

The VOICE

Alaska State Education Association • February 2023



HELP IS IN THE BUILDING

A voice, a community and a seat at the table

Also inside:

- NSEA tracks education in the legislature
- Navigating Student Debt
- Read Across America Day

Nebraska State Education Association
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March 2: Read Across America Day

NEA's Read Across America is the nation's largest celebration of reading. This year-round program focuses on motivating children and teens to read through events, partnerships, and reading resources that are about everyone—for everyone.

Read Across America Day celebrations will be held on March 2 and throughout National Reading Month in March. The titles and resources featured by NEA's Read Across America were selected by a committee of educators just like you! Find the complete calendar, as well as discussion ideas, at bit.ly/NEA-READ.

■ WHEN IS READ ACROSS AMERICA?

Read Across America offers limitless opportunities for involvement in children's reading throughout the year. The year-round program can fit reading fun into your calendar daily, weekly, or monthly.

■ HOW CAN I CELEBRATE?

Use NEA's book and activity suggestions to bring Read Across America to your community. Contact your local school, education association or library about planning or participating in an event.

■ WHO SHOULD CELEBRATE?

Across the nation, teachers, teenagers, librarians, politicians, actors, athletes, parents, grandparents and others develop Read Across America activities to bring reading excitement to children of all ages.



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

On the Cover: Carla Bobier knows firsthand how unsupported educators can feel, it's why she dropped her AAE membership and is taking an active role as a Bellevue Education Association member. Read her story on page 7.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

JENNI BENSON

Balance is the key to everything

bal·ance (noun) 2. a condition in which different elements are equal or in the correct proportions.

For many of us, the beginning of a new year starts with reflection. Some of us use this time to set goals and look deeply into our own behaviors and habits. Some will set resolutions and some will choose a motto to set the tone for the New Year. Some think of others and many focus only on changes within themselves. And there are also those of us who just move forward one day at a time.

I am typically a combination of all the above. My work life, my family life and my personal life all intersect in different ways. This year, I am looking for more balance.

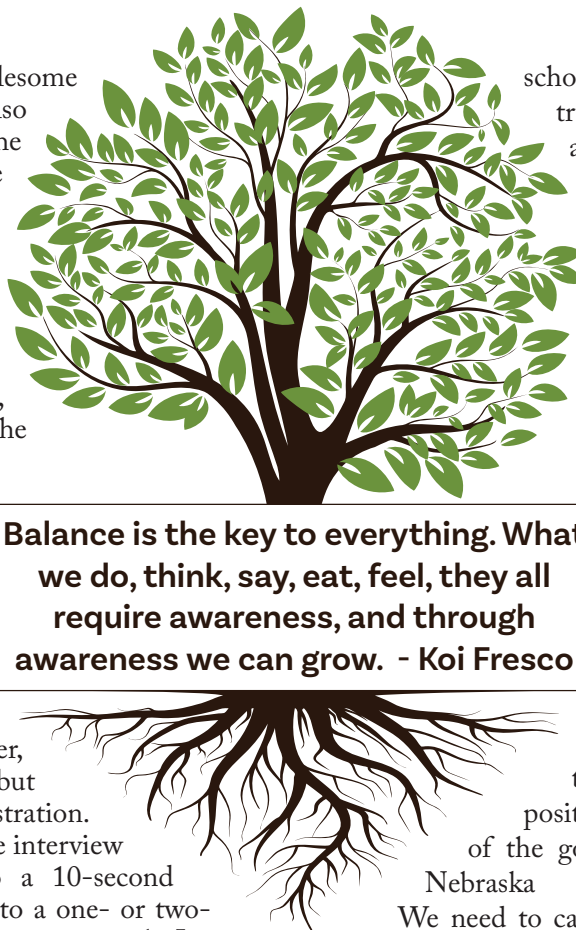
Over the past five years, as president of NSEA, I have written more than 40 articles and been interviewed on behalf of the Association dozens—if not hundreds—of times by the media. When the Nebraska Legislature convenes, there are inevitably bills introduced that will have a direct effect on students and educators. We're just a few short weeks into this legislative session and we've already seen some incredibly concerning bills being introduced. During this 90-day session, resources for schools and for students with the most need will be on the chopping block. With every bad bill, I see an increase in interview requests from members of the media.

Often the more controversial the bill, the more it will make headlines. Bad bills that would strip local control from public schools or discriminate against the students who attend them deserve to be covered. Transparency within the lawmaking process is important, but where is the balance? In every interview I do, whether it's a 5- or 20-minute interview, I take time to talk about the implications of

these troublesome bills while also highlighting the truly positive work being done in our public schools all across the state. Occasionally, when I see the final stories on the evening news, hear them on the radio or read the resulting articles in the newspaper, I can't help but feel some frustration. The 20-minute interview is reduced to a 10-second sound bite or to a one- or two-line quote in a written article. Lost in translation or on the cutting room floor are the positive things happening in our schools.

In my pursuit of balance this year, I'm asking for your help.

Our students, educators and schools need your help to balance out the negative rhetoric that poses a serious threat to schools in every community. Those who are inside our



Balance is the key to everything. What we do, think, say, eat, feel, they all require awareness, and through awareness we can grow. - Koi Fresco

schools and know the truth must speak against the harm such rhetoric is inflicting on students and public education. It is time to say as loudly as possible: This is not right. We need our educators to speak up. We need our neighbors and our church leaders to talk about the positive examples of the good work in our Nebraska public schools. We need to call out the untrue accusations being lobbed at our schools. We need to demand the truth be shared.

If you've not already, please sign up to receive the NSEA Capitol Update. We need everyone to be ready to stand up for all children and public education. To achieve balance, we need many voices to share the truth about what is happening in our schools.

Meet Nebraska's 2023 Teacher of the Year

Lincoln Education Association member Renee Jones, Nebraska's 2023 Teacher of the Year, was honored during an award reception in Dec. 2022.

Jones began her teaching career in 2014 in California before moving to Nebraska in 2015 to teach English at Lincoln Public Schools' Bryan Community Focus Program. In 2021, Jones moved to Lincoln High School where she teaches English in Oral Communications and works with students through reading interventions.

Helping Students

In the classroom, Jones helps students face one of the greatest fears in America. Surveys have shown that 25 percent of the population ranks speaking in front of an audience as their biggest fear. As an Oral Communications teacher, Jones tackles that challenge through the use of personal connections. She helps students overcome their fears by connecting directly with them, but also helping them connect with their peers.

"Connecting students is the most influential and important element of my role as a teacher," said Jones. "Connecting students with me, with their peers, and with themselves, is at the heart of gaining the confidence they need."

Jones said building connections leads to success not just in



Nebraska's 2023 Teacher of the Year Renee Jones and NSEA Executive Director Trish Guinan shake hands at the award reception in December.

her classroom but throughout life. Her message as Nebraska's Teacher of the Year builds on that idea.

Jones earned a bachelor's degree in Criminology and Criminal Justice from the University of Nebraska at Omaha and a master's degree in Educational Leadership from Doane University.

A panel of Nebraska educators selected Jones as the 2023 Nebraska Teacher of the Year.

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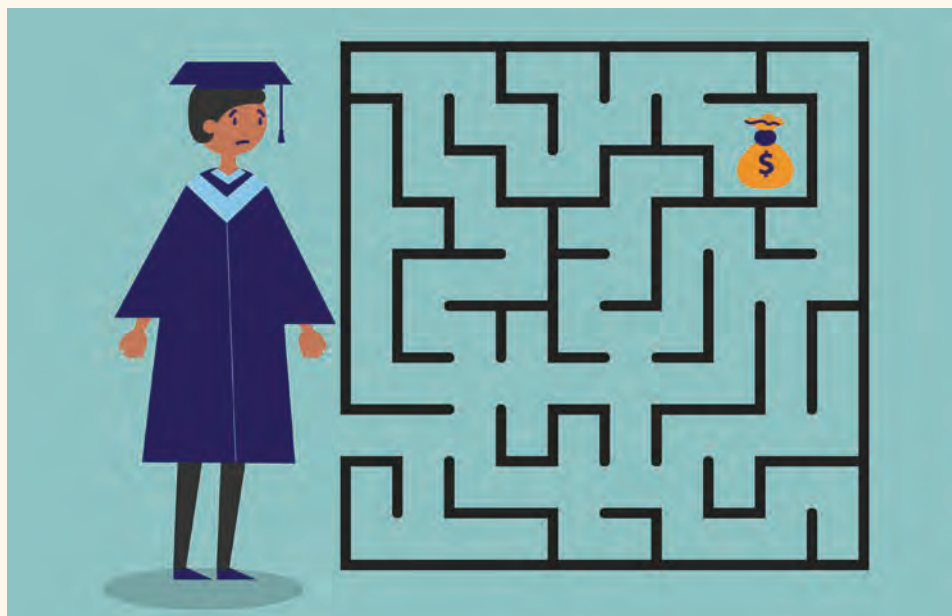
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Navigating Student Debt

Every American, no matter what we look like or where we come from, deserves the opportunity to create a better life for ourselves and our families. And for millions of us, going to college was supposed to allow us the ability to decide our futures, not decades of debt.

For years, NEA members have advocated in favor of public service loan forgiveness to fix the educator shortage. Now, due to those efforts student loans are being substantially reduced, forgiven, or even canceled outright. This has a ripple effect, affecting not only the borrowers themselves, but parents and grandparents who are helping them repay their debts and the loved ones who depend on them financially. The Association remains committed to helping you take advantage of these opportunities.

Public Service Loan Forgiveness Still Available

Due to Association efforts and support from the Biden Administration, more than 360,000 educators and public service workers have received student loan forgiveness through a Limited Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) Waiver. While the Limited Waiver expired on October 31, 2022, PSLF is still here for educators and other public service workers. Significant permanent improvements have been made to the program so that more educators can receive the debt forgiveness they were promised.

What is PSLF?

The Public Service Loan Forgiveness program was created in 2007 to forgive the remaining balance of federal student debt for public service workers, including teachers, higher education faculty, and education support professionals, who provide 10 years of public service while making 120 monthly payments on their federal student loans.

However, when the first borrowers became eligible for forgiveness, the previous administration denied over 90 percent of applications, forcing public service workers to continue making payments on student loans that should have been forgiven.

After listening to the voices of educators, the Biden Administration overhauled the program to permanently fix a number of technicalities, allowing hundreds of thousands of educators to become eligible for loan forgiveness sooner, or even immediately.

Who is eligible?

You must be employed full-time (30 hours or more per week) by a public service employer, which includes all public school districts and public and non-profit higher education institutions. This includes all educators:

- Teachers
- Education Support Professionals
- Specialized Instructional Support Personnel
- Higher Education Faculty, Including Adjunct/Contingent

Helpful Information

If you have a Direct Loan, believe you have made 120 payments, and have applied for PSLF, you should receive automatic forgiveness or updates about your payment count soon.

If you have a Direct Loan and have NOT applied for PSLF, visit studentaid.gov/PSLF to access the U.S. Department of Education's PSLF Help Tool to fill out your PSLF application.

- If you have worked for multiple public service employers since October 2007, you will need to file an application for every single employer.
- After completing the PSLF Help Tool, you will need to get your employer(s)'s signature on each completed form, and submit the application(s) to MOHELA, the student loan servicer that manages the PSLF program.

If you have a FFEL or Perkins loan, you must first consolidate into a Direct Loan, then apply for PSLF. You will need to consolidate before May 1, 2023, to take advantage of the Department of Education's one-time account adjustment, which will credit any payments made on these loans for the purposes of PSLF.

If you are not currently on an income-driven repayment plan (which is required for PSLF), apply for one before the payment pause ends. You may qualify for a \$0 monthly payment!

- Note, during the student debt repayment pause, all months from the pause count toward PSLF, thus making payments is not necessary. However, enrolling in an IDR plan as soon as possible will ensure you stay on track to receive PSLF, once payments do resume.

Every individual should also go to studentaid.gov and login with your Federal Student Aid ID (or create one if you do not have one) to make sure their contact information is up to date. The Department of Education uses this as its primary method of contact to reach you about the progress of your PSLF application.

NSEA Webinar:
Student Debt Management
Feb. 16, 5:30 p.m.
Register at: nsea.org/PDforEd



New programs

Undergraduate Degree

- Nutrition and Dietetics

Undergraduate Minors

- Data Analytics (online)
- Political Science

Undergraduate Options

- Media Production in Communication Arts
- Natural Sciences in Secondary Education (online)
- Pre-Art Therapy in Art

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Bellevue Education Association (BEA) member Carla Bobier stands inside her classroom donning her tie-dye lab coat. Bobier teaches 8th grade science at Logan Fontenelle Middle School and serves as a middle-level executive board member of BEA.

HELPS IN THE BUILDING: A voice, a community and a seat at the table

As Carla Bobier describes it, there was a cultural shift that occurred sometime during her fourth year as a middle school educator within Omaha Public Schools. Her middle school students began to test one another and then—their teachers.

“I loved those first couple of years of teaching and then there was a pre-COVID shift,” she explained. “There began to be this power struggle between students and teachers. We started having a lot of behavioral issues in our building.”

For the teachers, this meant implementing an “all hands on deck” protocol during lunch time and at dismissal because there were so many student fights.

“We were constantly breaking up fights in our building. Most of the time, we were able to break them up right away,” she said. “You learn to recognize the signs of a fight even before they start.”

The fight that turned out to be a trap

When Bobier passed by students gathered in a circle around what looked to be the latest clash, she rushed to intervene.

“I was the first teacher there. I got into

the middle to break up the fight, but there was no fight. The students had staged it to look like a fight so they could trap a teacher in the middle,” she said.

Once surrounded, Bobier was pinballed back and forth between the mass of students who thought it was funny.

“When it was happening to me, I was mostly just mad because I was being pushed around and touched by students who had planned to do this to a teacher,” Bobier said. “As I made my way out of the circle I took one of the first students there and hauled him to the office because I wanted to find out what was going on and who was behind this.”

Bobier said she was not physically hurt by the group of students but as she waited in the office the adrenaline from the incident subsided and she began to recognize the seriousness of what had happened.

“It really didn't hit me at first of how potentially dangerous that could have been. If there had been even one student who might have thrown an elbow or—God forbid—a knife or something. I kind of had a bit of a breakdown in the office.”

Administrators apologized to Bobier and began looking into the incident.

Several factors hindered the inquiry: a camera that should have captured the incident had been poorly maintained and the footage was deemed useless. The student Bobier had taken to the office turned out to be just a bystander who had been sucked into the circle of students. And many students remained tight-lipped or were not even questioned by administrators. Bobier still wanted the students who orchestrated the incident to be identified and face consequences. She felt the longer the district waited to act, the more likely something like this could happen to a colleague. A trusted friend told Bobier that she may need to reach out to her union representative for help getting a response from the district. At the time, Bobier was a member of the Association of American Educators (AAE).

Write a letter and wait

As a member of AAE, Bobier didn't have a local representative in her building, in her district or in Omaha. She called a phone number provided by AAE and explained what happened to a representative over the phone. Through a series of emails, Bobier put in writing what had happened and sought advice

on her next steps.

“There were emails back and forth and AAE’s solution was that I write a letter to the superintendent of OPS and that’s as far as I got,” explained Bobier. “I wrote the letter and sent it to AAE to look over. The AAE person didn’t have any changes. She was just like, ‘Yep, that’s good.’”

Bobier dropped her letter in the mail just before spring break 2020. Shortly after sending the letter, OPS and schools statewide shut down due to the pandemic.

“I never got a response from the district. There was never a follow up by the AAE representative about how it went or if it was resolved,” said Bobier. “I didn’t want to let the school or OPS get off that easy, but nothing came of it. I didn’t feel supported as an educator.”

Help is in the building

When Bobier took a new position as an 8th grade science teacher at Logan Fontenelle Middle School in Bellevue she immediately joined the Bellevue Education Association (BEA). In just a few short years she’s already taken on a leadership role as a middle-level executive board member of BEA.

“The reason I am so active is because of what happened. I want to know the inner workings of my local association. I want to help educators feel supported,” she said. “I think the most important thing is that your local association understands the buildings, they understand the people. They have a vested interest in making your working conditions better because they’re working alongside you. NSEA and BEA have firsthand knowledge of Nebraska public schools and all the districts. They have processes to get people the help and support they need.”

A voice, a community and a seat at the table

NSEA is a community of 26,000 dedicated professionals who share a passion for public education.

Association work is governed by members like Bobier who were elected by their peers to serve at the local, district, state and national levels.

NSEA is the only association in Nebraska that has the experience, expertise and strength to provide training and research for your local association negotiators. Support

ALTERNATIVE ORGANIZATIONS

What's going on beneath the surface?

WHAT THEY OFFER

CHEAP DUES

WHAT THEY WANT

TAKE AWAY COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

FUND PRIVATE SCHOOLS WITH PUBLIC TAX DOLLARS

TIE SALARIES TO TEST SCORES

UNDERMINE THE TEACHER RETIREMENT SYSTEM

REDUCE FUNDING FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

CONTROL CURRICULUM

through collective bargaining better equips local associations in their pursuit of improved contracts and working conditions that benefit you and your students.

NSEA has 18 organizational specialists who work closely with local associations and members in every part of the state. As former teachers, they are experienced bargainers, they understand contract comparability, and can provide accurate information and expert advice. NSEA's organizational specialists are ready and

able to help educators resolve minor disagreements with administrators or represent teachers in grievances and dismissal hearings. NSEA is also the only education association with legal counsel located right here in Nebraska.

For more than 155 years, NSEA has been the collective voice for Nebraska public educators. Whether pursuing change, speaking at school board meetings, seeking increased funding, or advocating for education with state elected officials, NSEA supports you and your students.

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Honor a Colleague at Delegate Assembly

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 his or her 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 an administrator who strives every day to help students and staff be successful.
 - **Friend of Education:** NSEA's highest honor recognizes an individual or organization that has made a statewide contribution to education.
 - **Outstanding Media:** Honors newspaper, television or radio station for coverage of education issues and promotion of public education.

Mailed nominations must be postmarked by Friday, Feb. 17, 2023, and should be sent to NSEA Awards, 605 S. 14th St., Lincoln, NE 68508-2742. Nominations may also be submitted online at www.nsea.org/DA, with required supporting material mailed to the NSEA.

File for NSEA office, and get ready to vote!

Is it time to step forward and consider a leadership role in your association? Starting Friday, Feb. 17, NSEA members will vote for candidates to fill dozens of district leadership posts, as well as openings on the NSEA's Board of Directors. Electees will assume roles in determining the Association's future. But first, those candidates must file.


The position of NSEA Vice President and one NEA Director position will be up for election for three-year terms at the April 2023 Delegate Assembly. Candidates for these offices must declare their candidacy by Tuesday, Feb. 15, in writing to NSEA Executive Director Trish Guinan at trish.guinan@nsea.org.

The window for filing for NSEA District offices opened Jan. 1 and closes Sunday, Feb. 5. To view the vacancies and to file, go to nsea.org and click on the 2023 District Elections link. Select your district, and then select the office of interest.

Candidates will need their 10-digit NSEA membership number. That number can be found above your name on the mailing label of The Voice.


All NSEA members are eligible to vote for district officers and Representative Assembly At-Large delegates. Voting will be available online from Friday, Feb. 17 to Sunday, March 12. All members are eligible to vote for their local association delegates to the NSEA Delegate Assembly.

Clustered locals will vote March 12-21. Locals with more than 26 members, talk with your local president for your local election timeline. Call NSEA for more information at 1-800-742-0047.



Required to vote: a valid email address


Members can elect the next round of NSEA leaders by casting a ballot in the Association elections. Voting opens on Friday, Feb. 17. On that date, members with valid email addresses on file will receive an email detailing the process. 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 Thursday, March 9, 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. Members should use a personal email account, not a school-issued one.




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



LEGISLATURE

Now in Session: NSEA tracks bills that could affect public education

When bill introductions wrapped up on Jan. 18, senators had introduced 812 new bills and 31 proposed constitutional amendments for consideration in the 90-day session of the Nebraska Legislature.

As the session continues, major education issues involving school financing—including three proposals brought by Gov. Jim Pillen—will be at the forefront of debate. Lawmakers will also hold public hearings on bills addressing the shortage of school employees, school safety and the public employee retirement system.

Your NSEA Government Relations team is hard at work tracking all legislative proposals that could affect public schools, educators and their students. Below is a preview of some of the top education-related topics lawmakers will debate.

FUNDING FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

Gov. Jim Pillen's school finance plan includes a \$2.5 billion "Education Future Fund" that would be created by setting aside \$1 billion this year, and another \$250 million in each of the next six years. The money would be used to pay for career and technical education programs, increased mentoring programs for K-12 students, and retention bonuses for teachers. Nebraska's Economic Forecasting Advisory Board helped make the proposals possible when, last October, it increased state revenue projections for the next two fiscal years by \$1.8 billion. The cash reserve fund is projected to reach \$2.3 billion by June 30, 2025. The Board also projected a 4.5% increase in the state's general fund for fiscal year 2023-24, bringing it to \$5.3 billion. These numbers are important because while state revenues are projected to grow significantly, Nebraska continues to rank 49th in the nation in the amount of state aid provided to PK-12 education.

Underfunding our public schools places a significant burden on school districts to increase local property taxes. Under the governor's proposals, property taxpayers would see some relief, but it could be a wash for public schools. A proposal to give every school district \$1,500 per student in state aid for K-12 education could reduce how much equalization aid larger districts are already receiving by up to the same amount. However, the

governor said during a January news conference that the new funding package would hold harmless all districts that receive equalization aid – at least for the coming fiscal year. Further, the package includes an additional 3% spending cap on a school district's annual revenue. This is in addition to the budget caps and levy lids that are already placed on school districts, and could tie the hands of local school board members trying to meet the needs of their public schools. Another part of the proposal would increase funding for special education by \$157 million which would be a big win for public schools and help meet the needs of students.

NSEA will delve deep into the implications of each proposal as more details become available.

KEEP PUBLIC DOLLARS FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS FOR ALL KIDS

LB753, a school privatization bill introduced by Elkhorn Sen. Lou Ann Linehan, would let corporations and the wealthy avoid paying up to 50% of their income taxes while reducing revenue to the state's general fund by millions of dollars, dollars that are needed to support Nebraska's public schools and other essential public services. The NSEA strongly opposes this tax scheme. Under LB753, public funds would be diverted to private and parochial schools, including those that discriminate against children and their families. In other states, vouchers have proven to be enormously expensive and ineffective.

Why are Voucher Tax Schemes harmful? They funnel tax dollars away from our already-underfunded public schools and children and give those public funds to private schools. Research shows that school vouchers do not improve students' academic performance and they fail to accommodate and support disabled and special-needs students.

LB753 is expensive. The first-year limit on the total amount of vouchers is \$25 million, and the cost to Nebraska's general fund is likely to grow exponentially, as it has in other states, to nearly \$250 million a year in just ten years. These tax credits benefit corporations and the wealthy while shifting the burden of funding critical programs and services to less affluent taxpayers.



Although proponents of school privatization promise the state will see a savings, such savings have not been realized in other states. Studies that claim to have found savings are based on assumptions—not on actual data—about how many students left public schools. Many—if not most—students who would receive scholarships would attend private schools without such state funding, and the number of those who transfer is too nominal to have any impact on public schools’ expenses.

The Bottom Line: LB753 would hurt Nebraska’s public schools and the students who attend them.

The tax dollars siphoned off to pay for this scheme would otherwise be available to fund our public schools and other state priorities like public health and safety, and other essential public services. Nebraska already consistently ranks nearly last in the nation for state support of K-12 education and, as a result, has some of the highest property taxes in the country. Legislators who care about kids must prioritize fully staffing and funding the K-12 schools that serve nine out of ten kids in Nebraska by investing more state funding in public education - not diverting millions of dollars to a system we’ve never funded before.

BILLS INTRODUCED ON NSEA'S BEHALF

LB519 – Introduced by Fremont Sen. Lynn Walz, LB519 would eliminate certification fees for teaching certificates, change provisions of the Excellence in Teaching Act, and adopt the Student Teaching Assistance.

LB724 – Introduced by Sen. Tony Vargas, this bill would eliminate certain basic skill and content test requirements for eligibility for teaching certificates.

LB585 – Introduced by Sen. Jana Hughes, LB585 would address school safety, changing duties of the state school security director and would require behavioral mental health training for certain personnel.

LB198 – Introduced by Sen. McDonnell, this bill would provide for a return to work and authorize contributions under the School Employees Retirement Act and the Class V School Employees Retirement Act.

QUALITY RETIREMENT PLANS ATTRACT QUALITY TEACHERS









Both school retirement plans in Nebraska (the OPS and statewide plans) provide monthly retirement income for more than 24,000 retired teachers and beneficiaries in Nebraska. The defined benefit pension plan is a key







employment benefit that attracts and helps retain quality teachers. Teachers contribute 9.78 percent of their salary to fund the plans. The state adds the equivalent of 2% of all school pay to the plans, representing a \$60.3 million annual contribution. NSEA remains vigilant in watching for amendments that could target this funding during this legislative session. To keep the retirement plans healthy, it is vital this funding continues.

VOICES FOR EDUCATION

Members and staff will meet with senators to share the stories of our educators and testify on proposed legislation with the goal of supporting Nebraska’s public schools. If you or someone you know is interested in testifying, contact NSEA Government Relations Associate Cathy Schapmann at cathy.schapmann@nsea.org or by calling (402) 475-7611.

THUMBS UP - THUMBS DOWN

	LB153 Adopt the Extraordinary Increase in Special Education Expenditures Act.
	LB753 Adopt the Opportunity Scholarships Act and provide tax credits.
	LB519 Eliminate certification fees for teaching certificates.
	LB603 Change provisions relating to the Alternative Certification for Quality Teachers Act and authorize the Commissioner of Education to issue alternative certificates to teach.
	LB724 Eliminate certain basic skill and content test requirements for eligibility for teaching certificates.
	LB165 Include elementary and secondary schools in the Nebraska educational savings plan trust and change tax benefits.
	LB585 Change a duty of state school security director and require behavioral mental health training for certain personnel.
	LB177 Adopt the My Student, My Choice Act

	<p>LB527 Provide reimbursements to school districts and educational service units for mental health expenditures.</p>
	<p>LB589 Adopt the School District Property Tax Limitation Act.</p>
	<p>LB324 Change provisions relating to reimbursements under the Special Education Act.</p>
	<p>LR24CA Constitutional amendment to eliminate the State Board of Education and provide for the Governor to appoint the Commissioner of Education.</p>
	<p>LB198 Provide for a return to work and authorize contributions under the School Employees Retirement Act and the Class V School Employees Retirement Act.</p>
	<p>LR28CA Constitutional amendment to change the membership of the State Board of Education.</p>

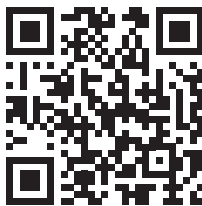


SURVEY

The Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Public Education

The Nebraska Advisory Committee (NAC) to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is currently engaging the general topic of how public education in Nebraska (i.e. students and their families, staff, administrators, curriculum, pedagogy, facilities) was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Edward Ventura, NEA Director, and Jason Hayes, NSEA Director of Government Relations, hold seats on the advisory group.

The NAC is conducting a survey for stakeholders who have first-hand knowledge of the effect of the pandemic on the Nebraska public education system and of the various modalities of instruction used during the pandemic period. The NAC are asking for your assistance based on your involvement with the public education system. Your unique perspectives and experiences will help the committee better understand how the public education system in Nebraska has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Take the survey at <https://bit.ly/NAC-Survey> or scan the QR code with this story.



Scan for Survey

Please complete this brief questionnaire by February 15, 2023. This survey is voluntary, and your name and any other personal identifying information as a participant in this survey will not be included in the Committee's records or reports. Please contact Victoria Moreno, Designated Federal Officer, at vmoreno@usccr.gov with any questions.

What's going on in the legislature?

Nebraska's 108th Legislature convened on Jan. 4. The 90-day session is expected to cover a wide range of proposed bills that will affect Nebraska public schools, students and staff.

Every decision made regarding education is a political decision. How you receive your teaching certificate, the standards you teach to, the number of students in your classroom, your curriculum, the resources you can access, and the amount on your paycheck are all 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 with legislative decisions that affect public education. Receive updates about legislative activity in 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.



Dynamic Presenters Sought for NSEA U

NSEA U, July 17-19, 2023

NSEA is looking for dynamic presentations for its annual NSEA U conference. The conference is a chance to provide members with the skills needed to lead in their local associations and to provide the best learning in their classrooms. If you have an area of expertise and would like to share your knowledge with teachers from across the state, complete the request for proposals (RFP) application form found at: www.nsea.org/nseau



Looking for more information? Visit NSEA.org/NSEAU

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A wooden signpost with a stone base. The sign reads: ARCHWAY ARCHWAY.ORG, Take the Journey That Built America, Historical Exhibit, Gift Shop Snacks, Tourist Info, EXIT NOW.

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To schedule your event, call (308) 237-1000
or email: aclement@archway.org



Turn to the Children's Fund this winter

Nebraska winters can make even the most warmly dressed children shiver. Imagine walking to school in the biting cold of the early morning

without a coat or warm mittens, or with shoes that are falling apart. Unfortunately, this is a reality for many children in Nebraska. 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.

Contributions to the NSEA Children's Fund come from teachers and businesses across the state.



Locals, businesses contribute

Contributions are tax deductible — and it's important to note that every penny contributed goes to help children. NSEA picks up the administrative expenses.



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.

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. During the pandemic in 2020, the NSEA Board of Directors, along with NSEA-Retired, directed a combined \$60,000 to food banks serving all 93 Nebraska counties to help reach students and families in need of meals.

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

April Delegate Assembly

At the mic: Capitol District President Burke Brown speaks at the April 2022 Delegate Assembly.



Plans are underway for the April 2023 Delegate Assembly – the 163rd assembly in NSEA history.

The 2023 Assembly will be held as an in-person gathering April 28-29 at Lincoln's Marriott Cornhusker Hotel.

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. These delegates manage the business and set the

future course of the Association.

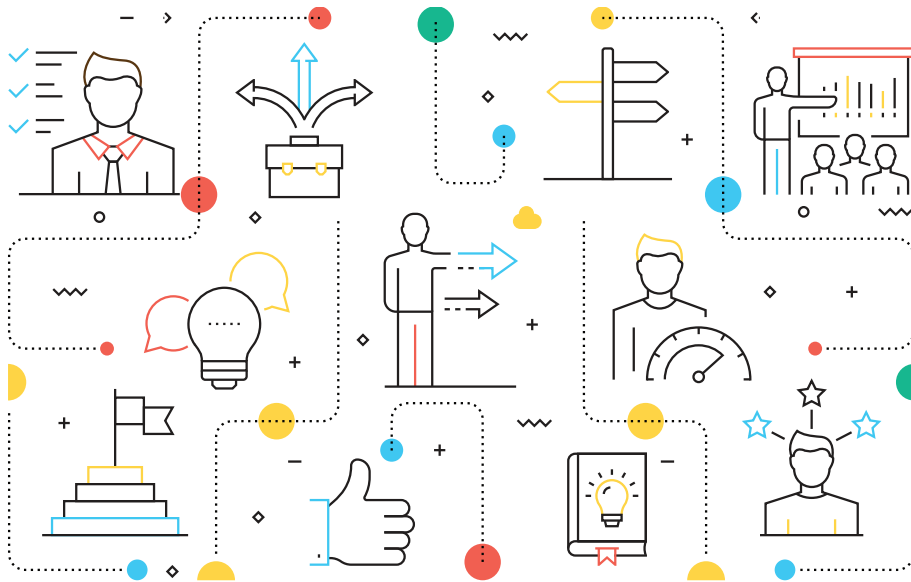
A keynote speaker, discussion of educational issues and consideration of updates to NSEA Bylaws and Resolutions are all part of the assembly action. Watch for details in upcoming editions of *The Voice*.

The event also features an awards presentation, recognizing the Early Career Educator of the Year, Educational Support Professional of the Year, and the Teaching Excellence Award, NSEA's 2023 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.



ESPs: Peer Mentoring Pilot

The National Education Association (NEA) is now accepting applications from state association teams for the 2023 NEA ESPs: Supporting Our Own Through Peer Mentoring Pilot Planning Workshop. Any interested affiliate members should form their teams, complete their pre-learning, submit a program checklist, and then apply. Details of this process can be found at bit.ly/ESPMentorPilot.

Running a pilot program allows members to start on a smaller scale and discover what does and doesn't work with your program. Running a pilot also allows you to incrementally increase ESP and partner involvement. All selected teams will convene with other groups around the country to plan their pilot programs on May 27-28, 2023.

Interested local or state Associations should apply no later than March 1, 2023. All applicant teams will be informed of their application status no later than March 24, 2023.

Request PAC Refund by Feb. 15

NSEA's Political Action Committee is supported by voluntary donations collected with NSEA dues. Support for the election of recommended candidates is provided by an annual contribution of \$15 from each NSEA member.

Any member may request a refund of those contributions for the current membership year. Alternatively, members may direct the \$15 contribution to be used for bond elections and school ballot issues only.

Refund requests must be in writing to NSEA President Jenni Benson. Each letter must be individually composed and contain an original signature of the member. Photocopied, computer-generated letters or email messages are not accepted. Each letter must indicate whether all or part of the contribution is to be refunded or designated for ballot issues.

Requests must be postmarked no later than Feb. 15, 2023. In order to efficiently use dues dollars, requests for refunds received by the due date will be processed and mailed in a single batch after that date.

Send requests to NSEA President Jenni Benson at 605 S. 14th St., Lincoln, NE 68508. For questions, email Jenni.Benson@nsea.org or call NSEA at 1-800-742-0047.

Register for Professional Development Opportunities offered in 2023!

One of the many perks of your NSEA membership is access to exclusive webinars tailored to the education profession.

A full slate of sessions is set for 2023, with topics ranging from financial essentials to planning a summer vacation. Go to www.nsea.org/webinars for a complete list of sessions.

NSEA members only

- **NSEA Legislative Update:** Tuesday, Feb. 7, 7 p.m. Receive a 2023 Legislative Update from Brian Mikkelsen, NSEA Director of Political Action.
- **Retirement Seminar:** Monday, Feb. 13, 7:30 p.m. The presentation will provide attendees basic information about the benefits that they will be receiving upon retirement from the Nebraska Public Employees Retirement System.
- **Student Debt Management:** Thursday, Feb. 16, 5:30 p.m. During this presentation, members will learn about two Student Loan Forgiveness Plans and how they can qualify for loan forgiveness.
- **Budgeting:** Thursday, Mar. 14, 7 p.m. Budgeting for some is easy. Budgeting for others is nearly impossible. This session will convey the basics of budgeting and provide the tools needed to help you on your budgeting journey to financial tranquility.
- **Financial Essentials:** Tuesday, March 14, 5:30 p.m. Specifically designed to help education professionals plan for retirement by reviewing financial concepts that can affect members during each life stage, especially as they move closer to retirement.
- **Retirement Seminar:** Tuesday, April 4, 7:30 p.m. The presentation will provide attendees basic information about the benefits that they will be receiving upon retirement from the Nebraska Public Employees Retirement System.

Hope: More than just wishful thinking

S.E.E.D

Supporting Educator Effectiveness through Development



Dr. Kim Snyder,
Director,
NDE Statewide
Teacher and Principal
Support



Dr. Julie Downing,
NDE Educator
Effectiveness
Specialist



Ryan Ricenbaw,
NDE Leadership and
Learning Network
Specialist



Dr. Sara Skretta,
NDE Educator
Effectiveness
Specialist at UNL

Hope is defined by Merriam-Webster as “to cherish a desire with anticipation or to want something to happen or be true and should include a stated goal, a plan and then the motivation to put the plan in motion.” Thus, hope is more than just setting goals and wishing to meet them. Three important components must be present for hope to exist: (a) a bright future or a vision—the goal setting; (b) creating the pathway to reach those goals, and (c) agency or having the ability to handle barriers that get in the way of continuing down the path toward the goals.

Hope is the steering wheel for where a person wants to go, providing a sense of direction. Being a high-hope teacher can result in students performing an average of 12 points higher than the teacher next door. This is increasingly more important as studies show that only 47% kids are hopeful—which is the #1 predictor of future well-being for both students and adults (Butler, The Harmony Project).

Having hope, however, is only part of making a difference. Pairing hope with action results in self-empowerment to build a better future because as one hopes for something specific, the mind starts solving problems standing in the way (Snyder, Inc. com). There is no question this is all easier said than done, but the components of hope are imperative in the success of both students and their educators.

Why is hope relevant? Hopeful educators and students demonstrate increased attendance, school engagement, health, and academic achievement. With 78% of teachers reporting symptoms of stress and depression (Butler, 2023), if hope is present in these areas, retention and culture also improve for educators. As Nebraska addresses educator workforce challenges, hope is a key element in attracting and retaining teachers and providing them with an outstanding employee experience and academic impact on students.

The Nebraska Teacher and Principal Performance Standards (NTPPS) describe what it looks like to be an effective teacher and principal in Nebraska. Many of the

standard indicators call for teachers and principals to provide learning environments in which hope is achievable, not only by students but by educators themselves. For example, in the Teacher Standard of The Learning Environment, Indicator C states that effective teachers collaborate with their students to support each student’s diverse academic, social-emotional, linguistic, and physical strengths and needs. In the Principal Standard of Vision for Learning, effective principals make their decisions based on student and staff development and support needs. When teachers and leaders are effective, conditions exist that allow students to have hope, and the supports effective educators put in place allow for students to have pathways and agency to reach their goals.

Many resources exist to support educators engaging in this work. In addition to the NTPPS, educators could also refer to the *Nebraska College and Career Readiness Standards*, the *Learning Forward Standards*, and the *CASEL Standards*.

Additionally, the Adult Resilience Standards (ARC) are equipped with easily accessible learning modules for educators. The book *Hope Rising: How the Science of Hope Can Change Your Life* (Gwinn & Hellman, 2022) contains *Child Hope and Adult Hope Scales*.

How can educators boost their own sense of hope and those of their colleagues? Simply by knowing how each adult in the building would answer these three questions.

1. What do I look like on a good day?
2. What do I look like on a bad day?
3. What would “save” me on a bad day?

Something as simple as knowing this about themselves and their colleagues would allow educators the opportunity to acknowledge a colleague’s good days with a pat on the back or words of affirmation, or the chance to “save” a colleague on a bad day with a cup of coffee or a note of support. Educators are all in this together and every gesture counts in the pursuit of hope.



Save with exclusive member offers in February

The NEA Discount Marketplace, powered by Rakuten, enables members to earn cash back when they shop and save on brand-name merchandise from more than 3,500 top retailers and online stores. Check out the following member-exclusive deals in February and search more retailers at neamb.com/marketplace:

1-800-Flowers

Send flowers and exclusive gifts to show you care this Valentine's Day or for any occasion! Save \$15 on two dozen red roses and receive 5% cash back.

Sephora

This Valentine's Day, shower your loved ones with gifts from Sephora that make them feel radiant and beautiful! Get 10% off your next purchase when you sign up for text updates and get free shipping on every order!

Macy's

Not sure what to give that special someone? Explore all your options at Macy's. Don't miss out on the Deals of the Day, earn cash back, and join Star Rewards for even more benefits.

Omaha Steaks

For the meat lovers in your life, give them a sizzling reminder of your love by sending Omaha Steaks! Help them stock their freezer for up to 55% off during the Freezer Filler sale and add gift wrap for that personal touch.

Godiva

Treat your special someone (and yourself!) to delicious Belgian chocolates this Valentine's Day. Buy a box of chocolates and add on an additional 15 pc. milk or dark chocolate gift box for only \$20 using the code SWEETTREAT.



Can you take advantage of the power of compound interest?

It may seem impossible to save what you need to afford your kids' education and also put enough away for retirement. But even though you may not know it, you have a powerful ally on your side – compound interest.

What is compound interest?

At its most basic, compound interest means that an investment of money begins to earn interest income on its interest income, accelerating its growth. So, if you have \$1,000 in an account and earn 3% interest, you'll have \$1,030 at the end of one year, but \$1,061 after two years. And the more

you contribute, the faster the account will build. The real power comes over time, as the account continues to grow exponentially based on the principal times interest.

Why is this important?

Growing interest can help you achieve those long-term savings goals, like saving for your children's college education or retirement. With the power of compound interest, if you put \$2,500 into a college savings account each year earning 3% interest, it would be worth \$47,892 at the end of 15 years.

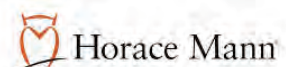
You can also apply this concept to retirement savings. If you put \$7,000 in a retirement account each year that earns 3% interest, it would be worth \$343,019 after 30 years.

That's why the time value of money depends on the power of compound interest. If you start early and save in an account that can provide you with growth, you can have a much greater amount than if you buried that money in the backyard. It's wise to use this power to your advantage while you can.

Why Horace Mann?

Horace Mann Educators Corporation provides individual and group insurance and financial solutions that help America's educators and others who serve the community achieve lifelong financial success. Many of our representatives are former educators and administrators so we have the advantage of understanding your true needs. Whether you're behind a desk, behind the cafeteria counter or behind the wheel, Horace Mann has you covered. Since educators are taking care of our children's future, Horace Mann believes in taking care of our educators' future.

Find your local Horace Mann representative at horacemann.com/locator and search by school district, location or agent name.





NEA Member Exclusive

Get this benefit at no cost to you

As an NEA member, did you know you receive \$1,000 of term life insurance at no cost to you? You're already enrolled in the NEA® Complimentary Life Insurance Plan, but it's a good time to make sure you've selected a beneficiary.

When you do, you'll not only get peace of mind that your loved ones will receive their benefits in a time of need, but you'll also get our new tote bag—free!

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TRISH GUINAN

Message from the Executive Director

A Tough Time of Year

Already this year many public schools in Nebraska have had to adjust their calendars due to weather. From the heaps of snow that recently buried parts of the panhandle to freezing rain in eastern parts of the state—winters in the Midwest can be brutal. When I think about my experience in the classroom, this time of year was always the hardest. Days are shorter, flu season is in full swing, and everyone seems more tired than usual just as educators enter this long stretch before spring break. These stressful conditions are, of course, on top of the challenges already facing public education: educator shortages, classroom safety, student behavior and economic concerns. How educators take care of themselves and manage stress during this time of year is just as important as managing student learning.

Holding Down Bobbers

My former colleague and fellow Fremont Education Association member Susie Kranz once described this post-holiday period in education best when she said, "Keeping the attention of my elementary students after winter break is like trying to hold down 25 fishing bobbers underwater at the same time without letting any of them come to the surface." Susie explained that February weather usually kept her elementary students inside for recess. If they were lucky enough to get outdoors, getting everyone bundled in their winter gear cut into their recess time. While high school students had time to move between classes, her elementary students were stuck in the same room all day. On a good day, one restless student can distract an entire classroom. A classroom of restless students in February is impossible to reel in—even for the most experienced angler educator.



Rest vs. Rejuvenation

There is an important distinction between rest and rejuvenation. Just because educators and students had days off during the holidays doesn't always mean they arrive back in the classroom rejuvenated. Rest is when we are given the opportunity to address physical tension and fatigue. Rest is only the beginning of rejuvenation. Rejuvenation is achieved on an emotional level. A rejuvenated educator feels connected and fulfilled, and finds purpose in the important work they do with their students. It's important for educators to feel empowered enough within their careers to attain both.

NSEA is Here to Help

In recent years we've seen a much-needed shift in how we address the well-being and mental health of our educators. As a part of the Educators Health Alliance (EHA), NSEA has procured quality, affordable health insurance for Nebraska education employees and their families—and this includes mental health services. Within the last two years, EHA made changes to its plan to ensure that in-network behavioral health office services are covered at 100% of BCBSNE's allowable amount, whether in-person or by using the telehealth benefit. EHA Wellness participants can also receive a free subscription to Headspace, a mindfulness and meditation app that offers ways to help manage stress and anxiety.

NSEA also empowers our members through collective bargaining, so they can negotiate pay, plan time, and address concerns at the local level. NSEA works with state lawmakers to tackle school financing issues, provide safer working environments, address the hurdles that hold potential teachers from the classroom and offer new strategies to keep the educator pipeline flowing. Rest assured; your professional association has your wellbeing at top of mind.

“
Keeping the attention of my elementary students after winter break is like trying to hold down 25 fishing bobbers underwater at the same time without letting any of them come to the surface.

”

- Susie Kranz,
Former Fremont Education
Assoc. member

February Lobby Day Goes “Hybrid”

Tuesday, February 21, 2023
In-Person and Zoom

In-person at 9 a.m. for registration and coffee at NSEA headquarters. Entry for the Zoom meeting will begin at 9:30 a.m.

Agenda: Welcome and introduction, 10 a.m. to noon:

- Dr. De Tonack, President, NSEA-Retired
- Jason Hayes, Director of Public Policy and Legislative Research
- Guest Senator Presentation
- Q & A Time
- Lunch for in-person attendees

Lobbying at the Capitol: In-person participants will walk to the Capitol for lobbying at 1:30 p.m. following lunch.

Register online at www.nsea.org/retired under Calendar, Events & Registrations. **The deadline for registration is Feb. 15, 2023.** Indicate whether you are registering for In-person or on Zoom. The Zoom link will be provided to registered participants for online participation. Lunch will be provided for those who attend in person.

NSEA-Retired Member Honored by Alma Mater



Chuck Lang

He has spent his life and career as an educator in Nebraska.

Lang is widely considered one of the top science educators in the nation. He was a mentor to not only students, but other educators as well.

This is not the first time Lang has been recognized for his work; he received the Friend of Science Award for his teacher workshops, the Presidential Award for teaching high school physics, and was recognized as a Rotary International Paul Harris Fellow for his volunteer work in West Omaha.

NSEA-Retired member Chuck Lang was honored as a distinguished alumni by Nebraska Wesleyan University. Lang graduated from NWU in 1957.

He has spent his life and career as an educator in Nebraska.



Front (left to right): BEA President A.J. Bowen and BEA-R President Bill Gaus. Back (left to right): BEA-R Secretary Donna Peet-Laurenti, Susan Daugherty (Middle), BEA-R Treasurer Jan Elliott, Mary Gibson and Denise Seaman.

CORE: Call On Retired Educators

With partial funding from the NEA-Retired Grant received by NSEA-Retired and their own donations, Bellevue Education Association – Retired (BEA-Rs) once again helped with distribution of food and clothes to students and families identified as "food or clothing insecure" by Bellevue Public Schools counselors.

Pictured above are the officers and others from BEA-R on a Saturday morning in mid-December.

The need is great in Sarpy County

as well as in other Nebraska counties. BEA-Rs want to help with this much needed endeavor! BEA-Rs have appointed a committee to research how they can serve young students throughout the school year and not just in December. It is amazing to see the enthusiasm of the group post-pandemic!

Funding for other local retired activities or projects is available. Contact De Tonack at dtonack@neb.rr.com for more information.

Run for something! NSEA-Retired elections

Consider running for one of the leadership roles in NSEA-Retired. Candidate filing for the upcoming elections is available online at www.nsea.org/retired. The filing deadline is Feb. 6, 2023.

Open positions on the Retired Board of Directors, each for a three-year term, are president, vice president and one board member each from the Capitol, Elkhorn and Sandhills districts.

Probable numbers for NSEA Delegate Assembly will be four delegates from Capitol District, five from Metro, three from Tri-Valley, two from Elkhorn, one from Panhandle, one from Sandhills and two at-large.

NEA Representative Assembly delegates will include one from the Capitol and Metro districts combined, one from the remaining four districts and out-of-state members combined, and three at-large delegates. NSEA-Retired President Dr. De Tonack serves as a delegate at both DA and RA by virtue of office.

Candidates are encouraged to provide a 50-word statement with their applications. All of these positions take office Aug. 15, 2023.



A third grader's perspective on language & learning

Each morning, I step outside my house and wait for a big yellow bus to pick me up and take me the approximately one mile to Jackson Elementary. Although I live within walking distance of another school, I go out of my way to attend Jackson because, as my dad says, it's remarkable that I am lucky enough to learn two languages while in a great public school right here in Omaha. He'll be the first to tell you that my Spanish is already better than his, and I'm only in the third grade.

I've been at Primaria Jackson for four years now. Each day, I spend half of my time learning in English and the other in Spanish. In kindergarten, I had Ms. McNeely in English and Maestra Betancourt in Español. My first-grade teachers were Mrs. Nielsen, and Maestra Betancourt moved up with my class so I had her for a second year as well. My second-grade teachers were Ms. Sitting Eagle and Maestra Navarro. That brings you up to speed. Today at Jackson, I have Ms. Franco and Maestra Pineda, and they're the amazing teachers I want to tell you about.

Depending on what group you're in, roja o azul, you start each day at Jackson with your home teacher. I'm in the red group so I started in English each day first quarter, and then we switched. I spent the morning in English, and the afternoon in Español. The blue group did it the other way around. In the first quarter, in the morning, I had math followed by science, both in English. After recess and lunch, I had social studies and writing in Spanish for the afternoon. For the second quarter my mornings were in Spanish, but the classes were in the same order.

Because my day started in English first quarter, I began with Ms. Franco. Ms. Franco usually has her blonde hair in a ponytail. Her classroom is extremely organized; when I walk in, the first things I see are our desks set up in pods and her whiteboards covered in tips for doing well on our upcoming math quiz, our specials for that day (such as art or educación física), and other helpful reminders. Ms. Franco is easily one of the most patient people I've ever met. She's kind and also helpful—she even gives me a hint on my math test if I need one!

When I transition to Spanish, I have Maestra Pineda for that half of the day. Maestra Pineda has glasses and dark hair that she wears in a bun. She has a thing for cactuses, and they're all over her room. There are fake cacti and pictures of cacti—you can't miss them. There are even two cactus pinatas hanging from the ceiling. Maestra is a native Spanish speaker, and I can tell that my own command of Español gets better just by being around her. Like Ms. Franco, she's kind and so very patient with all of us. It's easy to learn another language in an environment like Primaria Jackson.

Because of how the system works, the second quarter we switched which teacher, and thus which language, each group started in. As a native English speaker, I've learned a lot of Spanish, but so many of my classmates are native Spanish speakers and they get the same benefit I do but in reverse. By

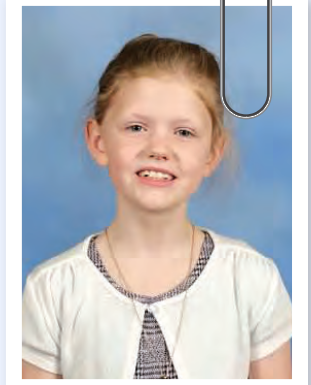
the time we leave Jackson after sixth grade, all of us will be fluent and literate in both languages! From there, we can attend OPS middle schools and eventually South High, where we will stay in the dual-language track and graduate with a skill set that will have prepared us for our lives in a way most students don't get. I hope to become a professional volleyball player, but I could see myself working for the UN if that doesn't pan out, and my Spanish will help to make that happen. No matter what I do, I've learned to appreciate other cultures in a way I never could have were I not a student at Primaria Jackson.

In addition to languages, of course, we still learn everything else that kids in other schools do. This year, I've learned how to do division in math. In science we've learned about fossils—Ash Falls Fossil Beds is really interesting to me. In Social Studies we're learning about American history. We broke into partners and chose different parts of the country. My partner and I researched La Ciudad de Nueva York. We wrote a paper about it and we also made a 3-D structure of Central Park and a school with the skyline behind it.

I think writing has been the best of all this year. We wrote a letter to our future selves about who we hope we become in the future. I wrote that I want to become an Olympic volleyball player. Maestra Pineda and Ms. Franco had us write about how we would become that thing, going to college and paying for our education. Other classmates of mine wrote about becoming cooks, lawyers, nurses and all sorts of things. They really had us thinking long-term about our futures.

As much as I love Jackson as a school—and I am a proud Jaguar!—it's my amazing maestras who make it so wonderful. Mi padre says he likes how well the teachers communicate, and he can tell that they always push me to do my very best. Mi madre says she loves that the teachers and administration know me so well, and she's a big fan of my learning Spanish, too. I think Jackson is the most amazing school, and I'm thankful that OPS makes it possible for all of us to have dual language immersion throughout our career as students.

Right before winter break, Ms. Franco made us all hot chocolate. Ms. Pineda had us making snowflakes and we were writing about how each one is unique and how we ourselves are unique like snowflakes. My snowflake, and those of all my classmates, are still hanging in our classroom right now, reminding us that we are special and that we can do anything we set our minds to doing. Lo que me gusta de Jackson son mis maestras y que ellas son bilingües y podemos hablar en inglés y español. También mis maestras pueden ayudarme y yo puedo colaborar en inglés y español con todos.



Lily Pernicek

Lily Pernicek is eight years old and a third grader at Jackson Elementary in Omaha. She currently has Ms. Pineda and Ms. Franco for teachers. She loves volleyball, Harry Potter, and reading the Merlin Missions Magic Treehouse series. She lives in Omaha with her brother, James, and her parents, Todd and Michelle. Her article was written with the help of Dr. Mark Gudgel, an 18-year veteran of teaching in Nebraska's public schools. Gudgel currently serves as an assistant professor of education at the College of Saint Mary.

Speaking of Education

“I have the audacity to believe that peoples everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education, and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality, and freedom for their spirits.”

— Martin Luther King, Jr.

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



Letter of intent date: March 15

Know your rights if asked to sign letter early

Signing and returning a letter of intent to your district employer is important, but don't let the pressure get to you – especially if you're asked to do so too early.

A letter of intent (and/or accompanying contract) signifies your plan to return to teaching in your district next year. State law allows school districts, on or after March 15 each year, to require PK-12 certificated educators to sign binding letters of intent and/or individual contracts.

Yet some administrators distribute letters – and ask for them back – even before the winter holidays. Often in an effort to get a handle on next year's staffing situation, superintendents might suggest letters be returned by Feb. 1 or March 1.

Knowing your rights is important. Members should not rush to sign, but rather be deliberate and use the time allotted by law. Making a decision months in advance may cause problems down the road if your personal situation changes.

State statute is clear: A school district cannot require teachers to make a commitment before March 15.

However, failure to sign and return the letter by stated deadlines that fall **on** or **after** March 15 is a threat to a teacher's employment.

If administrators distribute such a letter or contract prior to March 15 and ask for its return prior to March 15, a local association representative should fax a copy or scan and email a copy to their assigned NSEA organizational specialist at 1-402-475-2630.

In the meantime, an appropriate response to the letter is “I don't know yet” or “I'm not sure.”

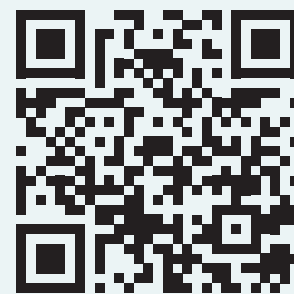
Letters that ask for a signature and return **on** March 15 or on a specified date **after** March 15 are appropriate. In such cases, it is vital to sign and return it by the due date.

Have questions? Call NSEA at 1-800-742-0047 to speak with your region's organizational specialist.

February is Black History Month

Feb. 1 marks the start of Black History Month, bringing opportunities for critical reflection and honest conversation with our students about our history. Educators may find resources to use in their classrooms that have been curated and vetted by The Library of Congress, National Archives and Records Administration, National Endowment for the Humanities, National Gallery of Art, National Park Service, Smithsonian Institution and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Scan the QR code to find ideas or visit:
bit.ly/BlackHistoryDotGov



**BLACK
HISTORY
MONTH**