

The VOICE

Nebraska State Education Association • March 2022



Sharing Your STORY

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THE VOICE

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NEA secretary to speak at April Delegate Assembly

National leadership will join Nebraska educators for the NSEA Delegate Assembly April 22-23.

Noel Candelaria, NEA secretary/treasurer, will give the keynote address during Friday evening's session.

Candelaria is the immediate past president of the Texas State Teachers Association. Prior to his election as TSTA president, Candelaria served three years as TSTA vice president after a distinguished tenure as president of the Ysleta Teachers Association in El Paso, Texas, where he worked as a teacher's aide and special education teacher in the Ysleta Independent School District, teaching subjects ranging from Algebra to World History.

Throughout his career, Candelaria has emphasized the importance of relationships built on trust – in the classroom, the community and the political arena. He believes our public schools should provide every student the best opportunity to fulfill their individual potential.

At the national level, he has worked with the National Teachers Hall of Fame and while acting as the chair of the Memorial to Fallen Educators, legislation was passed to designate the monument as a National Memorial site.

Candelaria has been appointed to be a part of multiple national committees and task forces including the NEA Human and Civil Rights Committee and the NEA Member Benefits Corporation Board.

Getting down to business

The Delegate Assembly is NSEA's annual business meeting. Any members in good standing can seek election to attend and participate. Friday night will include the Call to Order, Candelaria's address, a message from NSEA President Jenni Benson and Executive Director Trish Guinan, and reports from committees.

On Saturday, delegates will consider



Candelaria

proposed changes to Association Bylaws and Resolutions and approve dues for the 2022-23 Association year. They will also vote on an NEA Director. One candidate, Jenny Wood, has filed to serve as the ESP representative; and one candidate, Kristi Rastede, has filed to serve as the Higher Education representative. The filing deadline was Feb. 15. The bylaws state, "if the number of candidates equals the number of positions they are elected." Both candidates will be declared officially elected at Delegate Assembly. Awards honoring members and friends of public education also will be given on Saturday.

Any candidate wishing to have campaign material included in the DA materials must submit that request to Executive Director Trish Guinan by 11:59 p.m. on March 8. Send to trish.guinan@nsea.org.

Proposed Bylaw changes also must be submitted by March 8 and will be published online 30 days prior to DA, as well as in the April *Voice*. Proposed Resolutions and New Business Items are due by April 8. These may be submitted online at www.nsea.org/da.

On the Cover: NSEA EMAC Representative Christina Running Hawk Ellison testified in support of a bill that would add the Holocaust and other acts of genocide to Nebraska's existing multicultural education curriculum. Read more on page 7.

Inclusion is opportunity for all



NSEA
President
Jenni Benson

March always reminds me of my dear friend Francetta, who has been gone a few years now. Francetta was all about the Luck of the Irish. She loved all things shamrock and green. I met her when I started teaching Special Education at Huntington Elementary in Lincoln in 1994.

I was teaching students with serious behavior, learning, and mental health needs. I had many students who were with me all day. We were moving from a mainstreaming to a more inclusive environment. Special Education services were evolving as they always do.

I very distinctly remember meeting my new colleagues at a staff training the day before school started. I met Francetta there and she handed me a folder labeled Special Education Inclusion and said, “The only thing that likes change is a wet baby.” I was a bit surprised by that. Teaching for me was all about change. Adjust and modify. Differentiate the curriculum to meet my students’ needs. However, I understood inclusive practices were definitely a big change at the time.

Serious conversation

It took a bit of time for Francetta and I to become friends. I remember a very serious conversation about how we could work together to meet the needs of all students. I decided I would talk to her using the Irish Blessing, “May your troubles be less, your blessings be more, and nothing but happiness come through your door.” It wasn’t about being lucky or unlucky, it was about meeting ALL students where they were and moving forward.

We talked about our students’ unique learning needs. For some, their troubles were many and their blessings were few. Francetta and I learned a great deal about each other that day. Moving forward, we worked together to meet the needs of our students. Building a more inclusive learning environment was a big part of our journey together.

Valuing all students

The past couple of years have brought extreme change. Inclusive learning environments are under attack. ALL students should be included and valued. Curriculum should be inclusive. The definition of inclusion is “The practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as those who have physical or intellectual disabilities and members of other minority groups.”



Francetta gave me these shamrocks nearly 20 years ago and they are still blooming and thriving today.

This legislative session brings several bills that are aimed at undermining inclusion. It is important to ALL students that we pay attention to the bills proposed about truth in education, censorship, transparency, and more. Below are a few of the bills we are watching this session:

LB1077 is a classroom censorship bill that prohibits public schools, public postsecondary institutions, and governmental entities from training or teaching certain concepts relating to race and sex and provides for withholding of state funds.

LB1158 changes provisions relating to parental involvement in and access to learning materials in schools and provides for withholding of funding from school districts.

LB1213 provides powers and duties for school districts, schools, and the Nebraska Library Commission relating to obscenity and access to materials obscene as to minors or harmful as to minors through digital or online resources provided to students.

LB768 changes the provisions related to health education and prevents the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) from developing, approving, distributing, adopting, or promulgating any academic content standards for any subject other than reading, writing, mathematics, science, or social studies.

“
Inclusive learning is under attack. All students should be included and valued. Curriculum should be inclusive.
”



With courage: Christa McAuliffe's memory is honored each year with the McAuliffe Award for Courage and Excellence in Education. (Photo courtesy NASA)

Nominate a courageous teacher for McAuliffe Award

Christa McAuliffe sought to remind the entire nation of the importance of education and take students all over the country on the "ultimate field trip" to outer space.

McAuliffe and six others died in the 1986 explosion of the Challenger Space Shuttle. She was the first teacher in space. Her courage was evident in her willingness to board the shuttle and in her fierce defense of what and how she would teach from space.

To honor her courage and her memory, Dr. Gregg Wright, associate professor at UNL's Center on Children, Family and the Law, established the Nebraska McAuliffe Prize for Courage and Excellence in Education in 1986 in conjunction with the University of Nebraska Foundation.

The annual prize honors one courageous Nebraska K-12 teacher with a \$1,000 prize and plaque. This prize is different from other "Teacher of the Year" awards.

"Rewarding courage selects out a slightly different kind of teacher," Wright said.

Courage can be displayed in many different ways, but the common denominator among all the prizewinners is the lasting and positive effect they have had on their students and peers.

The winning teacher will be announced at Administrator Days in July.

Nominations are due by Friday, April 15. Supporting materials must be submitted by Sunday, May 15.

Nominations must include:

■ A letter of nomination that addresses how the teacher exemplifies the characteristics of Ms. McAuliffe – courage, commitment to excellence,

creativity and ability to inspire (limit two pages);

■ A resume of the nominee's professional experience and education. The nominee should participate in preparing this resume (limit two pages);

■ A statement from the nominee of their philosophy of education and the way in which the nominee exemplifies courage, commitment to excellence, creativity and ability to inspire (limit four pages); and

■ At least three letters of support from students, parents, administrators, fellow teachers and community members.

For more information or to submit a nomination, go to cehs.unl.edu/courage/nominate-teacher.



Share your skills with a presentation at NSEA University

Do you know a little something about education? Are you willing to share your insights with colleagues? If so, NSEA wants YOU to present a breakout session at NSEA University.

NSEA U is a three-day, members-only professional development conference planned for July 12-14 at Nebraska Innovation Campus in Lincoln. It features guest speakers and breakout sessions to help educators grow professionally while relaxing and networking.

If you have a proposal for a professional development session that would be useful to other Association members, submit your proposal at www.bit.ly/NSEAU22-RFP.

Questions? Contact Michelle Raphael at (800) 742-0047 or email her at michelle.raaphael@nsea.org.

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Schools provide 'kindling' for COVID outbreaks

Health experts urge vaccinations for students

Schools provide the “kindling” for viral outbreaks, and the Omicron variant has students becoming infected at higher rates, making it essential that more kids get vaccinated for COVID-19, according to health experts who participated in a Jan. 30 webinar sponsored by the Commissioner of Education, the Nebraska Council of School Administrators and the NSEA.

Only 20.7% of children 5-11 years old and 51.9% of youths 12-19 in Nebraska have been fully vaccinated so far, or about 119,719 total.

Those numbers “haven’t shown much growth in the past few weeks,” said Dr. Gwenn Skar, a pediatric infectious disease physician at Children’s Hospital in Omaha. “I love that we have this many kids vaccinated but we really have a lot of work to do.”

At the beginning of the pandemic, only 2.6% of all cases involved children, but that figure has risen to 25.5% of all cases now, she added.

Dr. Skar was joined by Dr. James Lawler, Co-director of the Global Center for Health Security at the University of Nebraska Medical Center for the COVID-19 update for school officials.

Lawler said that schools act as the “kindling” for community outbreaks of COVID and flu because students get more and longer exposure to respiratory infections in crowded school buses and classrooms. Lawler said a major “myth” about kids and COVID is that few get infected.

“That only appears to be true because we’re not looking,” he said.

Children, Lawler said, are tested at a much lower rate than adults in the United States, so the true infection numbers don’t show up.

Infections rising faster among children

Blood tests for antibodies against the COVID-19 virus show that infections among children are more common than with other age groups, he said.

In August 2020, 8% of children 17 or younger showed evidence they had been infected, based on the presence of antibodies in their blood. By December 2021, that figure had risen to 45%, Lawler said. That compares with 36% of adults ages 18-49 showing evidence of infection and less than 20% of those 65 and over.

“The only explanation for this is that children are getting

infected at a higher rate than anyone else,” Lawler said.

He doesn’t agree with some observers who are saying the current wave of infections caused by the Omicron variant might portend the end of the pandemic. Lawler said he doesn’t see evidence the virus has “exhausted all of its opportunities to create new variants.”

Communities that aren’t well-vaccinated provide the opportunity for the virus to mutate and launch a new wave of infections, Lawler said. That means it’s a “safer bet” that new variants will arise until the population is fully vaccinated at rates of 80% or higher.

Important information that was also shared includes:

Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C) is a dangerous side effect that can show up two to six weeks after a child is infected. It shows up in about 1 of every 3,200 infections, Skar said. The syndrome can cause damage to internal organs, including the

heart, liver and kidney. Children’s Hospital has treated over 100 children for the syndrome since the pandemic started, she said.

Heart problems such as pericarditis among children is “very, very rare,” involving approximately 54 cases per million, mainly involving 16- and 17-year-old males.

A study in Georgia found that schools that didn’t have mask requirements were 3.5 times more likely to have COVID outbreaks.

**Vaccination works for children:
Children are 93% less likely to be hospitalized for COVID-19 if vaccinated.**



In December, when vaccinations became available for children, a “Max the Vax” program was launched to educate parents.

Visit: www.MaxtheVaxNE.org





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NSEA EMAC Representative Christina Running Hawk Ellison testified in favor of redefining multicultural education for school districts.

Honesty, empathy and sensitivity

NSEA members support proposal to help students 'feel worthy, not erased'

LB888 would add Holocaust review to multicultural education

When Christina Ellison graduated from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 2002, she donned a plume on her graduation cap. The sleek eagle feather is a Native American regalia piece that can be given in honor of an achievement. At the time, it was the second plume awarded to Ellison. She had received her first plume for her high school graduation. Ellison said, back then, she had made the decision not to attach the plume to her high school graduation cap.

"It wasn't that I wasn't allowed," Ellison explained. "It was more that I felt like I would be shamed for attaching it to my cap."

Ellison is the American Indian/Alaskan Native Representative for the Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee for NSEA and an ancient civilizations teacher at Millard Public Schools. She was born and raised in Grand Island to a white mother and a Native father.

Outwardly expressing her Oglala Lakota Sioux roots was sometimes influenced by the environment she was raised in. As Ellison explains it, she grew up in two completely different worlds. Her father's family is from

the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota but her life in central Nebraska was far from the cultural protections of her tribe.

"I was raised in a dominantly white society," said Ellison. "There were no Native Americans in the town I grew up in. When I was in college, of course, it felt completely different. I felt empowered by wearing this piece of regalia."

Ellison said when she was growing up, many of her educators loved her native roots and some even inspired her to be a teacher, but she will always remember being mocked by one, too.

"One made fun of my last name: Running Hawk," she said.

The right to regalia

Nationally – and in Nebraska – Native American educators and students are working to secure their right to display cultural pride and heritage at high school graduation ceremonies. In January, Ellison and NEA Director for Nebraska Tracy Hartman-Bradley testified before the Legislature's Education Committee in support of LB872. The bill would allow for public and private school students to wear tribal regalia garments.

"Our students should have the ability to preserve their self-identity;

feel worthy, not erased. A feather, a sash, a beaded cap that was designed out of dignity. As they aim to earn Honor Cords and a Graduation Medallion, they should be allowed to wear the one that presents the victory over the attempt of cultural genocide," Ellison testified. "I would've loved to have had the opportunity to wear the feather I received at my high school graduation on my cap, maybe that visual would have brought internal awareness and sent forth questions to that teacher."

How students learn

Ellison has also had a hand in shaping the way Nebraska students learn about Native American history. When Nebraska's Social Studies Standards were revised and approved in 2019, Ellison was involved in rewriting strands of Native American history. Since then, Ellison believes America has made great strides in changing the way Native American history is recognized, including the proclamation of Indigenous People's Day, the completion of a South Omaha Mural Project, and the appointment of Deb Haaland as the first Native American U.S. Department of Interior Secretary.

Still, Ellison believes the way

Nebraska students learn about Indigenous history needs to be adapted to modern classrooms. On February 15, Ellison testified in support of LB888. Introduced by Sen. Jen Day, the bill would add the Holocaust and other acts of genocide to Nebraska's existing multicultural education curriculum.

"We don't use textbooks anymore. The kids don't carry them around anymore. We have moved away from all of this," Ellison explained. "There could be a multicultural course on the harsh human relation acts in our shared history that ends in a service-learning project within the community. The objective being to teach empathy and sensitivity to all races."

Six powerful words

In her 11 years as an educator, Ellison has worked to ensure that her students' knowledge of Indigenous history is swathed in a high level of cultural sensitivity and accuracy. As a 6th-grade reading teacher, Ellison found a Scholastic article titled, "Would You Be Killed." It was about the history of the Carlisle Boarding Schools.

"It was wonderfully written and the photos were captivating but in contrast, the disturbing and authoritative quote by Capt. Richard Henry Pratt, 'Kill the Indian, save the man,' shot out," Ellison said. "It was raw, it was real, and it was fact."

Five years later, while teaching an intervention class, Ellison searched for the same article, written for a more appropriate reading level for her students. Luckily, Scholastic had

printed it in its magazine, *Striving Readers*. Upon closer inspection, Ellison noticed the key quote from Pratt was missing. She contacted Scholastic's editors and, after an exchange of emails and one conference call, the publication's editor simply said, "We ran out of room."

"That was a difficult concept to process," Ellison said. "The quote is six words."

While Ellison felt Scholastic's edit was made without malicious intent, she believes it was an uneducated edit.

"To them, it was just a quote by some guy in the army. The two articles were almost verbatim, but those six words made one more powerful than the other," she said. "I knew the difference, but another teacher probably wouldn't."

Ellison made her case to the three Scholastic employees on the conference call. The next week Scholastic sent Ellison a digital copy of their reprinted version of the article. They'd put the quote "Kill the Indian, save the man," back in.

"The respect I have for Scholastic is immeasurable but their respect for Native Americans was even more noteworthy," Ellison explained, "I'm just a teacher in the middle of nowhere but they listened. They wanted to make sure they were educating correctly, and they adjusted the content."

Ellison shared this story with members of the Education Committee as part of her testimony. Ellison told lawmakers, "That's all that's being asked here, to adjust the content so we are educating our children correctly."



Tracy Hartman-Bradley, NSEA member and NEA Director, testified in support of LB872, which would allow Indigenous students to wear or display tribal regalia.

Being given a feather in many native cultures is a great honor. Feathers are prayed over and blessed. They are tied to the hair of the one being honored. Graduation caps are beaded with traditional tribal colors and the feather is tied to it for accomplishment to be seen. It also identifies that person and encourages them to go farther in their education. It also encourages others to strive for that recognition and honor. Let's give Indigenous students that opportunity to have pride in who they are, the culture that they are from and what they have achieved.

This bill is extremely important to many, myself, the Native community, Native Title programs, and to NSEA which supports this bill because it's good for kids. It gives back recognition of native culture that has been lost through misunderstandings, policies and laws that are not equitable to all.

Subscribe to legislative updates that affect YOU

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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 the legislature.

NSEA's Government Relations team monitors legislative activities and advocates for the best interests of our members and students. Bills change quickly throughout the session, and NSEA wants to keep you in the loop about how your job as an educator may be affected, and how you can take action.

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NSEA Aspiring Educators member Adrienne Kruger spoke in favor of legislation that would eliminate the Praxis test required by the state to enter a teacher college prep program in Nebraska.

Praxis Test Unnecessary Barrier

NSEA members support bills to eliminate expensive, standardized test

The first time Adrienne Kruger knew she wanted to work with special education students she was observing an elementary art class as part of a practicum at Wayne State College.

“I was told that a particular student has autism and the teacher was immediately like, ‘He doesn’t like new people. He won’t come near you,’” Kruger recalled.

But when the student entered the classroom and spotted Kruger at his assigned table, he smiled and ran towards her. The two spent the entire class sitting side-by-side, working together.

“I don’t know if it’s my red hair or just that I have a bubbly personality,” she said. “Kids are just drawn to me.”

Kruger’s path to the classroom has stalled in her junior year at Wayne State College. She has tried for three years to pass the Praxis I, a test that Nebraska requires would-be teachers to pass before taking upper-level education courses.

As a student with a disability, Kruger has found it “incredibly difficult to get accommodations” for taking the Praxis.

“I think this test creates an

unnecessary barrier for students with disabilities to move forward in the education profession,” she said.

So Kruger drove to Lincoln to testify before the Legislature’s Education Committee in support of legislation that would eliminate the Praxis test.

Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy recommends that the Praxis CORE not be used as an entrance exam:

- They are expensive to take - particularly for multiple-time test-takers;
- Basic pedagogical tests, including the Praxis CORE, have not been shown to correlate with teaching effectiveness; and
- They reproduce the inequality of prior access to strong education, thereby disadvantaging minority applicants at disproportionate levels.

“I personally have spent almost \$850 trying to pass one test,” she told members of the committee. “That \$850 could have gone toward my tuition, books or even personal bills.

“I have contemplated changing my major, dropping out of college and finding new avenues to move on with my education,” Kruger said.

Several testifiers echoed Kruger’s frustrations over the cost and difficulty of the basic skills test. Lawmakers heard from current educators, including teacher college professors, who argue the Praxis CORE is an expensive hurdle that is not serving prospective teachers or the education system well.

NSEA President Jenni Benson urged the committee to eliminate the Praxis CORE examination, calling the test a barrier for students at a time when the state and the nation are struggling to hire and retain enough educators.

“Students who have already shown ability through the ACT and successful completion of college courses should not be facing an expensive test that has no bearing on their future career,” Benson said.

The committee is considering three bills dealing with eliminating or providing alternatives to the Praxis exams: Bellevue Sen. Carol Blood’s LB690; Omaha Sen. Tony Vargas’ LB960; and an Education Committee bill, LB1218.

Designated as a priority bill, LB1218 provides an alternative to the Praxis Core test as well as a \$1,000 loan forgiveness program for college students who work a full semester as a student-teacher.

“A standardized test does not and should not determine what type of teachers they will be in the classroom,” Vargas told the committee.

Kruger couldn’t agree more.

Legislation that affects your pocketbook and your classroom

Harmful school revenue cap bill fails to advance

Your phone calls and emails to senators helped stop a bill that would have limited school district revenue growth, regardless of enrollment growth or other educational needs.

NSEA thanked the 21 senators who staged a filibuster to stop the harmful proposal. The revenue cap in LB986 would have placed an additional revenue and spending limitation on top of the already existing levy rate cap and budget limitation.

Oppose giving public dollars to private schools

Senators rejected LB364, sponsored and prioritized by Sen. Lou Ann Linehan. The bill would have created a tax scheme to give public tax revenue to private schools.

Now, that proposal has been re-introduced as LB1237, along with five more bills that would give public tax dollars to private schools (LB982, LB1014, LB1212, LB1240, LB1251).

It is important that NSEA members and other public school supporters continue to contact senators to oppose measures that would take funding away from public education.

Find more information on these and other bills at:

www.nsea.org/capitol-updates

Bill would cut top income tax rates

LB939, sponsored by Sen. LouAnn Linehan, would give large tax cuts to nonresidents, corporations and wealthy Nebraskans while slashing state revenues that are needed to fund schools, health care and other services everyday Nebraskans need. It would do little to nothing for average Nebraskans.

The bill will cut taxes on the wealthy and corporations. Low- and middle-income Nebraskans would experience little tax savings in comparison. The highest paid 1% of Nebraskans get an average cut of \$9,340; the lowest paid 20% of Nebraskans get less than \$1.

Those pushing the tax cuts say we

can afford them now because our state's coffers are full but what they don't say is that our economy is being bolstered by unprecedented levels of federal aid.

Passing these income tax cuts could leave us in a major pinch when the federal dollars stop flowing. It could force cuts to vital services Nebraskans rely on or increases in property taxes. It would annually slash state dollars needed to fund these services by nearly \$400 million by 2026. This would likely force increases in other taxes, including property taxes.

This means most Nebraskans could end up paying more taxes to fund LB939's tax cuts for the wealthy, corporations and nonresidents.

A corporate income tax cut will mostly flow to out-of-state corporations and businesses. Nebraska's corporate income tax falls largely on shareholders, who are predominantly wealthy, and most live out of state.

Contact your senator to oppose these bills at: www.nsea.org/action

Reduction in Force Notice? Call NSEA

Notification Deadline is April 15



It happens every year: Some Nebraska teachers receive Reduction in Force (RIF) notices informing them that their teaching contract may not be renewed for the coming year. The statutory deadline for school districts to hand out RIF notices is April 15.

However, thanks to legislation proposed by NSEA years ago, there is a statutory procedure that allows a teacher to ensure that the Reduction in Force process is followed correctly and fairly. In some instances, the process can result in saving the teacher's job or in creating other options for the teacher.

The best way to deal with a RIF notice is to be prepared. The moment you receive a RIF notice, a countdown begins.

To preserve your rights when facing a RIF you must always request a hearing. The hearing must be requested within seven days of receiving the RIF notice (five days for community college faculty). While your situation may never reach an actual hearing, immediately calling NSEA will give

you and NSEA's Advocacy department time to determine what steps are in your best interest.

Important Steps to Follow

- If you receive a RIF notice, call your NSEA Organizational Specialist immediately (1-800-742-0047).
- Email a copy of the notice to your NSEA Organizational Specialist. (Find your Organizational Specialist at www.nsea.org/field-staff-units)

Once a copy of the RIF notice is received at NSEA headquarters, members will be encouraged to request a hearing to preserve their rights.

"The only way to preserve the rights of the teacher affected is to request a hearing. Doing so gives us time to sort out the issues and help the member make the best possible decision on how to proceed," said NSEA Director of Advocacy Isau Metes.

"Teachers receiving settlement or buyout offers in lieu of a hearing should contact the NSEA before agreeing to anything," she added.

If you have questions concerning the RIF process, contact your NSEA Organizational Specialist or Metes by calling 1-800-742-0047.

The importance of teaching tough topics

by Jake Bogus

Eighth-grade U.S. History teacher, School Middle School, Lincoln



Bogus

I knew a teenage boy in rural Nebraska who received a wonderful public education. His grades were good. His teachers were great. He enjoyed a variety of extracurricular activities – band, speech, and drama.

The boy was white, heterosexual, and attended the town’s Catholic Church fairly regularly. Never mind he grew up with a single mother in poverty. You wouldn’t know based on his general happiness. He was often surrounded by close friends enjoying his adolescence.

Among his friends, they would joke around. The joking, of course as a teenage boy, generally dealt with nonsense. But sometimes this nonsense would contain quips about other races or sexualities of people. There weren’t any people of color around, so what was the harm in saying the N word? What was the big deal if he made a joke about Mexicans? Why not use a homophobic slur when goofing around with friends? “Everybody else” was doing it. After all, people laughed with him. It felt harmless, even normalized.

There wasn’t any in-depth teaching in the boy’s school about other races, sexual orientations or gender identities. Why should there be? People of different races and orientations barely existed in the community.

As far as he knew, none of his classmates were gay. Why would you choose to be gay? It was a choice to be homosexual according to many of the trusted adults in his community. And it was certainly something the Bible shunned according to a few select verses, so it must be true.

A better understanding

The boy was me. The man I am today certainly wishes he could help educate that boy.

The man I am today teaches in an 8th grade social studies classroom full of diverse students. Black, white, brown, Asian, Muslim, gay, straight, transgender, rich, and poor. I teach them all. Without them, I wouldn’t have such a well-rounded, informed education of our world.

Education isn’t just about algebraic equations or when to use a comma to separate two independent clauses. It’s about learning the reality of the world we live in. Accepting others.

Trying to do a better job of understanding others and why they are the way they are. It’s uncomfortable at first because we don’t understand. It takes time and effort especially when you grew up in a community of people who all look very much alike. It takes reading. It takes watching documentaries. It takes talking to someone who actually knows what they’re talking about because they’ve lived it.

State Sen. Ben Hansen introduced LB1077. The bill’s intentions are “to

provide restrictions and requirements for governmental entities, public postsecondary institutions, and public schools conducting mandatory staff or student training or education involving certain concepts relating to race and sex...”

Based on my own experiences growing up in a similar community setting to those that Hansen represents (Blair, Tekamah, West Point), this legislation is absurd. Where else could students get an education on the impact of race in our society’s history? Where else would they be able to learn about gender identity and other sexual orientations? It certainly can’t be from a community with a large majority of heterosexual, white adults who often prefer their beliefs over facts.

Some say parents should be teaching their children about race, sexuality, and gender identity. In a perfect world, sure. Parents should be able to teach their children about these tough-to-understand topics. But many of these same parents grew up in the same community as their own children. So no, they can’t effectively teach their children about race, sexuality, and gender identity. They aren’t educated on the topic, just like I find it difficult to help with algebra homework as a social studies teacher.

Some also mention religious texts as examples for how the world works or what should be taught in schools. We have private schools in this state that offer that type of education. Or parents can home school their children. There are plenty of options if they don’t like the reality being taught in a public school setting.

To completely eliminate and ban the teaching of tough topics in public school is to rob young people of a reality they deserve. It’s a reality they won’t understand until they’re potentially exposed to it later in life. It’s a reality they’ll look at while scoffing at their earlier education instead of celebrating it.

If the boy I knew in Minden walked into my classroom today, he would feel uncomfortable. When other students begin to enter the boy’s classroom, he would feel even more uncomfortable. Only about half of the students look like him, a white boy. Others are people of color. Some are outwardly gay. Some are transgender and will help him understand their pronouns. It’s all harmless. They’re all kind. They’re all humans living real lives.

Once class begins, nobody notices anymore. The boy is surrounded by students at school to learn the same thing he wants to learn. Reality. Facts. Tough topics. There’s no other place for him to learn it except at a public school.



As a member of NSEA you have a **VOICE.**

From your local school board to the state legislature, elected officials, and people they appoint set policies that directly affect your work with students. With a collective voice of more than 28,000 NSEA members, you can influence those who shape critical policy decisions.

NSEA is the **ONLY** education organization in Nebraska that believes in and fights for improving your salary and benefits and has the expertise to do so. So-called "alternative" organizations do not support collective bargaining and will not and cannot represent you at the negotiating table.

Beware of "alternative" organizations that claim they will provide education employees with advocacy without being involved in politics. Education, at its core, is political.

WHO DECIDES: Policies that govern educators' workload, class size, salary, retirement, health benefits, standards and testing, school budget, length of school year, certification standards and employee rights are in the hands of elected officials. When these organizations claim they're not political they relinquish the key role in shaping critical policy decisions.

YOUR VOICE: NSEA operates as a representative democracy. Every member has an equal voice, and every member has equal representation within the Association.



SALARY

WHO DECIDES?

- ➔ Your Local School Board
- ➔ Legislature
- ➔ Governor



NSEA has worked with our local associations to increase teacher salaries from 45th in the nation in 2001, to 30th in the nation in 2020.



RETIREMENT

WHO DECIDES?

- ➔ Your Local School Board
- ➔ Legislature
- ➔ Governor



NSEA is the **ONLY** association that pushed to create and continues to protect your Defined Benefit Retirement Plan through strong, effective legislative advocacy.



SCHOOL BUDGET

WHO DECIDES?

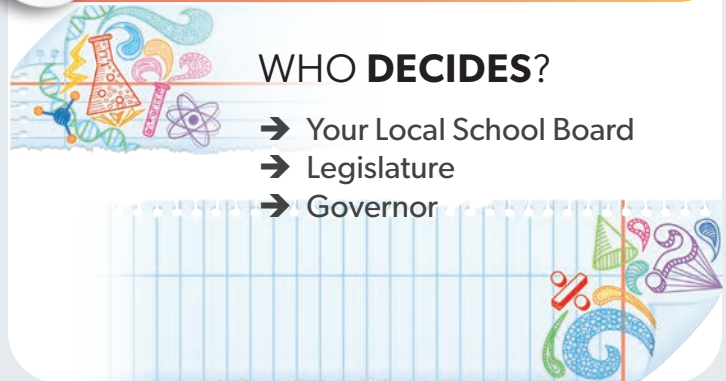
- ➔ Your Local School Board
- ➔ State Board of Education
- ➔ Legislature
- ➔ Governor



LENGTH OF SCHOOL YEAR

WHO DECIDES?

- ➔ Your Local School Board
- ➔ Legislature
- ➔ Governor



have to do with my classroom?



WORKLOAD

WHO DECIDES?

- ➔ Your Local School Board
- ➔ Legislature
- ➔ Governor



NSEA believes in and fights for duty-free lunch and plan time for educators. Your local negotiated agreement is a tool educators can use to improve their working conditions, including duty hours.



CLASS SIZE

WHO DECIDES?

- ➔ Your Local School Board
- ➔ Legislature
- ➔ Governor



NSEA empowers educators to advocate for smaller class sizes, less standardized testing, input into the curriculum and school safety, just to name a few. These working conditions mean a better learning environment for your students.



HEALTH BENEFITS

WHO DECIDES?

- ➔ Educators Health Alliance (EHA)
- ➔ Nebraska State Education Assoc. (NSEA)
- ➔ Your Local School Board

NSEA is the ONLY association that created and represents you on the Educators Health Alliance to provide you with quality, affordable health insurance. EHA's board is comprised of 12 voting members. Six members on the board are from the NSEA.



EMPLOYEE RIGHTS

WHO DECIDES?

- ➔ State Board of Education
- ➔ Legislature
- ➔ Governor

With representation at the bargaining table, liability insurance, legal representation, and more, NSEA provides advice and professional advocacy on a range of employee rights issues educators face.



CERTIFICATION STANDARDS

WHO DECIDES?

- ➔ Your Local School Board
- ➔ State Board of Education
- ➔ Legislature
- ➔ Governor



STANDARDS AND TESTING

WHO DECIDES?

- ➔ State Board of Education
- ➔ U.S. Secretary of Education
- ➔ U.S. Department of Education Governing Board

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ESP Maria Gonzalez

Organizing effort underway to increase pay for OEA's bilingual liaisons

NSEA member Maria Gonzalez joined the Omaha Public Schools District as a bilingual liaison in 2004, just a few years after the district began hiring liaisons to help meet the needs of its diversifying student population.

Classified as an educational support professional, Gonzalez's starting hourly wage was \$12.68 an hour. It wasn't enough to make ends meet and "our hourly rate never went up," Gonzalez said.

"So, one of my coworkers, who now is a counselor, decided to join the union because she loves the job but needed to make more money," said Gonzalez. "That's how it started, between the two of us."

Gonzalez said frustration after years of stagnant wages led others to follow their lead and join the Omaha Education Association.

"We went to the first meeting and 100% (of the bilingual liaisons) were present," Gonzalez said.

Expectations for OPS's bilingual liaisons reach far beyond the confines of school campuses, according to Gonzalez.

"I've been there to help students and their families at court hearings and for medical emergencies in hospitals. I've even helped deliver groceries for a family who had no means of transporting them home," she said.

All of this work is on top of their assigned duties: translating for students; translating for parents; home visits; testing help; parent-teacher conferences; EPTs; IEPs and more.

"Our job is very diversified," Gonzalez said. "I mean, if I make a list, I will have like 100 things that I can do."

With the help of OEA, the bilingual liaisons were able to bargain a negotiated agreement with OPS from about 2006 until 2011.

By 2011, membership in the unit had dropped to the point where the OEA could no longer bargain for them.

In 2019, Gonzalez said frustrations mounted. Cost of living had increased and so did the district's expectations of bilingual liaisons—all this while their wages fell behind.

Gonzalez contacted NSEA Organiza-

tional Specialist Elizabeth Figueroa to help with an organizing project to build membership and get the bilingual liaisons back to the bargaining table.

"As we worked our way through the process the bilingual liaisons made it clear they wanted to negotiate a contract," Figueroa said. "For the OEA to negotiate, the bilingual liaisons needed to hit a 75% membership threshold, which they did very quickly.

"Maria was instrumental in signing up new members. She is a master recruiter and a delightful person," Figueroa said of Gonzalez.

OEA continues to work with Gonzalez and others in the push for increased wages. While Gonzalez has seen many colleagues leave the education profession for higher wages elsewhere, she remains optimistic about the future.

"We will get to the point where we can make enough money that we can say, 'this is fair' and then can continue



NSEA ESP member Maria Gonzalez is a driving force in an effort to increase salaries for OEA's bilingual liaisons.

to increase those wages," Gonzalez said. "My goal is that people don't leave anymore.

"Membership is worth it because we are protected," she said. "I mean, right now we are going through a lot of stuff. And when we are represented, we are protected. So, it's worth it to pay the dues for something that is going to protect us in the long run."

Take care of yourself

If you need a little help on your journey, we're here for you.

Nebraskablue.com/EHAPOP

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Leading from the classroom

Supporting Educator Effectiveness through Development



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

In just one day in March 2020, many teachers went from feeling effective to ineffective, when traditional processes in schools changed due to the necessity of meeting student needs in different ways. Fortunately, many teachers found support in each other with a schoolwide culture of collective responsibility driving the system. Unfortunately, just as many did not.

Mr. Rogers said, **“Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.”**

They are in every school--educators who promote a school culture that supports collective responsibility. Teacher leaders who feel supported demonstrate the efficacy to lead the learning in their schools.

Traditional examples of teacher leadership include serving on a school’s improvement committee or mentoring new teachers. While those activities are necessary to a school’s success, the *Nebraska Teacher and Principal Performance Standards* (NTPPS) Rubrics provide a continuum of development that includes many more non-traditional nuances of leadership from teachers. Five highly effective rubric indicators give clarity to the Nebraska definition of teacher leadership from the classroom and within the school.

- *Leads efforts to develop, test, model, or promote equitable opportunities and outcomes for all student groups and promotes understanding of how data can be used to address students’ academic, physical, social-emotional, and mental health needs*
- *Establishes, communicates, and maintains high expectations, effective routines, procedures, and clear standards of conduct and involves students to engage parents and the educational community in a sustained collaborative communication process*
- *Leads efforts to develop, test, model, or promote processes for reflection of professional practice and high expectations for lesson preparedness*
- *Leads efforts to develop, test, or promote processes that foster an understanding within the educational community of cultural competence and responsiveness and models the implementation of evidence-based, district-supported curriculum, instructional materials, and strategies that confront and*

eliminate institutional bias and student marginalization

- *Leads efforts to develop, test, model, or promote reflection on how assessment practices and assessment bias impact institutional bias and student marginalization*

Last month the S.E.E.D. Team wrote that the most qualified voices to inform Nebraska efforts in educator effectiveness are the educators themselves. The time is now for districts to re-evaluate the ways in which they define and elevate educator input, especially in the area of teacher leadership. The NTPPS Rubrics are designed to assist teachers and school leaders to do just that--help calibrate the indicators above (or any chosen indicators within the NTPPS) with the role of each adult in the school through critical conversations.

As the teaching profession faces unprecedented shortages, this kind of voice, efficacy and leadership will be pivotal. Teachers need to ask these questions: Are they given space and opportunity to share their voices? Is the culture in the school favorable to innovation? Does the administration share decision making with teachers? Are teachers given space to champion best practice? What does a system of unrivaled support, development, and teacher efficacy look like?

Every district has teachers who consistently work effectively for their students. They ask hard questions like the ones above and want the answers, even when the answers require change. Teacher leadership may very well be the spark for the changes that post-pandemic schooling needs. How can you help? How can you enter into the tough conversations that might contain the answers?

The NDE and its partners are committed to leading and supporting all Nebraskans in learning, earning, and living. The NTPPS demonstrate necessary shifts toward teacher voice, efficacy, and leadership.

Resources:

Visit the Educator Effectiveness site at www.education.ne.gov/educatoreffectiveness. The standards are available at bit.ly/330g138.



Dr. Julie Downing,
NDE Educator
Effectiveness
Specialist



Ryan Ricenbaw,
NDE Leadership
and Learning
Network Specialist



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Community & Culture: Based in Omaha, the Community and Culture emphasis prepares students to better identify, communicate, and understand the nuances of rural, urban or global community organizations. C&C is designed for students with a background in education, as well as students with an interest in non-profit work, community development, government, management and counseling.

Leadership: Based in Lincoln, the Leadership emphasis prepares students for roles as scholastic leaders who utilize, analyze and produce data which helps inform decisions and practices. This program is a seamless continuation of Doane's Education Specialist degree (EdS), but available to students from outside institutions as well.

Now accepting applications!

Please call the Graduate Education Office at **844.321.6642** for a schedule.



Justin Smith, Kansas UniServ Director; Valerie Wilk, NEA Regional Representative; Ray Feuss, Iowa UniServ Director; and Rich Wergin, NSEA Organizational Specialist presented at the 2019 NSEA U on progress in higher education.

Higher Ed Sessions at NSEA U

This summer's NSEA U will feature special sessions specifically designed for Higher Education members.

On Tuesday, July 12, we will offer informational sessions to keep higher education members up to date on everything happening in the state, region, and nation. Among the topics to be discussed will be:

- Growing your Local Association as the Pandemic Moves Forward
- Bargaining Strategies that Yield Results
- Overcoming Barriers to Great Communication Among Members
- Identifying and Developing New Leaders
- Academic Freedom in Higher Education

Multiple breakout sessions on other topics will also be available at this members-only professional development conference. Sessions will be held during the mornings and afternoons of July 12 and 13, and in the morning on July 14.

If you have a proposal for a professional development session that would be useful to your association colleagues, please complete the RFP form at www.nsea.org/NSEAU. The deadline for submitting an RFP is Tuesday, March 15.

The 2022 NSEA U will be held Tues., July 12 through Thurs., July 14, at Innovation Campus in Lincoln. Please plan to join us!

NSEA's Conversations on Race and Belonging will be back this summer as a virtual six-session program. The sessions are designed to encourage participants to improve their personal racial understanding based on self-examination and awareness. The program builds a peer cohort and peer-to-peer relationships through conversation and storytelling.

Introductory Session

The 2.5-hour introductory session will be held virtually on April 30, 9:30 a.m. to 12 noon CT. It is designed to provide a preview of the full six-part summer program.

Summer Course

The six-week course will be held virtually on Wednesdays, 9:30 a.m. to 12 noon CT. It is tentatively scheduled to begin May 25.

Participants will have the opportunity to gain empowering skills to initiate meaningful conversations on race and to approach such opportunities as bridges into relationships and connections with others. These skills will be incorporated into each session, as well as outside of the sessions, with friends and family. All assignments, including the podcasts and videos, generally run less than one hour.

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.

Deeper Dive

Members interested in learning more about the Conversations on Race and Belonging program will have an opportunity to participate in an introductory session as well as three "deeper dive" sessions, scheduled for March 12, April 9, and June 11, 9 a.m. to 12 noon CT. Each virtual session will focus on a different topic.

These sessions are open to NSEA members, but space is limited. To apply, go to www.nsea.org/Conversations

Webinars planned to help with student debt, benefits

NSEA members can access exclusive webinars tailored to the education profession.

Go to nsea.org/webinars for a complete list of sessions and to register.

NSEA members only

■ **Student Debt Management:** Tuesday, March 29, 7 p.m. CT. Learn to use the NEA Debt Navigator, which can find forgiveness or cancellation programs for which you may qualify.

■ **Student Debt Management:** Tuesday, April 26, 6:30 p.m. CT. Learn to use the NEA Debt Navigator, which can find forgiveness or cancellation programs for which you may qualify.

All school employees

■ **Member Benefits Overview:** Tuesday, March 22, 6:30 p.m. CT. Learn the value of association membership with NEA Member Benefits' Susan Estes.

■ **EHA Retiree Options:** Monday, March 21, 4 - 5:30 p.m. CT Register at: <https://bit.ly/3s1bSWU>

Present or be a mentor

NSEA is looking for members who would like to share their ideas and skills. If interested in leading a webinar, contact Michelle Raphael at michelle.rafael@nsea.org.

NSEA is always seeking mentors and mentees in the classroom. For more information, visit www.nsea.org/mentor.



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- 



No substitute for vigilance

Ogallala, South Sioux, Omaha, Grand Island diligence pays off for all members

Your local association can have one of the most competitive negotiated agreements in terms of salary and benefits, but if the negotiated agreement isn't enforced it will erode over time. All members must keep a close watch on new hires within their districts – especially anything involving “long-term” and “substitute.”

The Grand Island Education Association is a good example. Leaders there have worked hard to maintain the integrity of their negotiated agreement. Last August, when building reps suspected the school district was misclassifying several staff members as long-term substitutes, GIEA took notice – and then took action to protect its bargaining unit members.

Nick Welding of Norby & Welding LLP, NSEA's attorney, worked with GIEA to file a petition with the Nebraska Commission of Industrial Relations alleging the Grand Island Public Schools violated the Industrial Relations Act. At the heart of the petition is that those misclassified employees are, in fact, part of the GIEA bargaining unit and should be paid under GIEA's agreement with the district. The district, however, is paying them as substitutes, which means they are paying them much less and are not providing them with the bargaining unit's negotiated benefits.

GIEA worked with NSEA and let their negotiated agreement guide the process. The association first submitted a written request to district administrators for information regarding the identity of those misclassified employees, as well as their assignments, workload, compensation, and other details. When administrators responded with partial information, GIEA leaders looked to their contract for the correct course of action.

In October, the association filed a grievance with the district's HR department. The multi-step grievance process required a meeting with the superintendent and, if not resolved, a hearing before the school board. When the grievance procedures were not followed by the district, the next step was to file the petition with the CIR.

Being a watchdog

The first time I learned school districts were using these classifications to underpay educators it was from a long-time negotiator for the Ogallala Education Association, Jim Ayers.

Jim really pushed us to look at the abuse that was going on with educators in his district. When these tactics started showing up in other districts, NSEA was prepared.

In 2007, I worked as a member rights advocate for Bethany Manning. Bethany had accepted a teaching job with the South Sioux City Public Schools. She was to replace a teacher who was moving out of state, yet Manning was told she would be a long-term substitute rather than a first-year, probationary teacher. Tracia Blom, president of the SSCEA at the time, flagged the misclassification for NSEA. Blom knew that as a substitute teacher, Manning would not be eligible for retirement benefits, health care, or the salary schedule placement she would have received as a new hire.

The South Sioux City Education Association stood behind Bethany and the negotiated agreement, and with NSEA's help, SSCEA filed a grievance with the school district on her behalf.

The school district denied the grievance, so attorney Scott Norby took the association's case to the next step, and the Nebraska Commission of Industrial Relations sided with the association. The school district appealed the CIR's ruling, and Manning's case landed in the Nebraska Supreme Court. Without dissent, the Nebraska Supreme Court reinforced the CIR opinion that the school district had engaged in a prohibited labor practice.

Supreme Court ruling

Yet even a ruling from the Nebraska Supreme Court hasn't put a stop to some school districts using long-term substitutes as an excuse to underpay and deny educators full benefits and bargaining power.

In 2016, NSEA successfully represented a number of certificated teachers working for the Omaha Public Schools District because the district had misclassified these educators as substitute teachers.

For educators, collective bargaining rights mean having a say in their pay, health care, working conditions, retirement, and the learning conditions for their students.

NSEA stands ready to help protect your rights. As we've seen, watching and working with your association building reps and local leaders is essential. Your diligence has and will continue to provide lasting benefits for you and your colleagues, and will help shape the future of the education profession.



Executive Director
Trish Guinan

“
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Would you like to write for The Voice?

Submit your education-related article and your questions to thevoice@nsea.org.

NSEA-Retired Spring Conference: It will be wild!

The NSEA-Retired Spring Conference will be held on Thursday, April 21 at the Lincoln Children’s Zoo. The program will include a “behind-the-scenes” experience at the Zoo, an update on the renovation of the Cascade Teachers’ Bicentennial Fountain, and traveling Nebraska with “The Better Half: Nebraska Hidden Treasures” presented by Matt and Sarah Hansen, and a bit more on the impact of Crop Art. Of course, prizes, food and great conversations will be part of the event.

Retired members attend for free while the cost for guests to attend is \$10. Registration will be available in March by going to nsea.org/retired and selecting Calendar/Events/Registrations.



Virtual Governance/Lobby Day

Jason Hayes, NSEA Director of Public Policy and Legislative Research, joined the Feb. 15 NSEA-Retired Governance Day to explain and answer questions on bills before the Nebraska Legislature. He also illustrated the many options to locate bills, hearings and senator contact information found on the website www.nebraskalegislature.gov.

NSEA President Jenni Benson welcomed the group, thanked them for their focus on legislation, and extended a thank you to retirees who have chosen to substitute in the schools.

Senator Lynne Walz, Education Committee Chair, joined the group briefly between debate on the



Sen. Walz

legislative floor to thank the retired educators for their continued involvement and work in support of retirees, children, public education and the education profession.

Together with a few other state senators and NSEA representatives, Senator Walz has held several town halls and roundtables to work on education issues.

A definite challenge is the workforce shortage in Nebraska schools. Walz mentioned LR157 which involved an interim study to examine how Nebraska schools can recruit teachers and administrators that accurately reflect the proportion of students of color attending Nebraska schools.

She also mentioned LB1128,

which changes provisions relating to certification of school employees and student loan forgiveness. Walz suggested LB945 and LB1128 will be combined, as both deal with student loan forgiveness.

Hayes encouraged retirees to continue to testify at legislative hearings and continue to communicate with their senators.

NSEA-Retired President Dr. De Tonack commended the information from the NSEA Capitol Update and, if not receiving that information, encouraged members to sign up at www.nsea.org/subscriber.

All participants received copies of the bills discussed by Hayes. Several local participants attended that afternoon’s Education Committee hearings.

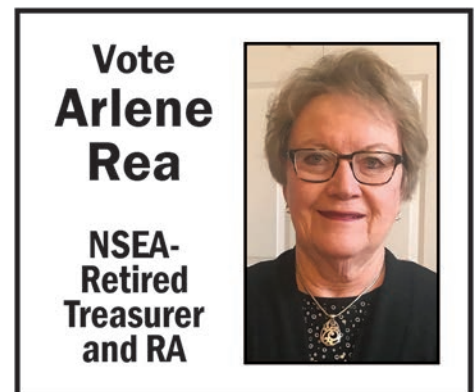
Retired Membership Expanded

NSEA-Retired is encouraging ESP retired members to join. To align with a change made by NEA-Retired last year, there is a reduced rate for ESP pre-retired and retired lifetime members effective February 15.

Pre-retired and retired lifetime dues of an active ESP member at the time of retirement shall be 60% of the dues of Retired members as established by the Retired Board of Directors. Currently that amount is a total of \$300 for the NEA and NSEA Retired lifetime dues. Annual ESP Retired dues are now \$46 which includes the NEA-Retired and NSEA-Retired.

Another change, made in both NSEA and NSEA-Retired bylaws in 2021, allows anyone who is eligible to receive a pension from a school employee retirement system and who was employed for at least five years in a position that would have qualified them for membership in NSEA but is no longer so employed to join NSEA-Retired. Previously, membership in NSEA-Retired required that individuals be members of NSEA during their final year of employment. This change expanded the pool of potential members in NSEA-Retired to include, among others, former ESP employees.

To join NSEA-Retired, visit www.nsea.org/retired and select Join Now.



Srb's membership pays off on new vehicle purchase

A new car was in the cards for Melissa Srb after she heard about the NEA Member Benefits Auto Buying Program.

Srb, a 5th-8th grade orchestra teacher at Marrs Magnet Center School in Omaha and a second-year NSEA member, saved around \$4,000 because of the program. She and her fiancé did their research before going car shopping.

"We looked at the NEA auto program to see what dealerships offered the program," Srb said. "I knew exactly what car I wanted, so I was hoping that there would be a dealership near us."

They located Beardmore Subaru through the NEA Member Benefits website.

"By going through the website, it automatically hooked me up with someone at the dealership. They were able to pull two models I was going between, so they were ready for me to test drive when we got there," Srb said. "Since I went through the website, they already knew that I was an NEA member and had pricing with the discount without me needing to mention it."

The near \$4,000 discount Srb received was in addition to the cash she got for trading in her old car, and she was able to score 0% financing for 48 months on her brand new 2021 Subaru Forester Premium.

"I was very surprised at the amount we were given off," Srb said. "The dealership said there is no other deal that gets you that much off other than the NEA discount."

Srb encourages all NSEA and NEA members to look for dealerships that participate in the program, and to know what they're looking for to save time and money.

"Car shopping can be an extremely stressful process, but by going through the NEA benefits, it was one of the easiest and least stressful things I have done," Srb said. "We will



A new ride: Omaha teacher and NSEA member Melissa Srb saved \$4,000 on a new vehicle through the NEA Member Benefits Auto Buying Program.

be using the NEA MB Auto Program again when my fiancé gets his new car because of how great of an experience we had."

And that's not all – the couple plans to look into travel discounts, as well.

"We're getting married this summer, and we plan to look at what NEA MB has to offer for traveling for our honeymoon," Srb said.

Hot deals and discounts available online

NEA discount tickets

Ramp up the fun in 2022 with special deals on tickets to theme parks, attractions, shows, sports, ski packages and more adventures nationwide with the new NEA Discount Tickets Program! Find your tickets now at www.neamb.com/tickets.

Kids' magazines

Delight all the "little sweeties" in your life with a monthly subscription to *Highlights* magazine or other engaging educational content. With the NEA Magazine



Service, you can choose from dozens of titles suitable for all age groups including preschoolers, children, 'tweens' and teens at up to 85% off newsstand prices. View the complete list of titles at www.neamb.com/magazine.

End-of-model-year vehicles

Shop last year's vehicle models now for great savings. Plus, when you use the NEA Auto Buying Program, you get \$2,000 in post-sale benefits! Visit www.neamb.com/autobuying to find a participating dealer and to learn more about this savings tool available exclusively to NEA members.

Ease mind with app

Ease your mind with the NEA Mental Health App, powered by Sanvello. Avail yourself of free and low-cost resources to cope with all the stressors daily life may toss your way.

Features of the NEA Mental Health Program include the on-demand mobile app with clinically validated tools for managing stress, anxiety, depression and more; free or discounted resources for NEA members; daily mood tracking, guided meditations and journeys, anonymous community of peers, and individual coaching and therapy.

Learn more at www.neamb.com/mentalhealth.

In Memory

We recognize these educators and NSEA members whom we've lost in the last few months.

*Carl Kendall Meyer, 80, Ogallala
Amy M. Murray, 46, Blair
Virgie L. Louis, 76, Omaha
Kyle J. Ediger, 31, Hampton*

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

Are you Nebraska's next Teacher of the Year?

In 2023, one teacher will represent the good work of all Nebraska teachers as the Nebraska Teacher of the Year. Application forms for the 2023 Nebraska Teacher of the Year are now available through your school administration or at the website listed below. Teachers may nominate a colleague for the honor or self-nominate.

Applications must be postmarked by midnight (CDT) July 15, 2022. A panel will review applications, and up to five finalists will be selected for interviews in August. The 2023 recipient will be recognized at an awards luncheon in November 2022.

Since 1972, the Nebraska Teacher of the Year program has recognized outstanding certified teachers in a pre-K-12 classroom setting who plan to continue in active teacher status in a state-approved or accredited school.

A two-minute public speaking video is required. The



application seeks information on educational background and personal development, community involvement, philosophy of teaching and learning, and commentary on the teaching profession.

The Teacher of the Year will maintain a regular teaching schedule while also participating in a year of professional learning through the National Teacher of the Year Program.

The NSEA, Nebraska Council of School Administrators, Nebraska Association of School Boards,

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska, Data Recognition Corporation, and the State Board of Education present cash awards or grants to the Teacher of the Year and other finalists.

For additional details, go to www.education.ne.gov/toy.

Those interested may reach program coordinator Lora Sypal at (402) 471-5059 or lora.sypal@nebraska.gov.

Ch-ch-changes!

Retirement, resignation means new duties, new faces

The NSEA said thank you to Rebecca Smith, a 14-year employee who retired Jan. 31. Smith worked with several field staff, the NSEA-Retired, EMAC, Professional Development and Wellness committees. She provided outstanding guidance to many past and current NSEA field staff members and enjoyed working with NSEA members from across the state. Smith is also a U.S. Navy veteran.

Samantha (Sami) Vrbka began Jan. 24 as the new associate for field staff, filling Smith's role. Vrbka earned a bachelor's degree in Liberal Arts from Doane University. Her previous experience includes work as a dental assistant/scheduling coordinator. She enjoyed working with third graders as a practicum student and said joining the NSEA staff provides her the opportunity to continue to support education.

Kelsey Foley has been tapped to serve as NSEA's Multimedia Communications Specialist. Foley has served as the associate staff for communications since September 2018. Her new responsibilities include producing The Voice magazine, conceptualizing and producing in-house videos, and assisting with social media content and other communications.

Before joining NSEA, Foley was an online content producer for WOWT 6 News in Omaha. She also worked as a senior web producer at 10/11 News in Lincoln, writing online articles and developing social media strategies. Foley also served as an intern with the NSEA communications department in 2010. She earned a bachelor's degree in media production at Hastings College and is a proud graduate of Anselmo-Merna High School.

Foley takes over for Emily Hemphill, who resigned to return to reporting for the Seward Independent group, five newspapers in Seward and Saline counties.



Foley



Vrbka