

# The VOICE

State Education Association • October 2022

## HELP WANTED

*Members share their insights on staff shortages and why they choose to stay in the classroom.*

*Also inside:*

- Voting Early? Support Candidates Who Support Public Schools
- Burnout vs. Resilience
- Why Don't We Talk About Bruno?





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# Nominate colleagues for top honors

Now is the time to discuss who you or your association might nominate for one of the honors to be given at NSEA’s Delegate Assembly in April. Any NSEA member may nominate a member teacher, Education Support Professional or deserving group. The 2023 Assembly will be held April 28-29 at Lincoln’s Marriott Cornhusker Hotel. 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:** Honors a newspaper, television or radio station for coverage of education issues and promotion of public 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](http://www.nsea.org/DA), with required supporting material mailed to the NSEA.

## 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)

**Correction:** Fremont teacher Mary Trehearn was incorrectly identified as a NSEA member in the September issue. We regret the error.

**On the Cover:** Members share their insights on current staff shortages and why they choose to stay in the classroom on page 7. Pro-public education candidates are on the ballot this election, see the member-selected list, page 12.



# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

JENNI BENSON

## Why Don't We Talk About Bruno?

I live with four of my grandchildren. The two youngest, ages seven and two, love to dance and sing to the movie *Encanto* – especially the “We don’t talk about Bruno” song.

If you haven’t seen the movie, it is worth a watch. The film follows the Madrigals, a Colombian family who serve their town thanks to their magical powers. Behind their powers is a moving story of generational trauma and the power of familial love.

I enjoyed the movie and especially love watching my grands enjoy it. One day I was contemplating why they “Don’t talk about Bruno.” Bruno was exiled by his family because he was different and was blamed for his family’s misfortunes. An online search asking, “What is the story behind *Encanto*’s Bruno?” turned up this analysis:

*“...topic of neurodiversity. What makes this taboo subject so heartbreaking is not because of who Bruno is, but for the unjust way in which the family viewed his actions and behaviors. The Encanto family kept Bruno at a distance. On the surface level, the song’s title shows the fear of discussing uncomfortable aspects of neurodivergent behaviors, seen with the missing member of the Madrigal family, Bruno... The undertone of the song hints at the real meaning of why the Madrigals do not speak about Bruno; the family truly does not know what to do with the estranged brother.”* ([www.screenrant.com/encanto-movie-dont-talk-bruno-song-meaning-sad](http://www.screenrant.com/encanto-movie-dont-talk-bruno-song-meaning-sad))

This fictional movie reflects real life. How often do we profess to care about the mental health of others, yet our behavior reflects more of a blame

game? Instead of support, we talk about others, we gossip, we blame. We as a nation are still not providing the resources needed to help. Every day we deal with situations that could be improved upon if our overall reaction was more positive, more self-reflective, and less judgmental.

Everyone is living with some challenges, and we all must strive to do better. We must have difficult conversations, even if the outcome may not be what we want.

NSEA collects several thousand educator interest cards a year to survey our educators’ needs. More mental health services for our members and our students is at the top of the list. I ask you to please scan the QR code to the right to provide your input.

NSEA works to provide resources to help our members, students and families. We provide year-round professional development to assist with several topics. This year, our NEA Policy Fellow, Ben Welsch, is working on a wide variety of learning for members to present and participate in. Find the schedule at: <https://www.nsea.org/webinars>

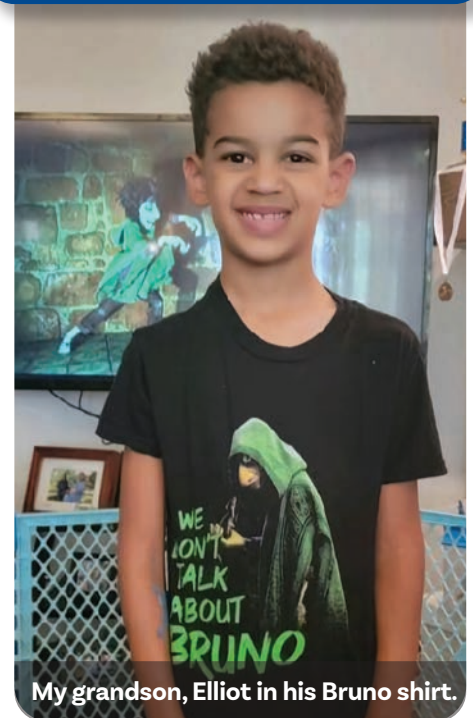
We will also provide dozens of opportunities for learning and fellowship at next year’s NSEA-U on July 17, 18 and 19 in Kearney. Planning is already underway and if you are interested in presenting or know someone who would be a great presenter, please let me know.

We know why the fictional Bruno was not talked about. It is our responsibility to do better by striving to set an example of support and help, not blame.



**Q:** What are the issues of importance and concern for you?

**A:** Complete the Educator Interest survey! Scan this QR Code to begin:



My grandson, Elliot in his Bruno shirt.

## Kearney EA Member Honored with Music Award

Clayton Moyer, a music educator at Kearney Public Schools, was named the Gary Thomas Distinguished Music Alumnus Award in September.

Moyer is a member of the Kearney Education Association and serves as director of choirs at Kearney High School. He directs six choral ensembles and is the music director for the Kearney High School musical theater program.

Under his direction, several KHS choirs have been selected to sing at multiple Nebraska Music Educators Association conferences, have performed at notable venues in Spain, Belgium, France, England, Ireland and Italy, and have received the Nebraska High School Music Academy Outstanding Musical Production award.



**Moyer**

## Nickels receives National Public Service Award

The National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) awarded Maureen Nickels with the 2022 Distinguished Service Award. This national award honors current and former state board members who have made exceptional contributions to education. It is given to three outstanding leaders each year and is the highest award NASBE can bestow on a state board of education member.



**Nickels**

Nickels was elected to the Nebraska State Board of Education in 2014. She served as vice president and then two years as president, leading the board through the pandemic. During her tenure, Nickels chaired committees on educator effectiveness, worked with state leaders on providing compliance flexibility for local schools and districts, and currently chairs the Budget and Finance Committee.

Nickels was an elementary school teacher for 26 years before working as an organizational specialist for the NSEA.

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# Burnout vs. Resilience

by Bob Bednar

The NEA recently unveiled its survey of members' opinions regarding issues in public education and the pandemic. The survey shows that the "massive staff shortages in America's public schools are leaving educators increasingly burned out, with an alarming 55% of educators indicating that they are ready to leave the profession they love earlier than planned."

Even in the best of times, being a public school educator is challenging. Even though we are moving to a data-driven matrix, the true success of our efforts cannot be measured immediately. The process of change in a student is lifelong, with ripple effects in the culture. The emotional demands of caring for the whole student in the context of cultural division and anger take a toll. A passionate mission is required to be an effective educator. The opportunity to move our nation forward, preparing tomorrow's leaders, despite the criticisms, is needed more than ever.

The events of the past two years revealed unprecedented tensions, with public education as a focal point. The long-standing divisions in our nation have come alive in every locality. Presidential and congressional elections, a global pandemic, and economic uncertainty play out in classroom management. Fake news and conspiracy theories are eroding confidence in our institutions, including the value of public education.

Educators work hard to implement a rigorous curriculum, preparing students for a career or advanced educational placement. Training students to demonstrate character and resilience, working together in a positive school climate, are essential during a chaotic time in our nation's history.

Never before has a classroom been so influenced by cultural controversies including health protocols and political campaigns. Should a school have strict health protection guidelines? Should students meet face to face or online? Should parents allow their children to receive a vaccine, much less wear a mask in the classroom? These issues are overshadowed by school shootings and what can be done to maintain school safety. Discussions are full of distrust and agendas.

Educators walk a tightrope of controversial conversations. Discussions can easily trigger polarizing issues that distract from academics or classroom climate. But in a social media world of algorithms that entrench opinion bias, educators can teach fact-finding skills. School culture is built on positive relationships fostering understanding and growth. Educators work and live to develop lifelong learners, not confirmation bias.

Our school culture is complex, demonstrated every day in most classrooms. The consequences of administrative decisions are weighty, with criticisms heavy on all sides. An erosion of public

trust and community support is taking place to no fault of any one factor. A perfect storm of upheaval is happening before our eyes. As divisions become vocal, political candidates take advantage of one side or the other to garner support for a faction of voters, rather than make a genuine effort to unify and move the public forward.

Some pundits suggest public education is trying to meet the needs of everyone while lowering standards for all. But is that accurate? We need to maintain high standards in all areas. If we lower the expectations, we lower the outcome. Educators are public leaders in every community and we must continue to treat all populations with the highest respect, teaching rigorous academic standards and preparing all students for a global economy.

Real-world applications in the academic classroom will help students have confidence that they can make a difference in an ever-changing world. Character and integrity will never go out of style. Employees want to hire the best applicant that is well educated but equally prepared with the soft skills needed. Moral development has always been a part of the classroom environment and it has never been as important as now.

Educators must develop and maintain a perspective that overrides division and controversy. Clear communication, collaboration, and a passion to reach every student are ingredients to a positive perspective that truly makes a difference. The mission of being an effective educator requires zeal and grit like no other time. Support staff, certified and licensed professionals, and administrators must work together to demonstrate what the rest of our culture lacks: unity toward a common goal. There is no better time for educators to be community leaders and role models for our nation. There is no greater investment our nation can make than in our youth.



### About the author:

Bob Bednar is a retired school counselor and lifetime NSEA member. He retired from Pleasanton Public Schools after 46 years in education.



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# HELP WANTED: Public schools, staff grapple with statewide staff shortages

Almost as soon as the 2022-23 school year began so did an alarming number of headlines highlighting the staffing shortages inside Nebraska public schools. A steady decline in educators entering the profession and retirements are two causes for the vacancies—but chronic understaffing, low pay, loss of planning time, and pressure-filled work environments are also key factors driving educators to walk away from the classroom for good.

The focus on the staffing shortages and the layered reasons driving it has spurred a renewed emphasis on the importance of supporting public education and educators. With this support comes an unprecedented opportunity to reshape the profession and the future of public education. The NSEA and its members will no doubt play a role in this future.

### **Not just the Pandemic**

The pandemic contributed to some of the biggest learning challenges the education field has faced but it is not all to blame. Penny Hite, president of the Perkins Education Association,

and many others interviewed for this story have shared that educators have been sounding the alarm for needed changes for years.

“Everybody wants to blame COVID-19 but the challenges we’ve been facing in our classrooms were happening way before the pandemic,” Hite said.

Hite has been an educator for 27 years, teaching history and reading to seventh and eighth-grade students at Perkins County Schools in Grant.

“I think since the pandemic, we’re more hyper-aware of the behavioral challenges, social-emotional obstacles and economic inequities that students are carrying into the classroom. The way we prioritize learning as a society needs to be revamped and completely refocused because it starts in those

crucial 0-5 years of a child’s life,” said Hite. “The expectation is that our public schools will be able to take a child facing challenges at home and match their test scores to a national average. Educators are frustrated because we’re being graded based on data that fail to show the complexity of learning and student achievement.”

Hite said more than ever, public schools and educators are being asked to do more with less.

“Less plan time and with fewer staff. At least once a week I’ll lose my plan time. Morale is slipping fast,” she said. “We have a shortage of teachers, but there are a ton of factors

as to why, and the high expectations placed on educators is on the list.”

### **Learning must go on**

Public educators are tasked with

**“It’s not about being flexible anymore. It’s about survival. You do what you have to do to survive in the classroom”**

**— Penny Hite,  
President, Perkins  
Education Association**

servicing every student and—understaffed or not—learning must go on. Carrie George is a member of the Papillion-LaVista Education Association and a special education teacher at Hickory Hill Elementary School. As a 20-year special education teacher, George understands that support provided by special education paraprofessionals is an invaluable tool for her students. She notes that with only 1.5 vacant para spots in her building, her team has fared far better than other districts. Still, she is hard on herself for wishing she could do more.

“We have such a high standard as teachers. So, we feel like if we are not doing the best that we know we can be doing, that we’re missing that mark,” George said. “Paras work one-on-one with students or with small groups, and we know that every minute we have with our students matters. If we miss a step along the way, it’s hard to recoup that time and thus the learning process takes a little bit longer for that student.”

Many of the workarounds needed for class coverage amid the shortages have been creative, but not ideal. For example, when Alliance Public Schools was unable to hire for some of its openings, administrators recruited heavily from Chadron State College. With two level two special education positions open, the school is making do with two student teachers filling the gaps.

“I think the plan is to hire them full-time in January, but I know we’re going to have to fill those positions

with substitute teachers when they go on to do the other half of their student teaching,” explained Alliance Education Association President Shannon Kinsella. “Right now, the other SPED teachers are having to split the caseload of IEPs which has put a great deal of stress on them.”

According to data collected by the Nebraska Department of Education, special education is the top trending shortage area statewide. Perkins County Schools have been unable to

replace a special education teacher position and the vacancy has had a ripple effect on other educators at the school.

“Right now, we have a first-grade teacher who is teaching SPED part-time in the afternoons to try to cover those kids,” Hite said. “That leaves the other first-grade teacher to take all those students in the afternoon, creating a large classroom. In our second grade program alone, we have two brand new teachers—one who is still getting a provisional license. It’s not about being flexible anymore. It’s about survival. You do what you have to do to survive in the classroom.”

### Trying hard to recruit

Finding enough teachers, bus drivers and paras in a tight job market means that districts aren’t only competing against other districts—they’re also up against private businesses.

“I know that our district is working very hard to recruit teachers and paras,” George said. “They just approved an increase in para pay.”

“Our district has been avidly—and I mean avidly—looking to hire teachers for the past two years,” Hite said.

“Just this last spring, our district had some new hires committed to coming here and then in June we found out they weren’t coming.”

The cooling housing market kept the new hires from selling their home and moving to Nebraska, but rural areas have always been a hard sell, Hite explained.

“It’s just very difficult to find teachers for rural areas like Grant. Finding housing is difficult here too,” she said.

Finding qualified applicants to fill vacancies has caused many districts to



get competitive with their hiring practices, such as offering hiring bonuses. But providing incentives to recruit teachers without incentives to retain our current educators is insufficient to address the teacher shortage crisis.

“The hiring incentives are great for teachers coming in. I think that’s great, but what about the teachers who have been in the trenches for 20 or 30 years? What are their incentives to stay?” asked Hite. “I have stayed for only one reason and that’s for our kids. I tell them that every day ‘I’m here because of you.’”

### Working for you

The NSEA Government Relations team has been preparing for the 2023 Legislative session. The Nebraska Legislature plays a significant role in all things involving public education and education employees. From funding to curriculum, decisions made in the Nebraska Legislature can determine what public school employees can do and what and how students learn.

“Individual educators should not feel like they alone are expected to do the heavy lifting of systemic change,” said NSEA President Jenni Benson. “The NSEA has been working on behalf of all in public education since 1867 and we have no intention of slowing down. Change will not happen overnight but rest assured NSEA continues to help members and work for broader change in the state.”

**“I know that our district is working very hard to recruit teachers and to recruit paras”**

— Carrie George,  
Papillian-LaVista  
Education Association



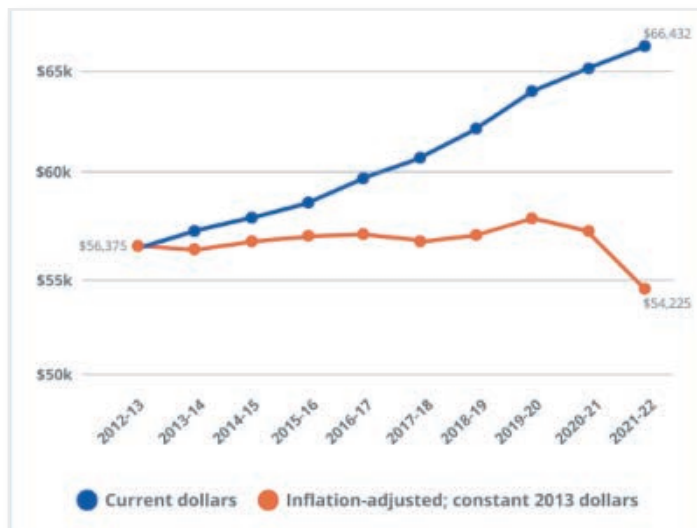
# Rankings & Estimates

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 On April 26, the National Education Association released new data on teacher salaries. The reports find that the instability brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and high inflation has stalled the progress made possible by the #RedForEd movement in 2018-19.
- 2 Nationally, the average teacher salary is estimated to be \$66,397 for the 2021-2022 school year. Adjusted for inflation, teachers are bringing home on average \$2,150 less per year than they did a decade ago.
- 3 Preventing a mass educator exodus from the profession, says NEA President Becky Pringle, requires an increase in pay across the board.

## The Decline in National Average Teacher Pay

Teachers make on average \$2,150 less than they did 10 years ago, adjusted for inflation.



Source: Rankings & Estimates, NEA Research, June 2022

## Change in Starting Teacher Salary Compared to Inflation

After nearly catching up, starting teacher salaries adjusted for inflation sunk to its lowest level since the Great Recession.

Source: State Teacher Salary Benchmark Data, FY 2020-21, NEA CBMA, April 2022.



# NEBRASKA

AVERAGE TEACHER STARTING SALARY

**\$36,491<sup>1</sup>**

**#47**

IN THE NATION

AVERAGE TEACHER SALARY

**\$56,463<sup>2</sup>**

**#31**

IN THE NATION

TEACHER PAY GAP

**79¢<sup>3</sup>**

MIN. LIVING WAGE

**\$52,132<sup>4</sup>**

AVERAGE ESP EARNINGS

**\$32,614<sup>5</sup>**

**#32**

IN THE NATION

PER STUDENT SPENDING

**\$13,133<sup>6</sup>**

**#26**

IN THE NATION

AVERAGE HIGHER ED FACULTY SALARY

**\$87,241<sup>7</sup>**

**#32**

IN THE NATION

1. State Teacher Salary Benchmark Data, FY 2020-21, NEA CBMA, April 2022

2. State Rankings, FY 2020-21, NEA Research

3. Compared to other college-educated professionals with similar experience. Economic Policy Institute, August 2022

4. Income needed for family of one adult and one child to have a modest but adequate standard of living in the most affordable metro area, 2020 dollars, Economic Policy Institute

5. Average ESP Earnings, FY 2020-21, NEA Research

6. Expenditure per student in fall enrollment. State Rankings, FY 2020-21, NEA Research

7. Average Faculty Salary for Four-Year Public Institutions, FY 2020-21, NEA Research



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In fact, all but three school districts in Nebraska participate in EHA.

## A Long History

NSEA members at the Association's 1941 Delegate Assembly directed the formation of local hospitalization groups. By 1959, more than 200 Nebraska school districts were using an NSEA-endorsed plan with health insurance coverage provided by Blue Cross and Blue Shield.

That relationship further evolved in the 1990s and culminated in the formation of the Educators Health Alliance in the late 1990s.

Today, the EHA Board of Directors manages the Blue Cross plan for more than 250 Nebraska school districts and education organizations, setting rates, coverage and deciding other aspects of the health care plan for nearly 90,000 lives. The EHA board also bids the plan on a regular basis.

The EHA Board includes six

NSEA representatives and three each from the Nebraska Association of School Boards and the Nebraska Council of School Administrators.

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# 2022 General Election Preview

## NEBRASKA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION



**RAIKES**

**5**



**HELZER**

**6**



**STEVENS**

**7**



**NEARY**

**8**

## PUBLIC EDUCATION CANDIDATES



**SEN. PANSING-BROOKS**



**SEN. VARGAS**



**SEN. BLOOD**



**SEN. WILLIAMS**



**SLATTERY**



**MAXWELL-OSTDIEK**



**SEN. CAVANAUGH**



**SEN. HUNT**



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**SEN. BRANDT**



**LAURITSEN**



**BOWERS**



## NEBRASKA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

### District 5 Helen Raikes

Raikes retired from UNL as an early childhood education professor in 2020. She is a past policy fellow for the Society for Research in Child Development and served with the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services in the mid-1990s. She pledges to protect our schools in rural communities and stand up for local control to ensure quality, transparent education for all children.

### District 6 Danielle Helzer

Helzer is a Nebraska native and former educator with experience teaching students in Grant, Ogallala, Gretna and Omaha. Helzer currently works in the nonprofit sector. She pledges to be a strong advocate for public education by supporting teachers, prioritizing the needs of students and by working with families and communities.

### District 7 Robin Stevens

Stevens spent 40 years as a professional educator. He served Nebraskans as a teacher, coach and administrator, including the last 13 years as superintendent of the Schuyler Public Schools. He supports mentoring programs for new teachers, due process, and balanced funding sources for K-12 schools.

### District 8 Deb Neary

Neary is a strong advocate for students, public schools and educators. She believes addressing the teacher shortage is an urgent need and could be helped by offering alternatives to the basic skills test required to enter teacher-prep programs. She has worked as executive director for the Midlands Mentoring Partnership and on education policy for 25 years.

**All candidates were interviewed by NSEA members and earned the recommendation because of their support of public education. The General Election is Tuesday, November 8! Please VOTE!**

### GOVERNOR

#### Sen. Carol Blood (D)

Sen. Blood is from a family of educators and has been supportive of teachers and public education as a state senator. Blood is an advocate for early childhood education and has worked closely with the NSEA to develop legislation to improve public education. She has proven to be an effective leader in the legislature, fighting against private school voucher schemes and supporting adequate and equitable state funding for public schools.

“It’s imperative that professionals in our state education system know they are not only appreciated but also compensated. This includes not only pay but also providing services for mental health, physical health and other potential tools that will help to lift our teachers and support staff,” Blood said.

### CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT 1

#### Sen. Patty Pansing-Brooks

Sen. Pansing-Brooks has been a powerful, knowledgeable and effective voice for public education, students and teachers during her legislative career. Her philosophy is that most decisions affecting public education are and should remain at the state and local level. Pansing-Brooks said she will be a partner in supporting schools and educators at the federal

level to provide data collection research and resources for financial aid to ensure equal access to public education.

### CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT 2

#### Senator Tony Vargas (D)

As a state senator, Sen. Vargas has worked to improve educational opportunities for kids and to support educators. Vargas is a former public school science teacher and previously served as a member of the Omaha Board of Education. Vargas believes every child is entitled to quality public education.

“The right to a free, high-quality public education means that our government should fully fund our schools—including increasing teacher pay,” Vargas said. “I have a strong relationship with NSEA – they know my door is always open.”

### BOARD OF REGENTS

#### District 7

#### Sen. Matt Williams

For the last eight years, Williams has served as a state senator from Legislative District 36. He is a well-respected legislator and a graduate of the NU system. Williams said he will be an advocate for students and families seeking high-quality education that is affordable and accessible. The interview team said Williams supports faculty unions and will support academic freedom.

### NEBRASKA LEGISLATURE

#### District 2 Sarah Slattery

Slattery is passionate about helping Nebraska families and young people. She describes herself as a working-class, single mother who has spent her life dedicated to serving her community. She has years of experience working in schools and is currently head of a school lunch program in Plattsmouth. She is campaigning with the slogan #LunchLadyforLegislature. The interview team of NSEA members said Slattery was “approachable, with an unwavering dedication to public schools and teachers.”

#### District 4 Cindy Maxwell-Ostdiek

Maxwell-Ostdiek is a small business owner who believes in sustainably funded, equitable and inclusive public schools. She believes in competitive salaries for teachers and support staff. She will advocate for equitable tax policies that will fund local school districts.

#### District 6 Sen. Machaela Cavanaugh

Cavanaugh has been an ardent supporter of public schools as a state senator. She has held state and local governments accountable for wasteful spending and stood against attempts to divert public school money to

# 2022 General Election Preview

private corporations through various income tax schemes. Cavanaugh previously worked at the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska.

## **District 8** **Sen. Megan Hunt**

Sen. Hunt earned NSEA's support four years ago and has unfailingly supported the needs of Nebraska children and public schools. Hunt advocates for high-quality and well-funded public schools as she believes they are instrumental to the success of all children. Hunt is a human rights champion and fights for equality for everyone who wants to call Nebraska home.

## **District 10** **Sen. Wendy DeBoer**

Sen. DeBoer comes from a long line of teachers and understands quality public education provides opportunities for all kids to be successful. Before she was elected to the legislature, DeBoer taught at the college level for many years. As a state senator, she fights to make schools stronger by providing teachers with the resources they need to be successful and to help every child be successful.

## **District 12** **Robin Richards**

Richards has strong ties to public education. She has worked as a paraprofessional, a music teacher, and has served as a school board member for Ralston Public Schools. Richards vows to fight to increase pay for all public employees by supporting retention payments and increasing pay for education support professionals.

## **District 18** **Michael Young**

The interview team described Young as personable and well-informed on education issues. Young is opposed to school vouchers and believes the conversation should be refocused on equity and wages for our future public educators. Young has served as vice-chair of the Metropolitan Community College of Nebraska for District 2 in Omaha. The interview team wrote that Young, "would be a champion for teachers, paras and students in Nebraska."

## **District 20** **Stu Dornan & John Fredrickson**

Stu Dornan describes himself as an effective advocate for school districts, parents and students. He has served on the Westside Community Schools Board of Education and is currently a member of the Educational Service Unit #3 Board. Dornan seeks to secure additional state funding for public education and to push for more mental health programs for students in need.

John Fredrickson has more than a decade of experience providing mental health counseling services as a social worker. He is adamant that public education is the backbone of a flourishing society and will ensure that public schools, teachers, support staff and administrators have the resources they need to provide our children "a world-class education."

## **District 26** **George Dungan**

Dungan considers education the great equalizer. He supports fully funding K-12 public education and will work to ensure access to higher education for people of all backgrounds. Dungan hopes providing loan repayment programs will help recruit and retain quality teachers to the state. Dungan will oppose any attempt to use taxpayer dollars to fund private schools or charter schools.

## **District 28** **Jane Raybould**

Raybould describes herself as a staunch advocate and supporter of public education. Raybould hopes to reduce the burden of property taxes by fully funding public education. She supports strengthening the teacher quality pipeline by exploring incentives such as tuition reimbursement and student loan repayment assistance. She opposes vouchers and tax credits for K-12 schools and supports making college more affordable for all.

## **District 30** **Sen. Myron Dorn**

Sen. Dorn is an advocate for local control and voted against a bill that would have capped school spending at 2.5% (LB 986). Dorn said Nebraskans strongly support local control with the election of

local candidates for school boards. He believes many Nebraska school districts are doing a good job controlling spending, and said when a district has a high increase in spending, there is generally a reason, such as growth in student population or building maintenance needs.

## **District 31** **Tim Royers**

Royers is the president of the Millard Education Association and has served as the chief negotiator. Royers was the 2016 Nebraska Teacher of the Year. He has taught more than 1,600 students and was named to the Millard Alumni Hall of Fame. Royer's top priorities are to strengthen schools, reform the tax code and retain local talent to support the community. Royers is knowledgeable of the legislative process and testified on several bills.

## **District 32** **Sen. Tom Brandt**

Brandt understands that our children are our greatest asset. Brandt supports adequate funding for public schools to ease the burden on local property taxes. He has worked to increase affordable broadband access in rural areas. He is past chair of the Jefferson County Republican Party.

## **District 36** **Angie Lauritsen**

Lauritsen supports strong K-12 education and will work to ensure public schools are supported. She believes every child should be given the opportunity to be successful and that economic opportunities for Nebraskans begin with quality education. Lauritsen believes all employees should have the right to collectively bargain and that public dollars should be used to support only public schools, not private schools.

## **District 46** **James Michael Bowers**

Bowers is a social worker at Dawes Middle School. He has been an effective Lincoln City Council member and is a NSEA member. He understands a strong educational team helps students to reach their potential and how bad policy can hamper even the most seasoned professionals. If elected, Bowers will work to support public schools by fully funding the state aid formula.





# Conversations on RACE & BELONGING



Palma Strand



Michele Chang

## Tackle Deep Learning through Self-Discovery

*In 2020, following a nationwide racial awakening, those in public education looked inward to build culturally responsive instruction into classrooms. As districts committed to make their schools more equitable and inclusive, NSEA sought experts to help educators navigate the widespread discussions about race and equity. Guided by the expertise of Palma Strand, Professor of Law in Creighton University's Negotiation and Conflict Resolution Program, and Challenging Racism founder Michele Chang, the Conversations on Race and Belonging (CORB) course was created.*

*The program builds a peer cohort and peer-to-peer relationships through conversation and storytelling. The course will again be offered virtually this November. Dates and registration information can be found on page 16.*

*Palma Strand and Michele Chang spoke with The Voice in September. Below are their responses to the questions we posed:*

### ■ What are the key principles of Conversations on Race and Belonging (CORB)?

“We really wanted to spend our time helping people to understand their own place in our history and their relationship to it. We give participants a chance to practice engaging in conversations that were both effective and relational. They can use these skills in relationships whether it's with their students, with their colleagues, sometimes with supervisors, with friends and family,” said Strand.

“Every time we have a new group—even though we're running similar programs—it feels like a different program. The people are different, and the national dialog is different. We come away learning from the program as much as we

hope we help the participants learn and take away.”

### ■ How does the course help educators grow together?

“Educators are coming in with their experiences on what's happening in their classroom and examples of what's happening within their district and community. We use our conversations to help educators respond to that,” Strand explained. “What we really emphasize in these programs is the development of a cohort and a group of peers who share similar vocabulary, have certain kind of basic insights and who are on the journey together.”

“It's tailored for educators. We realized that the program that we were originally working with was a little too long. So, we went back to the drawing board to figure out what it was that educators needed most so we could maximize their effort,” said Chang.

### ■ What kind of time commitment should participants expect?

“The six session program is formatted quite differently. We understand teachers have busy schedules and, because of staffing shortages or losing their plan time to help cover classes, they've really been overburdened,” said Chang. “We're going to try once-a-month meetings over the course of six months. We use a lot of different resources that are very accessible, including podcasts, short essays, short stories, and videos. We employ many resources, but what we're really focused on is relational listening.”

“We have an online classroom for them to be able to continue to talk with one another, do some of the work at their own pace, and then come back once a month to talk with one another,” added Strand.

## ■ How does CORB foster self-discovery?

“We call it a “brave space” not a “safe space” because being in this space requires courage. In this space, we’re going to create a place where people can take that risk and try it out. We want participants to be able to say, ‘Okay, I am going to tell that story that still makes me cringe when I remember it.’ Together we put these experiences in their place and process them. So many of these uncomfortable experiences are pushed down because people are afraid of being zapped. People are afraid of saying something that’s going to hurt somebody else’s feelings or they don’t know how it is going to be received. This ‘brave space’ is where we practice these conversations so they can take the literacy, the vocabulary and the skills and have the confidence to engage in real conversations,” said Strand. “We really emphasize that everybody has their own sphere of influence. And CORB isn’t about changing the world. It’s about what can I do in the places that I operate in and do it in a way that is not going to jeopardize my livelihood.”

“I really think that in terms of the national dialog right now, educators have a sense that they can’t ‘do this’ or they can’t ‘read that.’ All teachers, just like parents, are more interested in learning what it is they can do than what it is that they can’t do,” Chang said. “We’re trying to reframe this so people are allowed to see what is possible rather than what is being restricted.”

# Conversations on RACE & BELONGING

## ■ Where can I sign up for the course?

The six-session course will be held virtually on Sundays, 4:30 - 7 PM CT. It is scheduled to begin November 20, 2022.

**Session dates: Nov. 20, Dec. 11, Jan. 22, 2023, Feb. 26, 2023, March 26, 2023 and April 23, 2023.**

All assignments, including the podcasts and videos, generally run less than one hour.

**What you need:** Sessions include many opportunities to journal or take notes, so be sure to always come to the sessions with pen and paper. The format will include pair shares, small group work and full group work. Since the pandemic hit in 2020, this program moved to a virtual format. While participants may join the Zooms on a smartphone, a computer is encouraged to make shared material more easily visible.

**Registration is online at [www.nsea.org/conversations](http://www.nsea.org/conversations)**

**The deadline to sign up for the six-session course is Friday, Nov. 4.**

# The ARCHWAY

Kearney, Nebraska

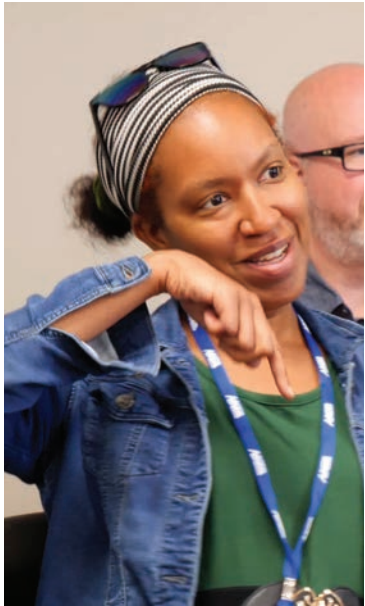
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**SAVE THE DATE**  
**NSEA U 2023**  
**When: July 17-19**  
**Where: Younes**  
**Conference Center**  
**Kearney, Nebraska**

**Never Stop Learning!** NSEA members gather each summer at NSEA U to learn the benefits of membership, skills for negotiations, and resources for educators.

## Tell Us: What Do You Want to Learn?

Planning for the annual NSEA U is underway, and we want to know – what sessions do YOU want to be offered? Scan the code below or go to [www.bit.ly/NSEAUInput](http://www.bit.ly/NSEAUInput) to offer your ideas on session topics and/or presenters. In the coming months a request for proposal (RFP) will be available to begin to structure and organize the final conference agenda.



## Don't want to wait for NSEA U?

Sign Up for Professional Development Opportunities offered sooner!

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

A full slate of sessions is set for 2022-23, with topics ranging from financial essentials to planning a summer vacation. Go to [nsea.org/webinars](http://nsea.org/webinars) for a complete list of sessions.

### NSEA members only

- **Social Media Privacy Settings: Who Can See What?** Thursday, Oct. 6, 7 p.m. Learn the latest in social media privacy.
- **Last Call! Student Debt Management:** Tuesday, Oct. 11, 5:30 p.m. Learn to find forgiveness or cancellation programs you may qualify for.
- **Planning for online Holiday Shopping and Travel:** Tuesday, Nov. 8, 5:30 p.m. Join NEA Member Benefits to learn how you can save on hotels, car rentals and flights through your membership.

### Present or be a mentor

NSEA is looking for members who would like to share their ideas and skills. If you are interested in leading a webinar, contact Jason Wiese at [jason.wiese@nsea.org](mailto:jason.wiese@nsea.org).

NSEA also is always seeking mentors and mentees in the classroom. For more information and to fill out an application, visit [www.nsea.org/mentor](http://www.nsea.org/mentor).

# Support and Retention Through Growth and Goals

S.E.E.D

*“When teachers stop learning, so do students.”*

*- Jim Knight, University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning*

## 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

Nebraska educators have successfully performed above and beyond their traditional duties during and since the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to substitute shortages, position vacancies, and a shortage of classified and support staff districts experience, evolving issues like student attendance, behaviors, and academic challenges continue to be significant concerns. Recognizing these challenges is important.

Through the numerous interactions and engagement the S.E.E.D. Team has had with educators across the state, it is evident there is a level of frustration from teachers who are working in situations where traditionally successful approaches no longer work. In this time when employees' top reason for resigning a job between April 2021 and April 2022 was “a lack of career development and advancement” (McKinsey & Company), the S.E.E.D. Team's work with educator effectiveness will help support the instructional and collaborative innovation needed for success in both the classroom and teacher professional development.

Educators who effectively utilize formative assessment in their classrooms engage students in activities, glean data (formal or informal) from individual student responses, and use that data to adapt their instruction. Skilled educators do this almost instinctively and, through this process, educators and their students are capable of monitoring each student's individual strengths and needs. Often overlooked, however, is that just as educators engage in the formative learning process with their students, so too must they be given opportunities to engage in formative learning themselves to develop, learn, and grow their own knowledge, career development, and skill set. Prioritizing and systematically supporting an environment where the professional development of educators not only improves the quality of education delivered but can be an effective tool in retaining top talent is a cornerstone to the success of an education system.

Important to the formative learning process – both for students and educators – is the goal-setting process. Many school systems are intentionally providing educators with more autonomy in setting goals related to their professional development than before the pandemic. One important, often overlooked component, however, is that before someone can set goals for themselves, they need to see and understand the full scope of their options for how to achieve those goals (Butler, 2019). The Nebraska Teacher Principal Performance Standards (NTPPS) are written to assist teachers in guiding their development within its framework of Planning and Preparation, the Learning Environment, Instructional Strategies, Assessment, and Professionalism. NTPPS-aligned Rubrics provide these necessary options to assist educators by describing highly effective teaching and leading. Utilizing these rubrics to determine how to overcome barriers provides the roadmap to goals and allows educators to monitor their own individual strengths and needs – the process of formative learning.

Effective leaders engage staff in a vision that allows individuals to seek out areas of growth and development. To achieve meaningful professional development, however it looks for individuals, educators must have the tools and knowledge and be able to demonstrate the ability to apply this knowledge and assess their progress to mark growth. This is where educator professional development and student achievement intersect - students benefit from educators who develop their skills and knowledge.

The NDE and its partners are committed to leading and supporting all Nebraskans in learning, earning, and living. The S.E.E.D. team's work and the NTPPS demonstrate the dedication to leading and supporting the necessary shifts toward teacher voice, efficacy, and leadership. The NTPPS and NTPPS-aligned Rubrics can be found at [www.education.ne.gov/educatoreffectiveness](http://www.education.ne.gov/educatoreffectiveness)



# NSEA Children's Fund helps students thrive



Where there is a child in need, there is likely a teacher willing to help by opening his wallet or her purse.

NSEA members see children who are under-dressed in cold weather; students who eat well only when school is in session; and students who can't see the front of the room clearly because they receive no regular vision care.

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.

## Locals, businesses contribute

Contributions to the NSEA Children's Fund come from teachers and businesses across the state. 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 who needed 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](https://nsea.org/childrensfund).**



## Buying and Selling Your Vehicle is Easy with the NEA Auto Buying Program

Visit [www.neamb.com/AutoBuying](https://www.neamb.com/AutoBuying) to shop for and sell your vehicle.

- **Used Cars:** View used car price ratings so you can recognize a great, fair or high price. Plus, get up to \$2,000 in post-sale benefits when you report your purchase.
- **New Cars:** Search and compare what others paid for the new car you want, and get an upfront member price offer online.
- **Sell Your Car:** Take advantage of high used vehicle values and see what your car's worth. Cash out or trade in for your next car.



## A win for your team

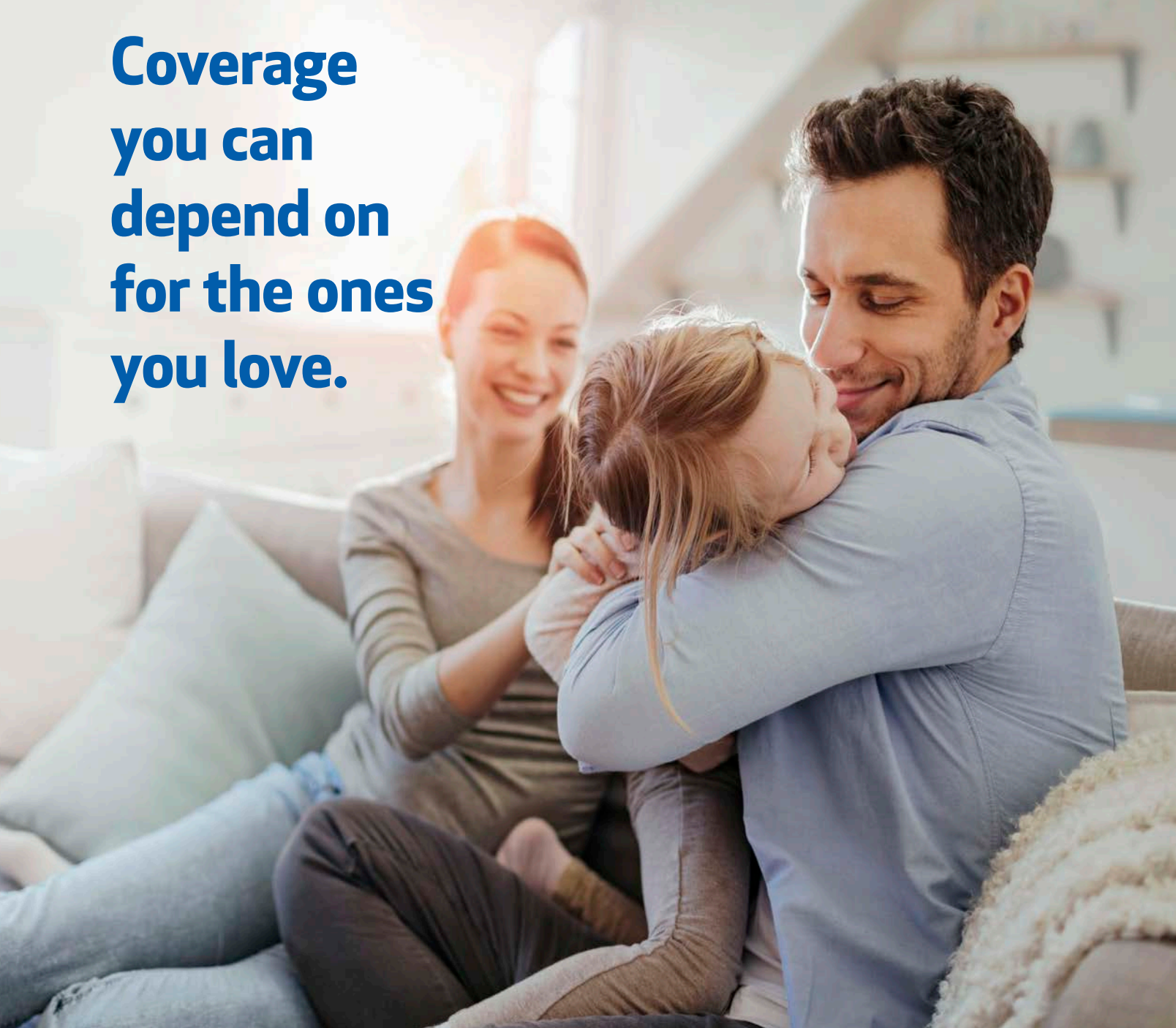
Give your athletes a chance at an upgrade with a Thomas R. Brown Athletics Grant. Apply to receive \$1,000 for your middle or high school's team.

The California Casualty Thomas R. Brown Athletics Grant was established to provide support to public school sports programs affected by reduced budgets.

As an employee of the school and a member of a participating education association, you can apply for a grant award for your school's sports program.

Visit [CalCasAthletics.com](https://CalCasAthletics.com) for application deadlines and grant eligibility.

# Coverage you can depend on for the ones you love.



As an eligible NEA member,\* you've got the protection of **NEA Complimentary Life Insurance**, issued by **The Prudential Insurance Company of America** — but you should name a beneficiary to make sure your loved ones are covered. Go to [neamb.com/free-tote](https://neamb.com/free-tote) and register your beneficiary to get this **FREE** tote. Or call **1-855-NEA-LIFE (632-5433)** and mention offer code: TOTE BAG

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TRISH GUINAN

# Message from the Executive Director

“  
**Together we can work as a team to solve problems and improve our lives and the lives of our students.**  
”

## Words are Powerful

Educating students is hard work – and so is parenting. In my role as Executive Director, I lean on my experiences as both a parent and a former educator to help guide decisions within the Association. Recently I was made aware of a screening of the film, “Mind Polluters” in Hartington.

I’m very familiar with the Hartington community. I spent time there when I represented the Northeast Unit as an organizational specialist. Of the 48 locals of that unit, Hartington was one of the most staunch, pro-education communities I had the pleasure of working with. Knowing that “Mind Polluters” is riddled with false and misleading information that is meant to erode trust in and respect for teachers, I knew the Hartington community would push back and rally behind their schools. I have a great deal of faith in Nebraska’s commitment to our public schools, teachers and the students who attend those schools, but I also know that words are powerful. The more the rhetoric from this vocal minority goes unchallenged, the more power these falsehoods hold.

I was told that parents, NSEA members as well as school administrators attended the event and used their organizational strength to drive the conversation back to the real issues. The truth is that educators and parents are more alike than we are different.

## Our Responsibility

Educators and parents have a shared responsibility to help students learn, grow and respect others. A recent National Education Association survey shows that the vast majority of voters share the same concerns about public education as our members. These concerns include a lack of mental health supports for students, the educator shortage, school safety, and more.

## Avenues to Address Concerns

Parents care deeply about their children and how they’re doing in school, and most often parents are reasonable, respectful, and cooperative when communicating with teachers. It’s okay that not everybody always agrees. As educators, we try to approach every conversation with parents by reminding them that we all share a common goal: to help students succeed in school. Opposition and respect can coexist. Keeping an open dialogue when addressing concerns will help let parents know you are both working together in the best interest of the child.

Even with the best intentions, problems can still arise. Know that NSEA and your local association are here to help guide you.

## R-E-S-P-E-C-T

Respect must be both taught and learned. When the adults in a child’s life disrespect educators—publicly or at home—kids hear that. Sometimes they repeat it and sometimes it leads to behavior issues within our classrooms. Remember, the respect adults share provides a model for children and students. Educators also have a duty to model the respectful behavior they expect from their students.

## We’re a Team

Together we can work as a team to solve problems and improve our lives and the lives of our students. Parents are waiting for the fully-staffed and fully-funded public education system that their students deserve. Our educators are also waiting for the compensation, plan time and respect they need to be successful. If everyone just waits—nothing changes. Nebraska public schools need the active and vocal support of lawmakers, communities, parents and even students to be successful.



## Register for the October Conference

Fun and learning will be the focus of the in-person NSEA-Retired fall conference on Tuesday, Oct. 18, at the Ramada Inn, 2503 South Locust, in Grand Island.

Registration runs from 8:15 to 9 a.m. followed by a welcome and refreshments.

There will be three morning breakout sessions to choose from:

- Biking Across the U.S., Jude and Bill Lammert
- CASA (Court-Appointed Special Advocate), Erin Howe, CASA Grand Island
- SHIIP (Senior Health Insurance Information Program), Ann Kroeger, SHIIP representative.

The afternoon breakout sessions will include:

- Safety in Numbers: 4 Lessons in Cyber Security, Ryan Sothan, Outreach Coordinator Neb. Attorney General's Office.



Former LEA President Rita Bennett with Pat Etherton.

NSEA-Retired board members will supply items for a silent auction, with proceeds benefiting the NEA Fund for Children and Public Education.

The event is free for NSEA-Retired members. The fee for each additional guests is \$10.

Attendees are also invited to a reception the evening prior, Oct. 17, at 7 p.m. at the Ramada Inn.

Registration will be available online at [www.nsea.org/retired](http://www.nsea.org/retired) — select Calendar, Events and Registration.

For questions or assistance, contact De Tonack, at [dtonack@neb.rr.com](mailto:dtonack@neb.rr.com). Register by Sunday, Oct. 11.



NSEA-Retired Member Sheri Paden holds a donated sign.

## Come and Get It!

For the second year, Lincoln Education Association-Retired hosted a “Come and Get It” event for teachers new to Lincoln Public Schools. Sheri Paden, LEA-Retired, and other members helped arrange the event.

Volunteers sorted the donated items that ranged from tissues, pens, markers, bulletin boards, games, puzzles, books and much more! Donations were received from LEA-Retired members, NSEA-Retired, a local teacher honorary as well as items remaining from an earlier, similar event held in Omaha.

# Blue Cross Blue Shield of Nebraska FALL SEMINARS

NSEA-Retired has partnered with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Nebraska to host seminars in October and November to provide information about Medicare and the Educators' Medicare Supplement.

The Educators' Medicare Supplement is available to those sliding over from an EHA plan as well as NSEA-Retired members and spouses. Seminar dates and places are listed in the chart (right). Visit [Nebraskablue.com/NSEASeminars](http://Nebraskablue.com/NSEASeminars) to register for in-person or online events at least one week prior to the date you plan to attend. Although there is no cost, registration is required and a valid email address is needed.

After the conclusion of the seminar, a copy of the webinars will be available at [www.chaplan.org/retiree-info](http://www.chaplan.org/retiree-info) and [www.nsea.org/retired](http://www.nsea.org/retired) selecting Retirement & Insurance.

### In-Person Sessions

Morning sessions: 9:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. (check in at 9 a.m.)  
Afternoon sessions: 1:30 p.m. – 3 p.m. (check in at 1 p.m.)

<b>Kearney</b>	Thursday, Oct. 27 Educational Service Unit 10 – Room B, (76 Plaza Boulevard, Kearney)
<b>Lincoln</b>	Tuesday, Nov. 1 Jack J. Huck Continuing Education Center – Rooms 303 and 304, (301 South 68th Street Place)
<b>Norfolk</b>	Friday, Nov. 4 Northeast Community College – Lifelong Learning Center, Suites F and G, (801 East Benjamin Avenue)
<b>Omaha</b>	Thursday, Nov. 10 Omaha Public Schools Teacher Administrative Center Tac – Board Room, (3215 Cuming Street)

### Webinars:

- Tuesday, Oct. 25, 2 to 3 p.m.
- Monday, Nov. 7, 2 p.m. to 3 p.m.
- Thursday, Nov. 3, 9 a.m. to 10 a.m.
- Wednesday, Nov. 9, 9 a.m. to 10 a.m.



## Representation Matters

“I pledge my head to clearer thinking, my heart to greater loyalty, my hands to larger service, and my health to better living.” This is how the 4-H Pledge begins.

For a young Dan Witte, the subtext went something like “...and my summers to getting out of working on the family farm.”

In order to accomplish that goal, Dan took a job as a counselor at the Nebraska State 4-H Camp in Halsey, a three-hour drive north from his hometown of Cambridge, NE. And it was there, working as a camp counselor, that Dan realized his love for helping young people.

“I got hooked working with kids, feeding off their energy, having fun leading them in activities, being a person someone relies on,” Witte explained.

The passion for helping young people that Dan first realized as a camp counselor eventually, like so many teachers, led him to the classroom.

Today, Witte teaches Contemporary Communications and Publications at Schoo Middle School in Lincoln.

Witte’s Twitter bio reads “Nebraska High School Football All-Time Leading Asian-Born Rusher. Preparing students for high school since 2009.” While the latter sentence speaks to his career as a middle school teacher, the former smacks with a profundity scarcely masked within the jocular statement.

Witte’s story is nearly as profound as he is.

“[I was] abandoned at a Busan, South Korea, bus stop when I was around four-days-old,” he explains. “When I was brought into wherever I was brought into, that little piece of umbilical cord was still attached to my belly button. They guessed how old I was by how far along that piece had kind of scabbed over and just counted back a few days to put a date in the record for my birthday.”

At four months of age, he was adopted and brought to the United States, where he spent the next 18 years growing up on a farm in rural Nebraska.

The motto of Witte’s home state of Nebraska is “Equality before the law.” Unfortunately, the state doesn’t always live up to its motto. With the onset of a global pandemic that challenged the world, Witte faced additional struggles in the form of bigotry directed toward Asian-Americans.

“Early on in the pandemic, on a few separate occasions, I had someone walk past me and grumble ‘China virus.’ I’d see the rise in Asian hate crimes and I got really uncomfortable and I worried about my own kids,” he recalls.

Then on March 16, 2021, eight people, six of them Asian, were slain in Atlanta.

“My wife showed me the headline and said, ‘I’m sorry,’” recalls Witte. “I remember going through the next school day thinking about the killings. Why does it make me feel things? Why are people doing this? Are my kids safe? I got to my plan time, sat at my desk, and I broke down. I couldn’t stop myself and I couldn’t understand why I was crying. I was genuinely worried I was going to cry through my next class. When I got home and hugged my wife I started

crying again.”

Through the pain, Witte made the most of what he was experiencing, and his students became the beneficiaries of his newfound realizations.

“That day was a turning point for me,” he recalls. “I started reading books by Korean authors. Embracing and trying foods and trying to learn about different cultures... it was the way I discovered that representation really did matter.”

Ever the educator, Dan ensured that the hurt he experienced personally became a benefit to his students.

“It’s something I started thinking about as I teach in my classroom. To communicate that there are others out there going through the same experiences, that empathize or want to help has gone a long way for me. And my hope is to make sure my students know that too.”

Like so many teachers, Witte’s combatting of the many prejudices that lurk within society doesn’t end with those that impact him directly.

“When I pass students in school that I don’t know, I’ll smile, nod, and say ‘Hello, Student,’ or ‘Hey, Boss,’” he says. “Last school year, a gender non-conforming student stopped me in the halls and said, ‘Hey, I really appreciate that you have a non-binary way to acknowledge everyone. Thanks.’”

“I was floored,” Witte said. “It’s become my constant reminder that words, even the most informal pieces of dialogue, have an impact. If something as small as that is seen and appreciated by a member of a still-marginalized group, sign me up.”

The passion Witte possesses for teaching and the respect he shows his students is evident in all he does, even years later.

“Teaching has always been about relationships and connections for me,” says Witte. “My proudest moments are when I’m out in the world and, I hear ‘Mr. Witte!’ Or when I’m lucky enough to get graduation invites from kids I haven’t taught in five years.”

Not everyone loves middle schoolers, but Witte genuinely enjoys them.

“When people ask me why I teach middle school, I tell them that I find the humor in it. It’s zany, it’s unexpected, no two days are the same, and I relish it all.”



**About the author:** Dr. Mark Gudgel was, like Dan, a 4-H Camp counselor before entering the classroom where he taught for 18 years. He is now an assistant professor of education at the College of Saint Mary.

**Featured educator:** Dan Witte is currently in his fourteenth year of teaching. In his time at Schoo Middle School he has served as the coach for five different sports as well as the activities director. Dan lives in Lincoln with his wife and children.

## Speaking of Education

“When parents and teachers collaborate on behalf of children, they create windows of light for generations that follow.”

— Anonymous/Unknown

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

# What You Need to Know About The New Student-Debt Cancellation Plan

After hearing from educators and other advocates across the country, the U.S. Department of Education announced a bold, life-changing student debt cancellation plan on behalf of 48 million student borrowers in America.

This comes on top of the temporary PSLF waiver, which has delivered \$10 billion in loan forgiveness for public-service workers over the past nine months.

### What the plan does to help educators

Cancels up to \$10,000 in federal student debt for most individuals, including current students.

Cancels up to \$20,000 for Pell Grant recipients.

If you have federal student loans and received a Pell Grant to help finance your undergraduate education,

you are eligible for \$20,000 in debt cancellation, provided you meet the income limits.

Individuals are eligible for this cancellation amount even if you have only received one Pell Grant in any amount. It doesn't matter how much you received in Pell Grants or how many years you received Pell Grants.

Although Pell Grants are only available to help finance an undergraduate program, the \$20,000 in cancellation will apply to both undergraduate and graduate federal loans.

### Eligibility for current students

Current students, such as NSEA Aspiring Educators, are eligible for either debt relief. If you are a dependent student, you will be eligible for relief based on parental income, rather than your own income.

If you have federal student loans and an annual income of less than \$125,000 (\$250,000 for married couples), you are eligible for \$10,000 in debt cancellation.

As many as 232,100 borrowers in Nebraska could qualify for student loan forgiveness under the new program, including an estimated 136,000 borrowers who received Pell grants.

**As of Aug. 2022, the Limited PSLF Waiver is still set to expire on Oct. 31, 2022**

**Apply Today at [studentaid.gov/pslf](https://studentaid.gov/pslf)**



**VOTE BY MAIL**

[www.nsea.org/EarlyVoter](https://www.nsea.org/EarlyVoter)

Nebraska is a “no-excuse” state, meaning any registered voter may request an early-voting (absentee) ballot, and is not required to provide a reason.

You can print an online early-voting application, complete the form, and then mail, fax or scan/take a picture of your application and email it to your county election office. The last day for an early-voting application to be received is 6 p.m. on the second Friday preceding the election.

Find a county-specific form at:  
[www.nsea.org/EarlyVoter](https://www.nsea.org/EarlyVoter)