

# The VOICE

Nebraska State Education Association

2022



## AT THE TABLE

*Locals look for solutions on pay,  
staff shortages through bargaining*

- Celebrate American Education Week: Nov. 12-19, 2022
- Student Loan Forgiveness Plan Updates
- Diabetes Management Tools and Insulin Savings for Members

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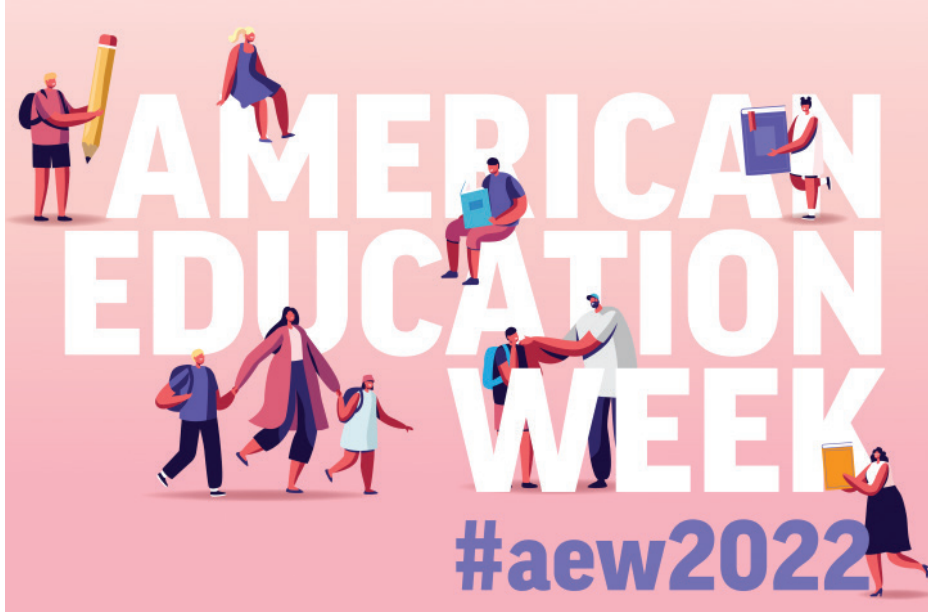
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## Celebrate American Education Week

American Education Week (AEW) annually celebrates the achievements of public schools in America and honors the work of people making a difference in education. This year, the festivities will take place Nov. 14 -18.

First celebrated in 1921, AEW was created by the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Legion after the nation's alarming rate of illiteracy was recognized. The aim of this special week was to create awareness about the need for education and to garner support to fund school systems.

Each day of the week has its own theme, during which we celebrate our public school community.

Festivities honor the team of people who work in our nation's public schools, everyone from the bus drivers and classroom teachers to the cafeteria workers and administrative staff, plus countless others. Schools are invited to celebrate and thank their staff in fun ways throughout the week.

**Monday: Kick-off Day**

Celebrate the start of the week by familiarizing students with the theme, activities, and purpose of the event.

**Tuesday: Family Day**

Celebrate by inviting parents to actively experience how a school day goes for their students.

**Wednesday: Education Support Professionals Day**

Education Support Professionals Day is a day to celebrate a school's support staff.

**Thursday: Educator for a Day**

Celebrate by inviting community leaders to work as an employee in the school, performing all the duties of a teacher for a full day.

**Friday: Substitute Educators Day**

Friday celebrates people who are there to help educators when there is a sudden emergency or temporary leave.

## Would You Like to Write for The Voice?

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

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

**On the Cover: Bargaining begins Nov. 1 and locals are looking to increase pay and find solutions to staff shortages. Story on page 7.**



# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

JENNI BENSON

## Why Can't We All Just Get Along? *Respect and Responsibility*

I have written several dozen articles over the past five years. Each article is personal to me and ties into the reality of our lives, education and current times.

I spend a great deal of time traveling across Nebraska as well as the nation. I tell my story and I listen a lot to other's stories. Recently, I had a member from a local that was down in membership ask, "Have you ever seen such a divisive time in our country?" He then added, "Can't we all just get along?"

We had a good discussion about what is contributing to the divisive nature of the world we live in. While it seems "politics" is a cause of many disagreements, there are many factors contributing to the divide splitting our communities and schools.

Even so, an "alternative" organization claims it is the solution to the "big bad union"— and is attempting to sell memberships based solely on the perception of NSEA being "too political." I've heard the ways in which this group twists our advocacy and the misinformation it spreads. Sadly, I've also heard of the promises these "alternative" organizations don't keep when an educator whose career is on the line turns to them for help.

The best way to respond to divisive misinformation is to educate with facts. NSEA's Year-Round Organizing and Membership site has tons of resources for our members to use with potential members. Visit [NSEA.org/YearRoundMembership](https://www.nsea.org/YearRoundMembership) to help communicate the truth about

NSEA's work on behalf of members and public education.

Something I didn't tell the member who asked the question about our divisive world is that I often lay awake pondering the same questions: Why can't we all just get along? What can I do about it? As I often do, I went to the web to research. The first thing that popped up was Kenny Chesney's song Get Along.

"To get along  
Down the road  
We've got a long, long way to go  
Scared to live, scared to die  
We ain't perfect but we try  
Get along while we can  
Always give love the upper hand  
Paint a wall, learn to dance  
Call your mom, buy a boat  
Drink a beer, sing a song  
Make a friend, can't we all get along."

Sounds simple enough, doesn't it? Are people in general just looking to criticize and divide? All around us are opportunities to get along with others. What stands in the way? What can we do as an Association to ease the divisiveness around us?

After my conversation with the member, I started asking people for feedback. I attended the Durham Museum Omaha Teacher's Night. I had a wide range of conversations from veteran teachers to beginning teachers. My daughter, Joy, who has a year left at UNK before becoming an early childhood teacher, came with me. One thing was very clear, our



My daughter Joy attended Teacher's Night at the Durham Museum with me in October.

educators are dedicated, hardworking, caring and amazing people. I also heard some heartbreaking stories of colleagues, parents, administrators and students being downright nasty to each other.

### Responsibilities of Members

It made me think of the work I've been doing helping update local bylaws for our 260 locals. We recently added a section that outlines the responsibilities of members to each other.

In the interest of intentionally fostering goodwill and trust and protecting the rights of all individuals to dignity and mutual respect, it is expected all members display:

- Respect for others and their views;
- Recognize and value individual differences;
- Promote mutual respect, understanding and cooperation as the basis of interactions amongst participants in Association activities, events, or meetings;
- Maintain the reputation of the Association by conducting themselves in accordance with high standards of professionalism.

The bottom line is we can get along. It is a choice we all need to make.



Joe Bristol

## OEA Member Wins Neb. Art Educator of the Year Award

Omaha Education Association member Joe Bristol has been named the 2022 Outstanding Art Educator of the Year by the Nebraska Art Teachers Association (NATA). Bristol teaches at Wakonda Elementary School and began his teaching career in 2015. Bristol, an Omaha Burke High graduate, says he was inspired by influential art teachers growing up in the district.

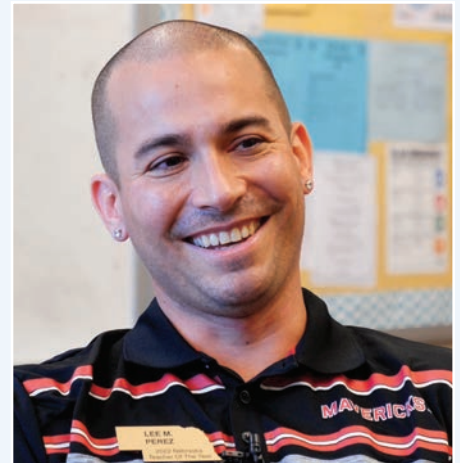
Also honored during the 2022 NATA Fall Conference Awards Ceremony in October were OEA members Lindsay Hueftle, recipient of the NATA Elementary Art Educator of the Year, and Ryan Dieke, recipient of the NATA Middle School Art Educator of the Year. Dieke teaches at Marrs Middle School and Hueftle teaches at Prairie Wind Elementary School.

Each year, NATA recognizes outstanding contributions to learning in art education, leadership in curriculum and staff development in local school districts and communities, and contributions to professional endeavors on state and national levels.

# Perez honored with NEA Teaching Excellence Award

Omaha Education Association member and 2022 Nebraska Teacher of the Year Lee Perez was honored with the California Casualty Award for Teaching Excellence in October. Perez was one of 46 public school educators from across the country to receive the award. Educators are nominated for their leadership, excellence in the classroom, family and community engagement, a commitment to equity and diversity, and advocacy for the teaching profession. Perez is an English as a Second Language teacher at Omaha's Alice Buffett Magnet Middle School.

The awardees will be honored at the NEA Foundation Salute to Excellence in Education on May 5, 2023, in Washington, DC. Five of the awardees nominated by National Education Association's state affiliates will be chosen as finalists for the top national award and receive \$10,000. The educator selected for the top award will be revealed at the



Lee Perez

NEA Foundation Salute to Excellence in Education and receive \$25,000.

The NEA Foundation is a national philanthropic organization committed to promoting the absolute best in public education. The Foundation invests in educators' leadership, shared learning, and collaboration; supports partnerships and initiatives that strengthen public education; and promotes improvements in public education policy and practice.

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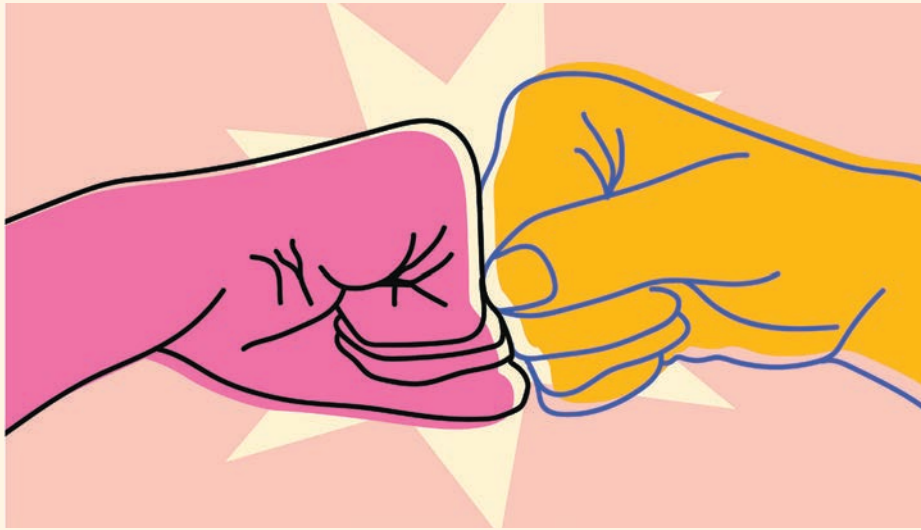


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# The Art of Collaboration

by Laura Enos

A giant red foam hand waving in the air, the sound of a cowbell clanging across a high school gymnasium over the crowd's applause as medalists' names are announced. Students striking up conversations with the head girls' wrestling coach. Sounds like a typical Saturday meet in front of an energetic crowd, right? Actually, in this case, it was the awards ceremony after a day-long competitive speech meet. This is my current teaching reality and it's fantastic.

As a 20-year secondary-level teacher, who has sponsored student council, book club, yearbook, newspaper, speech and one-act, the one role I've never been asked to serve, and for very good reason, is that of an athletic coach. Yet, I have a colleague who has only coached sports for his extra duties and whom I'd consider one of my speech team's biggest fans. He is a respected colleague and dear friend – and he happens to be my school's head girls wrestling coach.

In the earlier described scene, not only is said coach and high school SPED teacher, Anthony Ruzicka, attending speech meets on his Saturdays off, he's the one donning the red foam hand and energetically ringing that cow bell with pride. He supports all the kids in our school district and all their activities.

### Cross the Aisle

This is beyond just athletic and non-athletic coaches crossing the aisle to support one another's programs. Even though we don't have a lot of similar interests, we do share mutual respect, a passion to cheer on our students, and an

important professional standard that we support and celebrate. Rather than being in competition with one another, we want each other to succeed.

Case in point: Coach Ruzicka's wrestling season directly conflicts with my speech team's season. Three of our school's female speech team competitors this year are also dedicated wrestlers. Last season, one of the young ladies not only just marginally missed qualifying for Girls State Wrestling, she also competed at the State Speech tournament in March. Coach Ruzicka was there to watch her, and eight other qualifying kids present their speeches at Kearney High School – burning a personal day, spending his own money on gas, mileage, hotel and food.

It's not just at the big moments when my colleague's support is felt. It's All. The. Time. On school van rides to and from wrestling tournaments, Coach Ruzicka knew his athlete was working on memorizing her competitive persuasive speech, so he'd ask her to recite it to him aloud while on the road. Here's the kicker: the persuasive speech topic was about making menstrual products and services connected to women's health more affordable and accessible. She's giving a speech about PERIODS, and this thirty-something-year-old male teacher and wrestling coach didn't blink an eye listening to her speech with sincere interest because he knew she was passionate about the topic.

Do we punish our shared students or pressure them to like one extra-curricular activity over the other? Absolutely not. This same student was nursing an

injury last year. When she was cleared to competitively wrestle again, she let me know she was going to compete on the mat rather than give her persuasive speech on an upcoming conflicting weekend competition. I smiled and told her how excited I was for her that she was going to get to finish out her wrestling season. And I meant it. When the students witness adults modeling teamwork, civility, camaraderie and support for one another, they truly see it and demonstrate it among their peers as well. Kids are extremely observant and perceptive.

### Celebrate and Collaborate

Neither one of us sees ourselves as top billing over the other. Mr. Ruzicka and I ask questions, learn about each other's interests and let the kids know we care about them beyond our individual fishbowls of the activities that we coach.

When I wasn't taking students to a speech competition last winter, I found myself driving to a girls' wrestling tournament on a Saturday and walking into new territory. I became an instant fan. As a feminist, I immediately connected to how empowered and strong these young women are. The life skills and the physical and mental strength they were gaining from being a part of this sport was clear from my view in the bleachers.

I've been in work environments where athletic coaches and activity sponsors functioned on completely different islands with not much crossover or communication. We weren't outright enemies, but we didn't really know each other, or even try to collaborate, for that matter. Not only is there the social separation in opposing athletics and activities, but let's be honest, we see and hear the negative comparisons in opposing departments and grade levels within a district. Why? We should not be too afraid or too stubborn to celebrate one another and want each other to succeed.

The only competitive nature I have against Mr. Ruzicka now, is who can be the better fan for each other's activity. The man brought a foam hand and cowbell to a speech tournament, for goodness sakes! How does one top that? Face paint? Posters? Hmm...time to brainstorm.



### About the author:

Laura Enos has taught for 20 years in Nebraska public schools. Today she teaches high school English at Scribner-Snyder Community Schools.

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Your NSEA colleagues are working to improve your contracts. Attendees from these locals participated in the Greater Nebraska Bargaining Meeting: Amherst, Aurora, Axtell, Elm Creek, Gibbon, Holdrege, Hastings, Kearney, Overton, Red Cloud, SCATA, Shelton and Wilcox-Hildreth.

# AT THE TABLE: Locals look for solutions on pay, staff shortages through bargaining

Ahead of the 2023-24 bargaining season, NSEA members from 13 local associations traveled to Kearney to discuss ways to increase wages, secure benefits, and improve teaching and learning conditions. As is usual, negotiations teams will address topics such as salary increases, health insurance coverage, class size, plan time and retirement and, this year, many locals will also be tackling staff shortages and teacher retention.

Local leaders from Amherst, Aurora, Axtell, Elm Creek, Gibbon, Holdrege, Hastings, Kearney, Overton, Red Cloud, SCATA, Shelton and Wilcox-Hildreth gathered in mid-October for NSEA's Greater Nebraska Bargaining meeting. Participants were joined by NSEA's Collective Bargaining Specialist Jen Dubas and Organizational Specialists Kristen Sedlacek, Kim Story and Patrick Fielder.

The statutory start of bargaining for the 2023-24 contract is Nov. 1. Association and school board bargaining teams then have essentially two months to bargain, with a goal of wrapping up negotiations with a tentative agreement sometime in January. For Holdrege Education Association

President Deb Komenda, the cost of living increase is a concern that will play into her negotiations this fall.

"This year we have a lot of information about how much inflation has changed in even the last year," she said. "We'd like to use the information that was in *The Voice* on how the buying power of our salaries has decreased by about \$2,000 to show the district that we really need to do something for our teachers."

As trusted professionals, educators are best equipped to advocate for change at the table but when bargaining begins, there are invariably questions that arise. NSEA has staff ready to assist with negotiations. From our PK-12 local associations to statewide Higher Education teams, NSEA has the expertise and resources to help.

### Competitive Pay

Anna Peralez was elected president of the UMÓ<sup>o</sup>HO<sup>n</sup> Nation Education Association just a few

months ago. Previously, she served as lead negotiator for her local. Peralez attended the NSEA U Bargaining Strategy Workshop over the summer to help prepare for this year's negotiations.

"I know this year will be a different experience for me because the last time I was at the table it was COVID, and we were worried our schools might get shut down. We were in a bit of a rush to get an agreement."

Peralez said that the workshop gave her a head start on a comp study for UMÓ<sup>o</sup>HO<sup>n</sup> Nation—a first for her local.

"Because our school had never done the study before, it took a little while to get the information we needed from the district," she said. "Attending

the conference felt like having a community of help. It was just a good group to be a part of. I came away with new ideas for my local."

Like many schools trying to hire in a tight job market, UMÓ<sup>o</sup>HO<sup>n</sup>



Anna Peralez  
UMÓ<sup>o</sup>HO<sup>n</sup> Nation  
Education Association

## On the Cover

Nation offered hiring bonuses to attract new teachers. While these one-time bonuses may have helped fill classrooms in the short term, Peralez believes the district must next focus on long-term improvements in teacher attrition — and that includes competitive pay.

“Our teachers on longevity never saw any of the hiring-bonus money or anything like that. We’re going into this year looking for solutions to how we get people to stay here,” said Peralez.

Research has shown that increasing base pay has been connected to attracting more and higher-quality teaching candidates, and districts that offer higher pay have had lower levels of teacher attrition. This will likely be a key issue for districts and local school boards as well. When Kearney Public Schools unveiled its new strategic plan, staff recruitment and retention were outlined as a key pillar. For Kearney Education Association Lead Negotiator Kevin Witte, the new strategic plan signals hope for a collaborative approach to bargaining with the district.

“I think from a negotiations standpoint, we’re excited that our administration, our board and our key negotiation group, we’re all actually working on the same thing,” he said.

### Insurance Coverage

Providing affordable, high-quality health care benefits is an important tool

to improving retention and recruitment.

“For our negotiations team a huge priority is trying to close the gap on insurance costs. As insurance goes up, it gets harder and harder for our members to make up the difference,” Witte explained.

Many agreements contain a pasted version of the 22-23 premium/coverage table to supplement the specific language that details the terms of the benefit provided by the district. NSEA advises locals to be thorough when proofreading this section of the agreement and watch for deductible amounts, premium amounts and terms of the coverage.

### Follow the Calendar

Locals that have met to bargain at least four times and have still not reached agreement should be in regular consultation with their NSEA organizational specialist by January.

“Provisions in Nebraska law force negotiations to adhere to tight timelines once bargaining nears the end of January, so working closely with your NSEA organizational specialist becomes critical,” said NSEA Collective Bargaining Specialist Jen Dubas. “Negotiators should be aware of problematic comments, proposals and strategies they observe during contract talks, and they should share those issues with their NSEA



Front: Kearney EA Lead Negotiator Kevin Witte. Back row: KEA member Scott Steinbrook and KEA President Katie Brodine.

organizational specialist.”

### A Reason to Belong

There are countless reasons membership in your professional association is a good idea and bargaining is a key reason for KEA President Katie Brodine.

“Something our new educators always ask is, ‘Why should I belong?’ And one of the first answers that I always provide is whether you are a member or not your local negotiates on your behalf. The key thing here is that the more members we have, the more bargaining power we have to improve your salary and your benefits.”

## Bargaining calendar for 2023-24 contract

State law sets a firm schedule for bargaining activities, which determine your pay and working conditions. Now is the time to bargain for the 2023-24 contract year.

Nov. 1



Bargaining must commence on or before this date.

Dec. 16



Decision Day. Talks must be complete, or you can continue to negotiate but your local must be willing to settle without legal assistance, or your local must notify your NSEA organizational specialist of the likely need to prepare for resolution officer training.

January



Locals pursuing resolution officer training work with NSEA to prepare their case or conclude bargaining on their own and ratify the contract.

Feb. 8



Statutory filing date for resolution officer proceedings.

March 25



Proceedings end, and locals provide a signed copy of the new agreement to NSEA.

April 8



Resolution officer decision becomes final unless jurisdiction of Commission of Industrial Relations (CIR) is invoked by this date.

For further details, talk with your NSEA Organizational Specialist. Find your representative at [www.nsea.org/Field-Staff-Units](http://www.nsea.org/Field-Staff-Units)





## New programs

### Undergraduate Degree

- Nutrition and Dietetics

### Undergraduate Minors

- Data Analytics (online)
- Political Science

### Undergraduate Options

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

### Undergraduate Certificate

- Unmanned Aircraft Systems for Remote Sensing

### Graduate Degree

- Athletic Training

### Graduate Certificates

- Digital Marketing (online)
- Healthcare Management (online)



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# Tell Us: What Do You Want to Learn?



The three-day professional development conference will be held in Kearney at the Younes Conference Center, July 17-19, 2023.

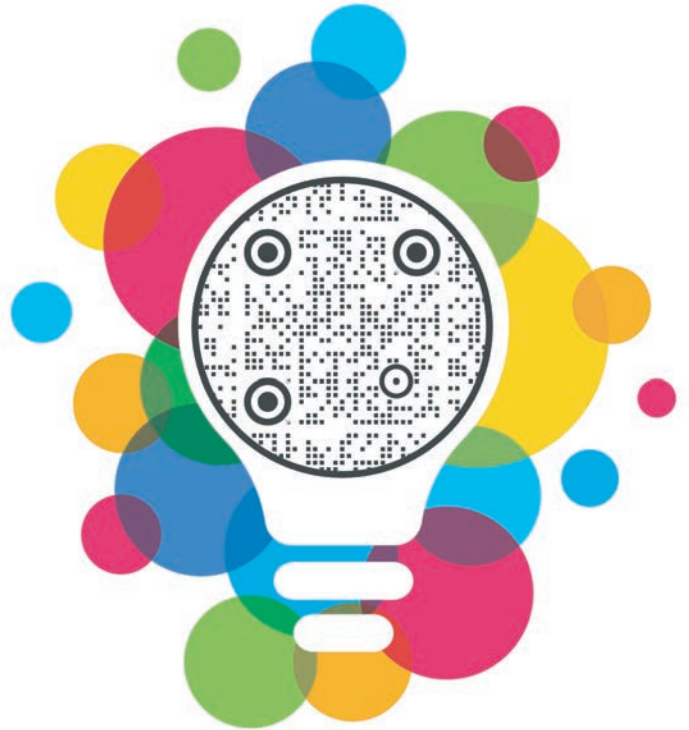
Planning for the annual event is already underway, and we want to know – what sessions do YOU want to be offered?

Scan the code on this page 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.

“We want to ensure that we are offering sessions of interest to every leader and every member,” said NSEA President Jenni Benson.

Watch *The Voice* and NSEA social media for details about the 2023 conference.



## 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 [www.nsea.org/webinars](http://www.nsea.org/webinars) for a complete list of sessions.

### NSEA members only

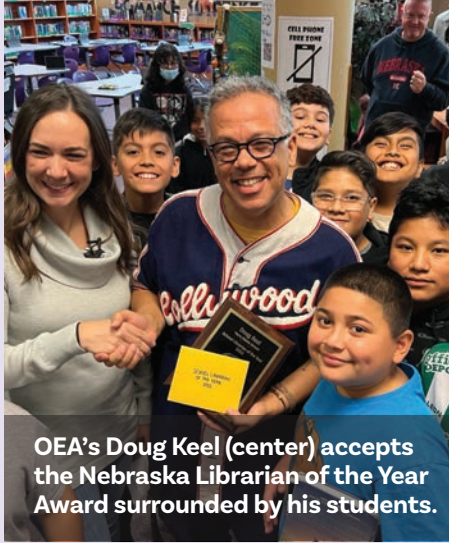
- **Planning for Online Holiday Shopping and Travel:** Tuesday, Nov. 8, 5:30 p.m. Join NEA Member Benefits to learn how you can save on hotels, car rentals and flights through your membership.
- **Financial Essentials** Thursday, Nov. 17, 7 p.m. Specifically designed to help education professionals plan for retirement by reviewing financial concepts that can impact members during each life-stage especially as they move closer to retirement.
- **Delegate Assembly 101** Tuesday, Nov. 29, 7 p.m. Learn about NSEA Delegate Assembly's role in driving the focus of the association and how to become a delegate.
- **NSEA Member Opportunities** Thursday, Dec. 8, 7 p.m. Join NSEA officers to learn about leadership opportunities within the association.

- **Retirement Seminar** Tuesday, Nov. 8, 7:30 p.m. The presentation will provide attendees basic information about the benefits that they will be receiving upon retirement from the Nebraska Public Employees Retirement System.
- **Budgeting for the New Year** Thursday, Dec. 15, 5:30 p.m. This session will go over basics of budgeting and will provide the tools needed to help you on your budgeting journey to financial tranquility.
- **2023 NEA Member Benefits Overview** Tuesday, Jan. 10, 2023, 5:30 p.m. Hear about the services and cost saving opportunities available to you as a member.
- **NSEA Legislative Update** Tuesday, Feb. 7, 2023, 7 p.m. Receive a 2023 Legislative Update from Brian Mikkelsen, NSEA Director of Political Action.

### 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 Michelle Raphael at [michelle.rafael@nsea.org](mailto:michelle.rafael@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).



OEA's Doug Keel (center) accepts the Nebraska Librarian of the Year Award surrounded by his students.

## OEA Member Wins Neb. Librarian of the Year Award

The Nebraska School Librarians Association (NSLA) selected Doug Keel of Marrs Middle School as the 2022 School Librarian of the Year. The NSLA surprised Keel, a member of the Omaha Education Association (OEA), with the honor during a presentation at the school in October.

The award honors those who demonstrate creativity and innovation in the profession through instructional opportunities and programming.

Keel's nominator described him as "one of the most creative and innovative librarians" whose love for the profession is infectious. Keel is known for engaging students through hands-on activities and creating unique monthly displays.

# Applications open for 2023 Belz, Lynch, Krause Grant

Good teachers are always looking to improve their skill set, and the NSEA makes learning easier with an award from the Belz, Lynch, Krause Educational Grant Fund. The 2023 application deadline is Tuesday, Feb. 28.



Belz



Lynch



Krause

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

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

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

Applications must be submitted online by 11:59 p.m. CST on Feb. 28, 2023. Recipients will be notified in March.

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

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

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

## EHA to announce insurance rates for '23-24



The Educators Health Alliance board took action to set rates for the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Nebraska educator health plans in late October, with rates to be announced Oct. 28.

Once released, the new rates, any changes to the plans and updated cost-sharing information will be available online at [www.ehaplan.org](http://www.ehaplan.org).

The average annual rate increase over the past 10 years has been below 5%.

The EHA is a non-profit corporation created to procure quality, affordable health care insurance for Nebraska education employees. The rates set by the EHA are for the BCBSNE plan used by more than 400 public school districts and affiliates. The plan is governed by a 12-member board representing the Nebraska Association of School Boards, the Nebraska Council of School Administrators and the NSEA.

*Learn. Challenge. Empower. Transform.*

## READY TO TAKE THE LEAD?

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- Prepare for top-level leadership and superintendent roles.

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# Tools to help manage diabetes

November is Diabetes Awareness month. Although it is an often-invisible disease, diabetes affects more than 35 million Americans, according to the Centers for Disease Control. It is also the seventh-leading cause of death in the United States, and people with diagnosed diabetes have a 50% higher risk of early death than those without.

The financial burden of diabetes is substantial. The CDC reports that the disease costs the U.S. an estimated \$327 billion annually because of increased medical costs and lost wages.

People with diagnosed diabetes have on average 2.3 times higher medical costs than those without diabetes.

Fortunately, better health management can help people with diabetes live longer and healthier lives, while preventing or delaying diabetes complications.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska, a partner with the Educators Health Alliance, offers innovative, proven solutions to manage, and in some cases reverse, diabetes.

Its suite of diabetes management and reversal offerings complement each other.

## Nurses on staff

To support these programs, BCBSNE has nurse diabetes educators on staff to help inform, encourage and support those looking to better manage their condition.

“The fact that BCBSNE covers diabetes education programs, including programs for prediabetes, allows our members to get the most out of their health care coverage,” Kelly Zelenda, nurse diabetes educator, said. “We’re able to work with customers one-on-one and help them through their journey to a healthier lifestyle.”

## Type 1, type 2 and prediabetes management program

BCBSNE nurse diabetes educators use a mobile platform powered by Wellframe to deliver personalized support and resources to patients, show real-time progress and enable easy two-way communication that



helps members manage type 1 and type 2 diabetes and prediabetes.

### Type 2 diabetes reversal program

A program powered by Virta is available to EHA members and can help reverse type 2 diabetes using a clinically proven combination of nutritional ketosis, medical supervision and one-on-one health coaching. Virta helps participants lose weight, reduce blood sugar and A1c

and get off diabetes medications for good.

### \$0 cost share for preferred insulin

Beginning in Jan. 2022, BCBSNE offered preferred insulin therapy at no cost to members diagnosed with diabetes.

To learn how these programs can help you on your health journey, call 877-721-2583 or visit [NebraskaBlue.com/EHAPop](https://www.NebraskaBlue.com/EHAPop).

**November is Diabetes Awareness Month**

1 in 10 Nebraskans are living with diabetes, but healthy lifestyle choices can improve your outcomes.

Your EHA health benefits include a suite of powerful tools to manage diabetes, at no additional cost.

Get support on your journey at [NebraskaBlue.com/EHAPop](https://www.NebraskaBlue.com/EHAPop)

**BlueCross BlueShield Nebraska**

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



# FAQs of One-time Federal Student Loan Debt Relief

## Do I qualify for student loan relief?

To be eligible for federal debt relief, you must have federal student loans and earn less than \$125,000 annually or \$250,000 per household. You need to meet the income criteria for either 2020 or 2021, but you don't need to meet it for both years.

- **Receive Up to \$20,000 in debt relief** if you received a Federal Pell Grant in college and meet the income requirements.
- **Receive Up to \$10,000 in debt relief** if you didn't receive a Federal Pell Grant in college and meet the income requirements.

If you have eligible federal student loans and meet the income requirements, it doesn't matter if you've been actively repaying your loans or are in school, a grace period, or default.

**Note:** The debt relief applies only to loan balances you had before June 30, 2022. Any new loans disbursed on or after July 1, 2022, aren't eligible for debt relief. For more on eligible federal loans and income requirements visit [StudentAid.gov](https://studentaid.gov)

## How do I apply?

You can apply by filling out the application online at [StudentAid.gov](https://studentaid.gov). You can apply today but no later than Dec. 31, 2023. Filling out the application is easy and takes about 5 minutes. You don't need to log in or provide any documents.

**Note:** The application is open, but debt discharge is paused. As a result of a court order, the department is temporarily blocked from processing debt discharges. You are encouraged to apply if you are eligible. A review of applications will continue.

## What if I have multiple loans?

For borrowers with multiple loans, they'll apply the relief in the following order:

- Defaulted ED-held loans
- Defaulted commercial FFEL Program loans
- Non-defaulted Direct Loans and FFEL Program loans held by ED
- Perkins Loans held by ED

If you have multiple loans in a program type (e.g., multiple Direct Loans), they'll apply the relief in the following order:

- Apply relief to loans with highest interest rate.
- If interest rates are the same, apply to unsubsidized loans before subsidized loans.
- If interest rate and subsidy status are the same, apply to the most recent loan.
- If interest rate, subsidy status, and disbursement date are the same, apply to the loan with the lowest combined principal and interest balance.

## When will I know my debt relief is complete?

### 1. Watch for an email confirmation.

After you submit your Student Loan Debt Relief Application, you'll receive an email confirmation. Your [StudentAid.gov](https://studentaid.gov) account won't show the status of your application.

### 2. Your application will be reviewed.

Once you submit your application, it will be reviewed to confirm you're eligible for debt relief.

### 3. You will be contacted if more information is needed.

If there is not enough information on file to confirm eligibility, you will receive an email with instructions. Here are some reasons they may follow up:

- They need documentation to verify income.
- You were enrolled as a dependent student anytime between July 1, 2021, and June 30, 2022, and they need information about your parent's income.
- They can't match any loan records based on the information provided in your application.
- They determine that you don't have any eligible federal loans.
- If you don't hear anything from [StudentAid.gov](https://studentaid.gov), no further action is needed.

### 4. They will notify you once your application is approved.

Once they confirm your eligibility, they'll notify you. They'll determine how debt relief gets applied to your loans and provide this information to your loan servicer(s).

### 5. Your loan servicer(s) will apply your debt relief and notify you.

Your loan servicer(s) will apply your relief directly to your account. It may take some time for your account to reflect this change. Each loan servicer you have will notify you separately. They'll let you know if your loans are paid in full or have an outstanding balance. If you have an outstanding loan balance, they will also notify you what your new monthly payment will be once payments resume after Dec. 31, 2022.

If you made payments during the payment pause that brought your balance below what you're eligible for (\$10,000 or \$20,000) but didn't pay off your loan in full, refund payments will be sent automatically.

**Beware of Scams:** Make sure you work only with the U.S. Department of Education and its loan servicers, and never reveal your personal information or account password to anyone.

# NSEA, Higher Education & you!

The Nebraska State Education Association has a longstanding, strong commitment to its higher education members.

Since 2006, the NSEA Higher Education Affairs Committee has facilitated communication between NSEA higher education associations and members; supporting and promoting NSEA in a comprehensive and unified way and developing outreach and recruitment efforts for higher education faculty, academic professionals and higher education support professionals across Nebraska.



**Kristi Rastede**  
Northeast CC  
Higher ed '24

## Your Advocate

Kristi Rastede, a full-time instructor at Northeast Community College, was appointed as the acting chair of the Higher Ed Committee in March and elected to serve as the Higher Ed At Large Representative on the NSEA Board at DA 2022. Rastede and others on the committee are exploring ways to meet the needs of higher education members.

“Members of the Higher Education Affairs Committee are actively evaluating ways our association can be the best advocates for our colleagues,

our students, and ourselves,” Rastede said.

## Breaking the Silos

Rastede hopes in her time as chair she can work to break down what she calls “silos” in higher education.

“Because our members are so spread out around the state and we don’t really see each other that much, it feels like we’re in our own silos,” she said. “I want to find a way to unite our members so we can act collectively and speak with a unified voice. When we address challenges in higher education together, we have a better pathway to affect change.”

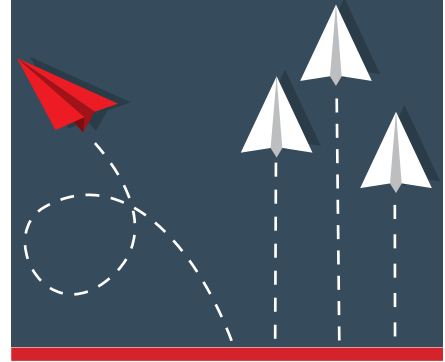
## NSEA U

NSEA provides a variety of training opportunities and resources for members. Rastede is working with NSEA Higher Education Organizational Specialist Mandy Faripour to advance the higher education professional development offered at next summer’s NSEA U conference.

“I welcome new ideas from our members. NSEA U is an opportunity to join together to address challenges and set goals as we navigate the future of higher education.”

**Have ideas?** E-mail Kristi Rastede at [kristir\\_29@hotmail.com](mailto:kristir_29@hotmail.com)

## Why Join NSEA?



## Education Support Professionals :

### There is strength in numbers!

NSEA works with ESPs to create learning opportunities and supports for them to elevate their professional excellence throughout their careers. Together, we can make good things happen, including:

- Securing better pay, benefits, and working conditions;
- Gaining Professional Development and leadership training;
- Having strong, effective representation in job-related disputes;
- Accessing affordable life, health, disability, and casualty insurance programs; and
- Receiving on-the-job liability insurance of up to \$1 million.

Contact NSEA at (800) 742-0047 or email questions to [info@nsea.org](mailto:info@nsea.org).

## What’s going on in the legislature?

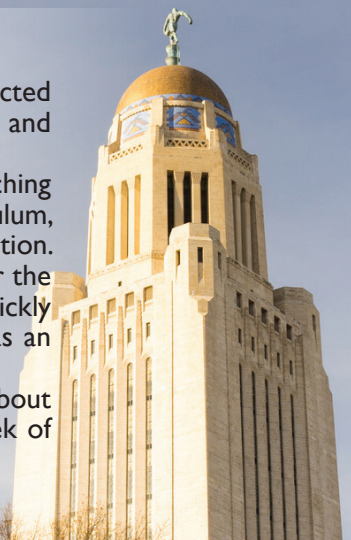
Nebraska’s 108th Legislature will convene on January 4, 2023. The 90-day session is expected to cover a wide range of proposed bills that will affect Nebraska public schools, students and staff.

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

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

Stay up-to-date with legislative decisions that affect public education. Receive updates about legislative activity in NSEA’s Capitol Update, sent to your personal email inbox each week of the legislative session.

Subscribe to the Capitol Update at [www.nsea.org/subscriber](http://www.nsea.org/subscriber).



# 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 do not receive 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).



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- » Educational Specialist Degree (Ed.S.)

### MASTER OF SCIENCE DEGREES:

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- » Elementary & Secondary Education
- » Literacy
- » School Counseling
- » Special Education
- » Speech-Language Pathology
- » Clinical Mental Health Counseling\*

\* For those interested in school-based mental health careers

[ [CEHHS.UNOMAHA.EDU/GRAD](https://cehhs.unomaha.edu/grad) ]

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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.

## IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

### Virtual 2022 Special Delegate Assembly December 10, 2022

As announced to members in an all-member email sent October 26, 2022, the NSEA Board of Directors has called for a Special Delegate Assembly.

Delegates who were duly elected for the 2022 Annual Meeting, and were verified as current NSEA members, were sent the information through US mail as well as an email with specific details. Members can find more information on the NSEA website:

[www.nsea.org/SpecialDA](http://www.nsea.org/SpecialDA)



## Mark Your Calendar

- **December 10, 2022**  
Virtual Special DA
- **February 15, 2022**  
Deadline to declare intention to run for NSEA Executive Officer Vacancies
- **February 17, 2023**  
Award Nominations Due
- **April 28-29, 2023**  
Annual Delegate Assembly, Lincoln

# Student Voice: Calibrating Autonomy

S.E.E.D

*“When students have a voice, they have more meaningful learning experiences.” - Dr. Russell, Quaglia*

## 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 value environments that encourage students to reflect on and take ownership of their own learning behaviors and academic progress. Student voices are a necessary component of these environments that foster student autonomy. For more than 30 years, Dr. Russell Quaglia and his team at the Quaglia Institute for School Voice and Aspirations have been collecting data about “student voice.” Data from half a million students who took the Quaglia Student Voice Survey shows that when students have some autonomy in their education, they are three times more likely to experience self-worth, and five times more likely to be engaged and find purpose at school. However, many students reported low levels of decision-making during their school experiences. As educators bridge teaching and learning into the post-covid era, finding ways to build relationships that support elevated student voice and increase the opportunity for students to calibrate autonomy (adjusting decision making based on the factors and data they have access to) will prove to be an important way to engage learners.

The importance of autonomy in learning and leading isn't a new concept. In previous articles, the NDE SEED Team has referenced “the feeling that their voice is heard” as one reason why teachers thrive in their districts (Johnson, 2019). Thus, what is true for student autonomy is true for the adults and educators in schools, resulting not only in the calibration of their autonomy as professional educators, but also serving as a retention tool.

Job satisfaction is key in employee retention and research shows that respect, compensation, trust between employees and leadership, job security, and opportunities to use skills and abilities are the reasons employees stay. The Society for Human Resources Management found that employees who are able to move into different positions within the same

organization or school district, often had greater job satisfaction because they were able to use their skills in different ways. Employees also want to be recognized for their accomplishments and that piece can look very different for each employee or location.

That same study showed that employees stay because they become embedded in their jobs, their communities, and as a result, have established a network of professional and personal relationships that motivate them to stay. Just as engaging students is a priority for teachers to ensure academic success, it should also be a top priority for principals to engage teachers to optimize their success and effectiveness. This should result in job satisfaction leading not only to retention, but to high quality performance for both teachers and students.

Relationship building is the foundation for allowing both students and educators to calibrate their autonomy by engaging in their own growth. The Nebraska Teacher Principal Performance Standards (NTPPS) are written to support effective teachers that build and sustain healthy relationships with each student. Students thrive in classrooms filled with trust, mutual respect and support. The NTPPS are also written to support effective school leaders who focus on the growth and development of not only students, but of all educators. Educators thrive in buildings filled with communication, collaboration, and a strong sense of collective efficacy.

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 [education.ne.gov/EducatorEffectiveness](https://education.ne.gov/EducatorEffectiveness)

# Save with exclusive member offers in November

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

### Dell

Shop the latest Dell computers and technology solutions including laptops, desktops, all-in-one PCs and gaming equipment and accessories. Deals in the Dell Outlet offer “same as new” warranties.

### Kohl's

Find great savings on clothing, shoes, toys, home décor, appliances and electronics for the whole family. Plus, enjoy free shipping and easy returns every day!

### Aerie

Check out cold weather clothing and activewear including the latest styles in leggings, joggers, sweatshirts

and sweaters. Aerie offers a full line of intimates, too. Get 25% off your purchase when you refer a friend!

### Zappos

Shop a huge selection of shoes, boots, sneakers, slippers and even athletic clothing. Your order comes with fast, free shipping and a 365-day return policy!

### Ulta

Choose from over 25,000 hair care, skin & nail care and cosmetic products from the largest beauty retailer in the U.S. Gift collections and fragrances are perfect for holiday giving! Get free shipping on orders of \$35 or more.

If you don't find what you're looking for in the exclusive member deals above, simply search for your favorite retailer by entering the store name in the search box on the NEA Discount Marketplace page!

## Get the NEA Mental Health Program at No Cost!

For NEA members only, the NEA Members Insurance Trust is offering ONE YEAR OF EXCLUSIVE, NO-COST ACCESS to the NEA Mental Health Program, powered by Sanvello.

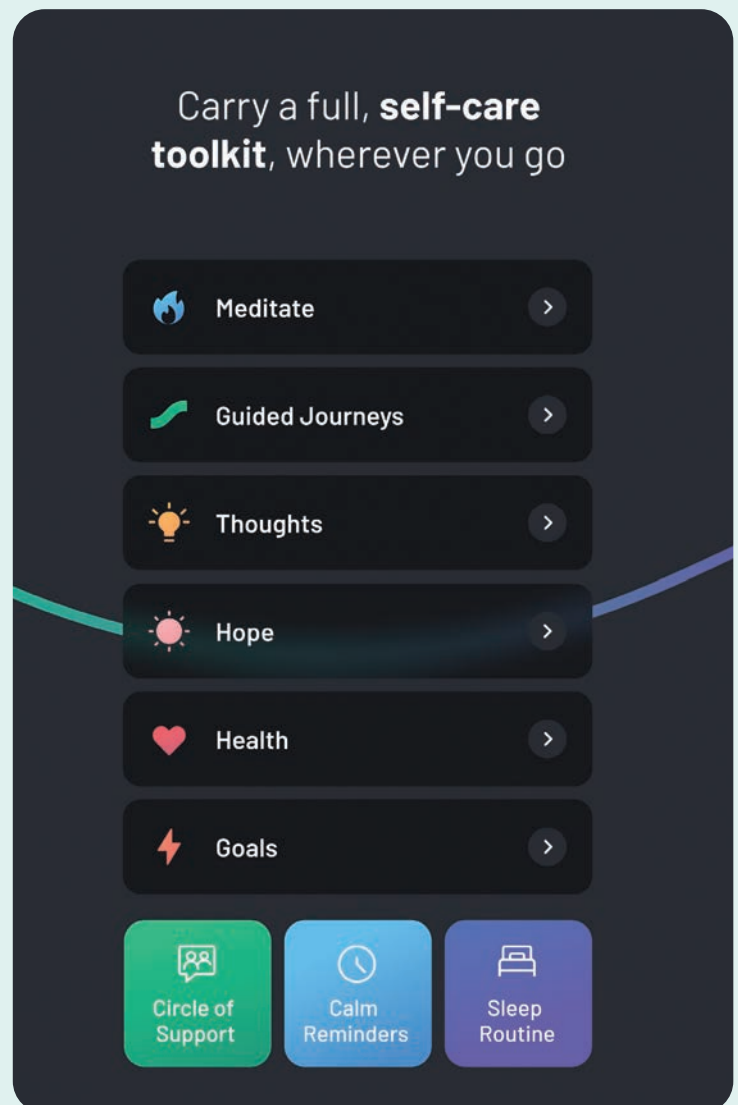
Rethink how you manage your mental health. Get clinically-validated tools for stress, anxiety, depression, or whatever you're going through. Whether you're feeling anxious, lonely, overwhelmed, or just burned out, Sanvello will meet you where you're at.

Get all of the support you need to improve your mental health—anywhere, anytime—with a confidential, on-demand mobile app which provides evidence-based tools that can help you feel happier over time:

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# Message from the Executive Director



TRISH GUINAN

## The Fairness Factor

Throughout my career, I have benefited from collective bargaining. In my early years of teaching, I heard stories from older colleagues about the ways in which collective bargaining made public education more equitable. It was collective bargaining that corrected the pay disparities between men and women, as well as between elementary and secondary educators. NSEA has consistently led efforts to protect our collective bargaining rights which has helped to ensure that public educators are protected and treated fairly.

When you are a middle child like I am, fairness is a big deal. The idea of fairness and its connectedness to the collective power of our Association resonates with me. It was the work of NSEA members before me that I had benefited from, and I believed it was my turn to advocate for fairness for myself, my students and those who would enter the profession after me. Yet it wasn't until I watched our neighbors in the Wisconsin Legislature strip educators of their collective bargaining rights that I fully realized how organized and deliberate the attacks on public employees had become.

## The Playbook

Unfortunately, Wisconsin was only the first of many states surrounding Nebraska to enact laws that substantially restricted or prohibited the collective bargaining rights of public school employees. Lawmakers in Kansas introduced bills modeled after the Wisconsin law to limit the scope of public employee union negotiations. A collective bargaining law in Iowa was repealed in just a matter of weeks when new lawmakers convened in January 2017. Under the proposal, most negotiations were limited to only the base wage—leaving fringe benefits and numerous other economic terms and conditions of employment off the table. NSEA has been vigorously working with our allies in the legislature to ensure that your collective bargaining rights remain strong.

## Follow the Money

It's not hard to trace the origins of these attacks on collective bargaining—just follow the money. Many of the out-of-state lawmakers who introduced these kinds of bills have accepted money from organizations funded by corporate interests and anti-public school billionaires such as the Koch brothers. Even some alternative organizations in Nebraska that encourage our members to drop their NSEA membership are funded by the same bad actors. These alternative organizations don't provide access to quality, affordable health insurance or fight for fair and decent wages through collective bargaining. NSEA is the only association that truly advocates for educators, all students and public schools.

## NSEA Membership

Beyond the laws that protect our rights to bargain, NSEA's membership is a key source of power. Attaining and maintaining membership requires that we educate members and potential members about NSEA's history, explain the benefits of membership, and continually engage members in issues that are important to them.

There are two things I would ask all our local associations to consider as we head into this bargaining season.

1. Consider holding a bargaining certification election if your local association has not already done so. Certification removes one step from the local association's 'to do' list each fall and offers protection.
2. Keep in touch with your NSEA organizational specialist throughout the bargaining process. These specialists are experienced bargainers, and they understand contract comparability, which will help you and your colleagues when it comes to securing increased salaries and benefits.

It is important to remember that a competitive compensation package achieved through collective bargaining benefits both our school employees and our students.

“

**When you are a middle child like I am, fairness is a big deal. The idea of fairness and its connectedness to the collective power of our Association resonates with me.**

”



From left to right, front row: Will West, De Tonack and Mary Dupuis.  
Back row: Stephanie Howell, volunteer Matt Oldfield, Marge Keep, and Julie Colby.

## CORE (Call On Retired Educators)

NSEA-Retired members continue to help and support Association activities through CORE (Call On Retired Educators). Lincoln Education Association (LEA) and Lincoln Education Association Retired members pitched in at the fall shredding event held at the LEA office on Oct. 8.

Donations from the shredding event help fund the Harvest of Books drive. Harvest of Books is sponsored by LEA. Founded in 1997, the goal of Harvest of Books, Inc. is to provide every first grader with one new book of their own to take home and share with their family.

Have an article idea for the NSEA-Retired Advocate or the NSEA Voice magazine? Send your idea to Dr. De Tonack at [dtonack@neb.rr.com](mailto:dtonack@neb.rr.com)

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

**Norfolk - BCBSNE Seminar** will be held in-person on Friday, Nov. 4 at Northeast Community College. Morning and afternoon sessions are available.

**Online - BCBSNE Seminar** will be held on Thursday, Nov. 3 from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m.

**Omaha - BCBSNE Seminar** will be held in-person on Friday Nov. 4 at the Omaha Public Schools Teacher Administrative Center TAC. Morning and afternoon sessions are available.

**Online - BCBSNE Seminar** will be held on Monday, Nov. 7 from 2 p.m. to 3 p.m.

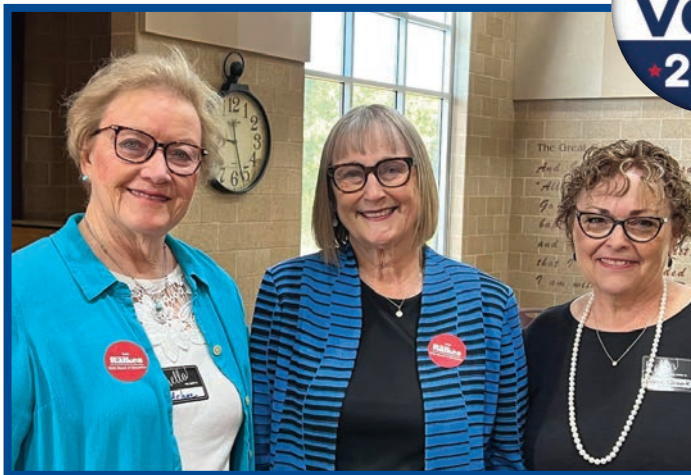
**Online - BCBSNE Seminar** will be held on Wednesday, Nov. 9 from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m.

Retired Governance/Lobby Day will be held on Feb. 21, 2023, in Lincoln.

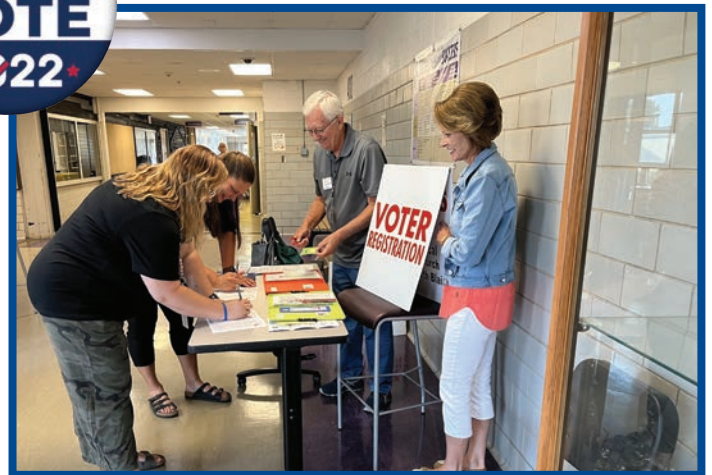
**Your Voice!**



**Your Vote!**



**Supporting candidates who support public education:** NSEA Retired members Arlene Rea and Margie Nowak attend a meet and greet with Helen Raikes, NSEA-recommended candidate for the Nebraska State Board of Education.



**Voter Registration:** Platte Valley Retired Association members Guy Roggenkamp and Bonna Wanek offered voter registration during a new teachers welcome event in Grand Island.

# The Joy of Teaching

“You wanna know what I make? I make kids work harder than they ever thought they could.”

So goes Taylor Mali’s infamous “What teachers make” slam poem that has become an anthem of sorts for many in the teaching profession, including Valentine’s Janell Stoeger.

“I know that I have impacted former students and I make a difference for kids today,” says Stoeger, referring to the poem. “Teaching is in my blood. My paternal grandmother served one-room schools in Brown and Cherry Counties. My aunt served the Scottsbluff School District for her entire career.”

And today, Stoeger has been serving in Valentine – or nearby – for more than twenty years, proudly carrying on the legacy as a third-generation educator in Nebraska.

Stoeger teaches seventh and eighth grade English at Valentine Middle School, where she will also be assisting with the speech program this year.

“My greatest joy in teaching is having a student say ‘I did not really read until I got to your class,’” smiles Stoeger.

Valentine, population 2,500, is a rural community on the northernmost plains of central Nebraska. Surrounded by the gently rolling Sandhills, it rests near the bank of the Niobrara. The town has a couple of grocery stores, a couple restaurants and a bookstore. Children there grow up nine miles from the Rosebud Reservation, 125 miles from a town with a five-figure population, and 400 miles from an international airport. Most young people don’t seem to realize just how special the place is but as adults many of them figure it out and return. What Stoeger adds to the lives of youth through her passion for literacy and her dedication to forensics is possibly even more important in such an isolated setting. Through literature, she can introduce her students to whole worlds they never knew about.

“I firmly believe that instilling a love of reading is the greatest gift one can give,” Stoeger says.

As both the seventh and eighth grade middle school English teacher, Stoeger gets to spend twice as much time with her students as most teachers.

“My favorite part of teaching is helping my students grow as writers over a two-year span. I have the opportunity to really develop relationships with students,” she says.

And it’s true. Former students of Stoeger’s can count on her to greet them with a friendly smile when they run into one another in the YA Lit section of the Plains Trading Company or in the produce aisles at Henderson’s IGA. She also has a tendency to send graduation cards or even quilt a blanket to commemorate the birth of a former student’s child. For Stoeger, teaching isn’t just about imparting content knowledge, it’s about building lifelong relationships

and nurturing her students even after they leave her classroom.

A teacher with a tenure as long as Stoeger’s has seen education undergo a great deal of change, and not all of it has been positive.

“Education feels heavier now than ever before,” sighs Stoeger. “Students and teachers are under a great deal of pressure to produce satisfactory results on tests. There doesn’t seem to be as much time to develop a deeper understanding of content. It is also a challenge to compete for a student’s attention in the classroom. The lure of digital media’s siren song is powerful.”

As if those factors weren’t enough, Stoeger reflects upon other struggles she knows her students face.

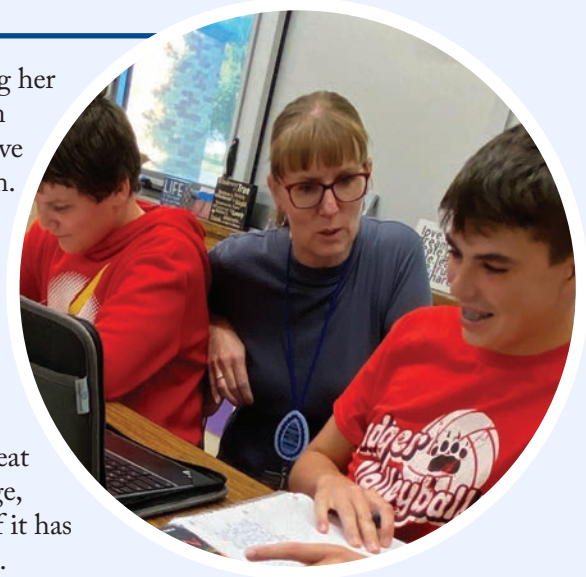
“The hardest part is knowing for some students, school is their safe place,” she remarks. “Weekends present a different level of stressful challenges for some kids. They may not know if they will have food and shelter until Monday morning. It breaks my heart to know that basic needs are not being met.”

But these difficulties don’t mean that Stoeger and her students alike don’t regularly find tremendous success in the classroom.

“I have a student who resisted completing the written portion of the vocabulary quiz,” reflects Stoeger. “Last week, I watched her break words into groups and complete those sentences before moving on. She was so proud of herself,” she smiles. “To witness her recognition of her capability moved me: it is why I teach,” Stoeger resolutely concludes.

“You want to know what I make?” asks Taylor Mali. “I make kids wonder, I make them question. I make them criticize. I make them apologize and mean it. I make them write. I make them read, read, read.”

And in this way, Taylor Mali and Janell Stoeger are incredibly alike. Their shared passion for English is surpassed by their commitment and dedication to young people. The young people of Valentine are very fortunate to have Janell Stoeger, and she knows she’s lucky to have them, too.



**About the author:** Dr. Mark Gudgel grew up in Valentine and spent eighteen years as a high school teacher in Nebraska. He currently serves as an assistant professor of education at the College of Saint Mary. Janell Stoeger was his teacher as well as his assistant speech coach and theater director while he was in high school, and for that he is forever grateful.

**Featured educator:** Janell Stoeger teaches English at Valentine Middle School, and is a pillar of the Valentine community. Fans, former students, and admirers of Ms. Stoeger can send milk chocolate, Gold Peak Sweet Tea, Frixon erasable pens, and their favorite YA lit to Valentine Middle School, attention Janell Stoeger, 239 N Wood St, Valentine, NE 69201, where they can be certain that those things will be put to good use.

## In Memory

We recognize these members whom we've lost recently.

Linda Hartman, 73, Alliance  
 Rosalyn C. Lamb, 89, Burwell  
 Harold Baker, 93, Lincoln  
 Alice G. Colgan, 78, Fremont

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

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