr Museum. 4. Margie Nowak and Jan Barnason at the registration table. 5. Pat Etherton exploring an exhibit. 6. Howard Gaffney, Marina Garner and Joy Brown.

## CONNECTING, LEARNING & EXPLORING A Memorable Fall Conference at Stuhr Museum

The NSEA-Retired Fall Conference was a chance for retirees to come together and connect while learning and exploring the rich history of Stuhr Museum's expansive facilities. More than 90 NSEA-Retired members attended the Fall Conference held in Grand Island, Nebraska in October.

Attendees were treated to an array of captivating presentations and interactive sessions. From learning about the intricacies of Victorian underwear to exploring the fascinating world of wicker coffins, participants delved into the history of the state.

Beyond the educational sessions, the conference provided a platform for members to connect and forge new friendships. Networking opportunities were plentiful, resulting in a vibrant exchange of ideas and experiences.

The fall conference at the Stuhr Museum was a testament to the continued passion for learning among members of the NSEA-Retired. We extend our heartfelt appreciation to all those involved in organizing and making this extraordinary event possible.

Have an article idea for the NSEA-Retired Advocate or the NSEA Voice magazine? Send your idea to John Heineman at [RingoJohn@aol.com](mailto:RingoJohn@aol.com)

# From the desk of Doane University College of Education:

## *When the teacher becomes the student*



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- **Final Assessment:** Students are prepared and confident to start new jobs and step into leadership roles. It has been wonderful having them in our classrooms.

After 13 years of teaching and recently earning her Master of Education in School Counseling, **Brittany McCleery '23E** started a new career as a K-5 counselor at Monclair Elementary School in Millard.



*"Doane gave me a thorough education that has prepared me for anything my new job will throw at me."*



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### **Application deadline**

- January 5, 2024

### **Classes start**

- January 17, 2024

*Learn. Challenge. Empower. Transform.*

## In Memory

We recognize these members whom we've lost recently.

Susan Carol Peters, 72, Lincoln

Bonnie Obermier, 79, Grand Island

Jo Ann Campbell, 73, Fremont

Mailed By: **The Nebraska State Education Association**  
605 S. 14th St., Lincoln, NE 68508-2742

## Just One Campaign

**Forward Together:** To help us continue to advocate for all educators, NSEA asks each local to sign up at least ONE new member between January 1 and February 29, 2024.



To help continue to advocate for all educators, NSEA asks each local to sign up at least ONE new member between January 1 and February 29, 2024. New members who join in January and February will pay the remaining portion of the association year's dues. That's about \$1.50 a day for the remainder of the membership year. Every new member who joins, and the member who enrolled them, will be entered into prize drawings!

### For Local Associations:

Every local that gains more than one member will receive \$50 to be used at the local level for a membership event of its choosing. Local leaders will be able to keep track of locals that have signed up at least one new member by checking the list online at [www.nsea.org/Just-One](http://www.nsea.org/Just-One).

### Next Steps:

1. Make a plan for how you will reach out to all potential members. Engage in one-on-one conversations with potential members. This can be done

by matching current members with a potential member they may know or assign building representatives to potential members. Explain the benefits of membership and share your reasons for joining.

2. Host a member recruitment event, invite potential members to a local meeting or membership event. If you'd like to schedule a local event, contact your NSEA Organizational Specialist ASAP for help in planning.

3. Record the one-to-one conversations at: [www.bit.ly/NSEAOne-to-One](http://www.bit.ly/NSEAOne-to-One). Contact your NSEA Organizational Specialist if you need assistance with this step.

4. As soon as you receive new member forms send them to NSEA by fax, or scan and email or by U.S. Mail. Enrollment date must be between Jan. 1, 2024 and Feb. 29, 2024.

5. Contact your NSEA Organizational Specialist if you have any questions.



The courses listed below are available to NSEA members at no cost. These on-demand courses are self-paced learning with 365-day access. Once you enroll, you will receive an email from NSEA confirming your registration. Within 72 hours, you will be enrolled in the course(s) and receive an email from NSEA's Learn Upon portal to begin your course work.

The first time you are enrolled in a course, you will need to finish your registration process in the NSEA Learn Upon portal (a link will be sent to you). If you have questions and/or do not receive the email from NSEA's Learn Upon system within 72 hours, please email [NSEALearningOnDemand@nsea.org](mailto:NSEALearningOnDemand@nsea.org).

### Courses:

- Collaborating for Student Success
- NEA Self-Assessment: Social and Emotional Intelligence
- Poverty Immersion
- Classroom Management
- Education Support Professionals: Supporting Our Own Through Peer Mentoring