

# The VOICE

Nebraska School Journal • November 2023



# SCOTT PHILLIPS

*2024 Nebraska  
Teacher of the Year*

*Also inside:*

- Para to Teacher Career Ladder Program
- Conversations on Race and Belonging: A Deep Dive
- Nebraska Voters Will Decide the Fate of LB753



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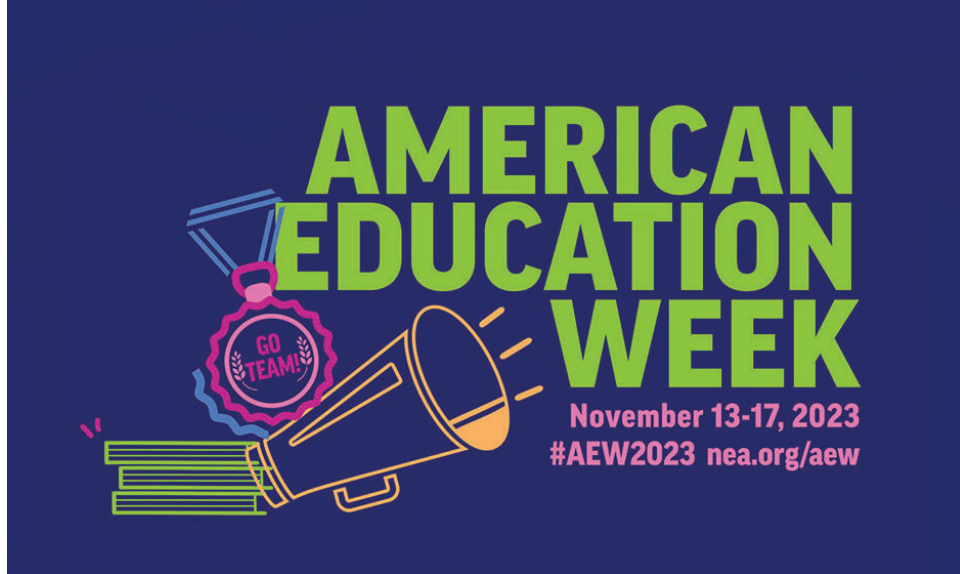
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## Celebrate American Education Week

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. 13 -17.

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 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 public schools, everyone from bus drivers and classroom teachers to cafeteria workers and administrative staff, plus countless others. Schools and communities are invited to celebrate and thank school 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:** Aurora Middle School math teacher Scott Phillips is Nebraska's 2024 Teacher of the Year. See the story and photos, pages 7-8. (Photos by Nebraska Department of Education)



# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

JENNI BENSON

## TELL ME WHY?

I have 11 grandkids and one more arriving in December. Through the years I have heard, "Why?" too many times to count. As my father would say, "If I had a nickel every time I heard that."

As a teacher for more than 35 years, I have also heard "Why do we have to do this?" I am sure you can relate.

I'm writing this after just hearing from the Secretary of State that election officials from Nebraska's 93 counties have verified more than enough referendum petition signatures to put the REPEAL of LB753 on the November 2024 ballot. Thanks to thousands of volunteers – many of whom are NSEA members – Support Our Schools Nebraska knocked it out of the park, gathering 117,145 signatures!

The phone was ringing off the hook with several reporters calling to interview. I was asked a slew of "Why" questions.

### Why do you think so many people signed the petition?

This is a decisive victory for Nebraskans – and it's the first step to ensure public funds are used to support public schools, not private schools. Nebraskans cannot afford to pay for two school systems.

### Why does the opposition say the "teacher's union" doesn't care about kids?

NSEA is its' members – and our members care and support students from birth through college. Indeed, NSEA's mission is to advocate for education professionals, empowering them to provide an excellent public education for every student. One reason we are opposed to LB753 is because it lacks transparency and accountability, which are especially important given that private schools are

allowed to discriminate against children, unlike public schools which are open to all children.

### Why is Nebraska one of the last states to approve tax vouchers for private schools?

Nebraskans support their local public schools – and our public schools rank very high nationally in the quality of education provided to our students. If LB753 is not repealed, it will not only hurt our public schools and students, it will hurt our local communities. LB753 will cost taxpayers \$100 million and that will lead to increased property taxes.

### Why don't you support scholarships for "needy children?"

The fact is that LB753 is not about helping low-income kids. It's about creating a tax scheme that will let wealthy people and corporations avoid paying their fair share in taxes. LB753 will hurt our local public schools that provide opportunities for every child – no matter their race, religion, language or special needs.

Only with your continued help can we let all Nebraskans know the answers to these "Why" questions. It is up to all of us to support our Nebraska public schools by learning the answers to these questions and by sharing the information with others.

Visit [SupportOurSchoolsNebraska.org](https://SupportOurSchoolsNebraska.org) for information—and please consider donating \$7.53 a month to the SOSNE Ballot Campaign. Only by each of us doing our part can we defeat Michigan billionaire Betsy DeVos and her dark money allies in this battle.

We have just over a year to continue to let Nebraskans know why it is important they vote to REPEAL LB753.



# Nebraska Voters Will Decide.

After verifying thousands of signatures collected over the summer by Support Our Schools Nebraska volunteers, official word came from the Nebraska Secretary of State's office in October: Nebraska voters will decide the fate of LB753's public funds for private schools tax scheme in the November 2024 election.

In August, public school supporters submitted 117,145 signatures—nearly twice the required number—from at least 5% of registered voters in 65 counties, far surpassing the 38-county requirement. The Secretary of State's certification means election officials have confirmed petition circulators met all constitutional requirements.

"The overwhelming success of this petition sends a clear message to the Governor and state lawmakers: Nebraskans want to vote on the issue of diverting public tax dollars to pay for private schools," said NSEA President Jenni Benson, a sponsor of Support Our Schools Nebraska.

The controversial bill was signed into law earlier this year after numerous failed attempts and despite strong opposition from a diverse coalition of parents, teachers, faith leaders, and education policy experts. Nebraska is currently the only state with a school privatization referendum on the ballot in 2024.

National attention will also mean continued interference in Nebraska's

elections by out-of-state special interest groups like those affiliated with Betsy DeVos, a Michigan billionaire and the primary financial backer of LB753.

Under LB753, taxpayers can divert owed state taxes to support private schools. Individuals and corporations can annually divert up to \$100,000, while estates and trusts can divert \$1 million. Statewide, the dollar-for-dollar tax credits can grow to \$100 million within 10 years, reducing state revenues available to fund public education and other priorities. Beyond its fiscal consequences, those working to repeal

LB753 have serious concerns about its impact on students, families, and teachers. The bill lacks necessary transparency and accountability requirements, which are especially important given that private schools are allowed to discriminate in admissions, unlike public schools which are open to all children.

"Now, we redouble our efforts to inform Nebraskans of the harm LB753 will cause if it is not repealed," said Benson.

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



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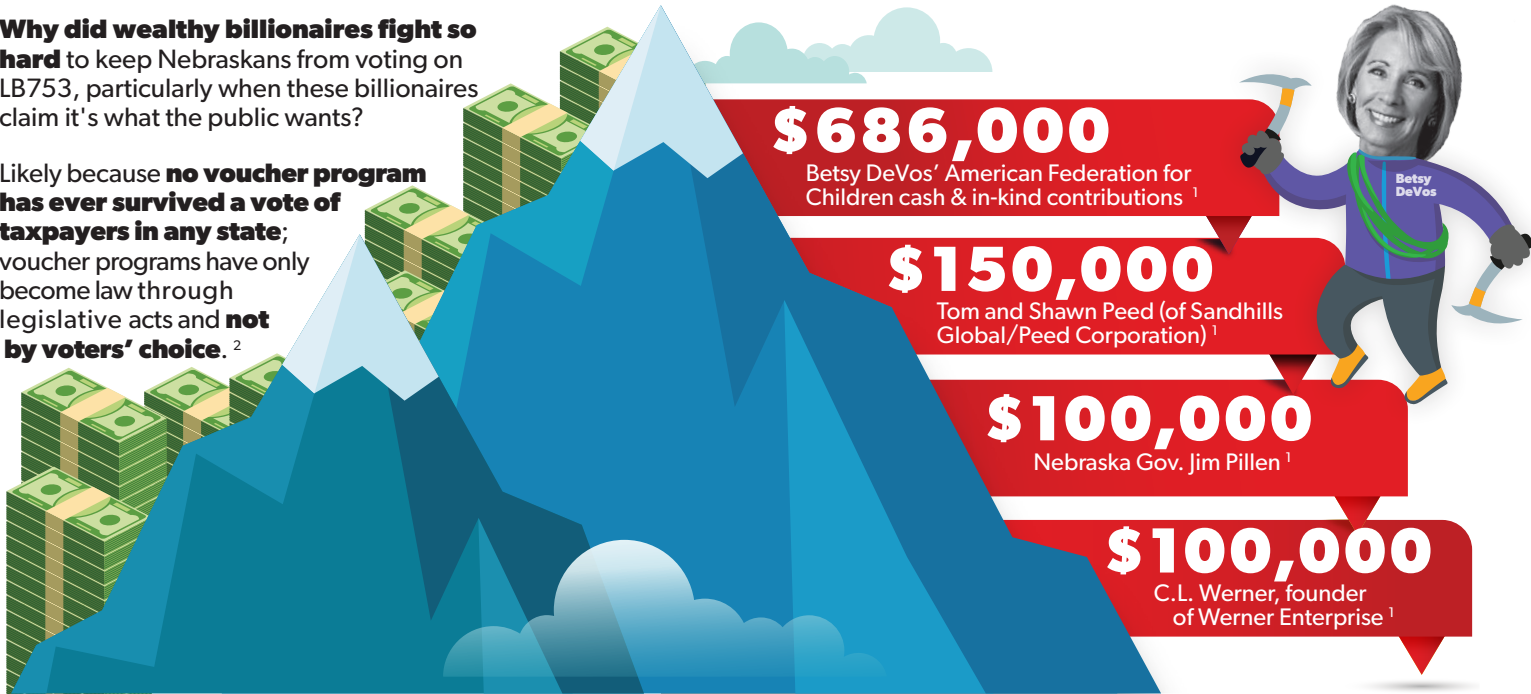


# MOUNTAINS OF MONEY

The LB753 petition drive has attracted a mountain of money from outside the state.

**Why did wealthy billionaires fight so hard** to keep Nebraskans from voting on LB753, particularly when these billionaires claim it's what the public wants?

Likely because **no voucher program has ever survived a vote of taxpayers in any state;** voucher programs have only become law through legislative acts and **not by voters' choice.** <sup>2</sup>



## THE "HANDS OFF" CLAUSE IN LB753

Under LB753, even though a private school is accepting tax dollars, the lack of accountability requirements means that the state cannot exercise any authority over that school.

As with many tax voucher schemes, LB753 includes a standard "hands off" clause, meaning that once the private schools receive money from the taxpayer-funded vouchers, there's no accountability for how that money is spent.

There's nothing in LB753 that spells out the tax voucher "scholarship" amounts. According to LB753, a tax voucher "scholarship" can cover all or part of a private school's tuition and fees, with the only limitation being that the amount can't exceed the "cost of educating an eligible student" as determined by each school.

In Iowa, and in other states where public funding for private school programs has expanded, many private schools have responded with significant hikes in tuition. <sup>3</sup>

The only annual reporting requirements included in LB753 are placed on the Scholarship Granting Organizations (SGOs)—the organizations established to accept donations and award the private school vouchers. Each year, the SGOs must file a report summarizing their policies and procedures, the number of students receiving scholarships, the total amount of donations received, and scholarships awarded. There's no requirement in LB753 that the SGOs or the Nebraska Department of Revenue provide information on the racial/ethnic distribution of voucher recipients and there's no evaluation measure for students' academic outcomes.

### IT'S NOT ABOUT CHOICE

Under LB753, the state cannot tell the school who it shall or shall not admit. Receiving a voucher does not mean that

the private school will accept that student. The only "choice" ultimately lies with private schools. Unlike public schools, private schools can pick and choose the students they want to enroll, and these private schools can remove students at any time without providing an alternative education option.

The tax dollars diverted to private schools through LB753 would otherwise be tax dollars available to help public schools. The Legislature's own fiscal analysts have predicted a more than \$11 million initial reduction in state aid to schools. <sup>4</sup>

## THINGS TO KNOW



**The Bill:** LB753, passed by the Nebraska Legislature in 2023, creates dollar-for-dollar tax credits totaling up to \$100M for donations by individuals, corporations and other entities to organizations granting scholarships to K-12 private schools. <sup>5</sup>



**The Voucher Scheme:** Through LB753's tax credit scheme, the state is skirting the state constitution's prohibition against using public tax dollars to fund private schools. Under LB753, corporations, individuals and other entities can divert state taxes they owe to fund private schools through newly-created "scholarship granting organizations" (SGOs).

1. Nebraska Accountability and Disclosure "Campaign Filings," Sept. 29, 2023.  
2. Forbes, "In Nebraska, The Fate Of A New Voucher Program May Be Decided At Ballot Box," October 10, 2023.

3. Iowa Starting Line, "Kim Reynolds' Private School Voucher Plan Led To Tuition Hikes," May 12, 2023.  
4. Nebraska Legislature, "LB 753 Fiscal Note," April 4, 2023.  
5. Nebraska Legislature, "LB 753," Jan. 18, 2023.



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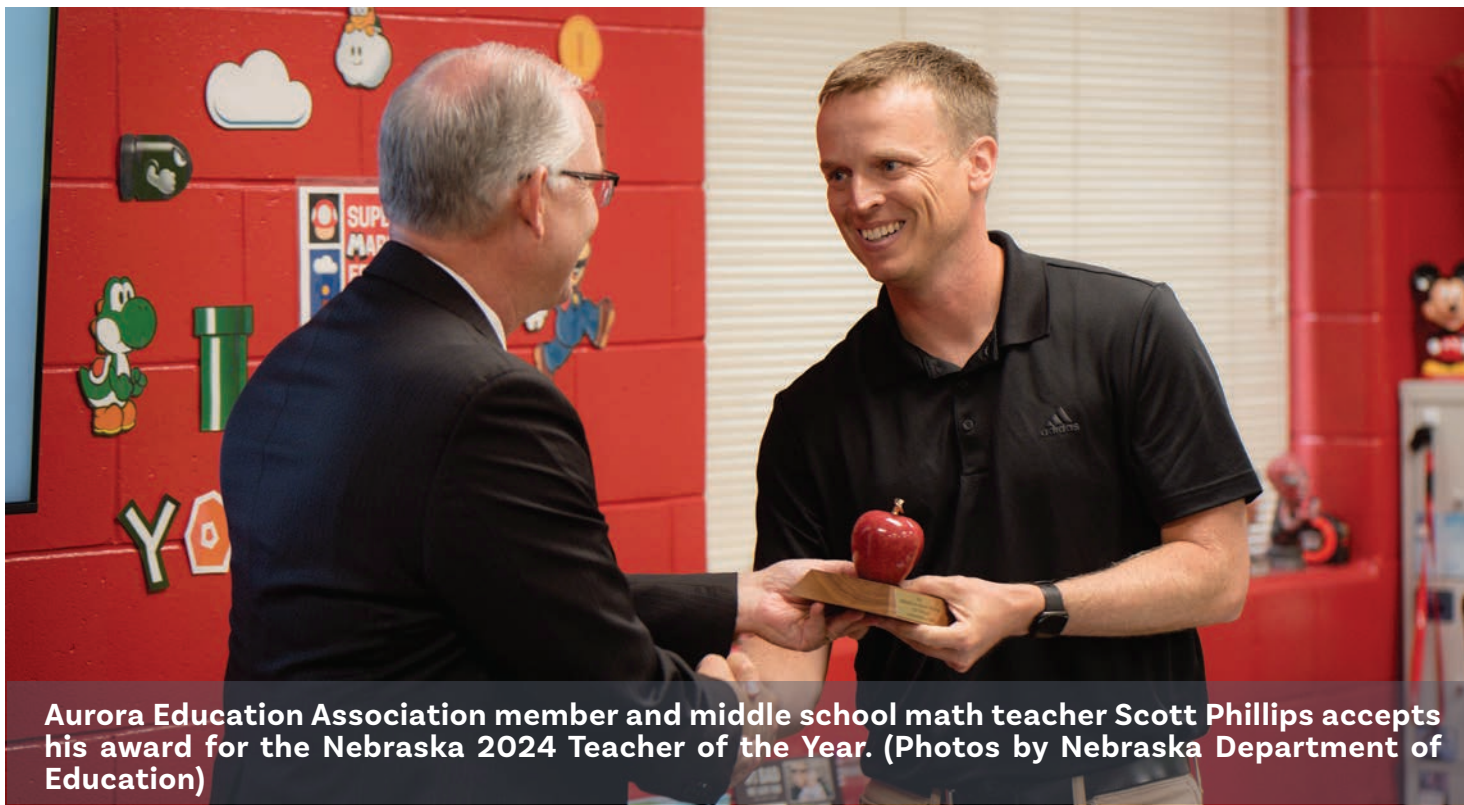
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Aurora Education Association member and middle school math teacher Scott Phillips accepts his award for the Nebraska 2024 Teacher of the Year. (Photos by Nebraska Department of Education)

# AURORA EDUCATION ASSOCIATION MEMBER Scott Phillips named '24 Nebraska Teacher of the Year

Scott Phillips can't really remember what inspired him to start reaching out to the public school teachers who taught him growing up, but as he explains it, he just wanted to tell them "Thank you."

"I started this tradition of trying to reconnect with my teachers a handful of years ago. I wanted to tell them how they inspired me," Phillips said.

It was a few encouraging words from his high school math teacher, Mr. Harris, that first set him on the path to becoming an educator himself.

"I still remember the moment clearly to this day. I was on a school bus helping one of my friends with her math homework and Mr. Harris turned around in his bus seat and he said to me, 'You'd be a good math teacher someday,'" said Phillips. "That one little comment stuck with me for all these years."

Phillips never took an advanced math class while in high school and began his freshman year of college as a broadcast journalism major, but the words from his math teacher stuck with him.

"I reached out to him probably five

or six years ago and told him, 'Hey, that made a big impact on me and I'm a math teacher now.'"

Phillips is currently in his 14th year of teaching at Aurora Public Schools. He has taught 7th grade math, Pre-Algebra, and a math intervention program. In late September, Phillips was named the 2024 Nebraska Teacher of the Year during a surprise award presentation. The Teacher of the Year program recognizes the contributions of classroom teachers who are exceptionally dedicated, knowledgeable and who can inspire students of all backgrounds and abilities to learn.

### Lessons in Failure

Like many in education, Phillips' approach to teaching was upended by the pandemic and the transition to remote learning, but it has forever

**"I teach about failure because if you're not missing some questions in math, you're probably not being challenged."**

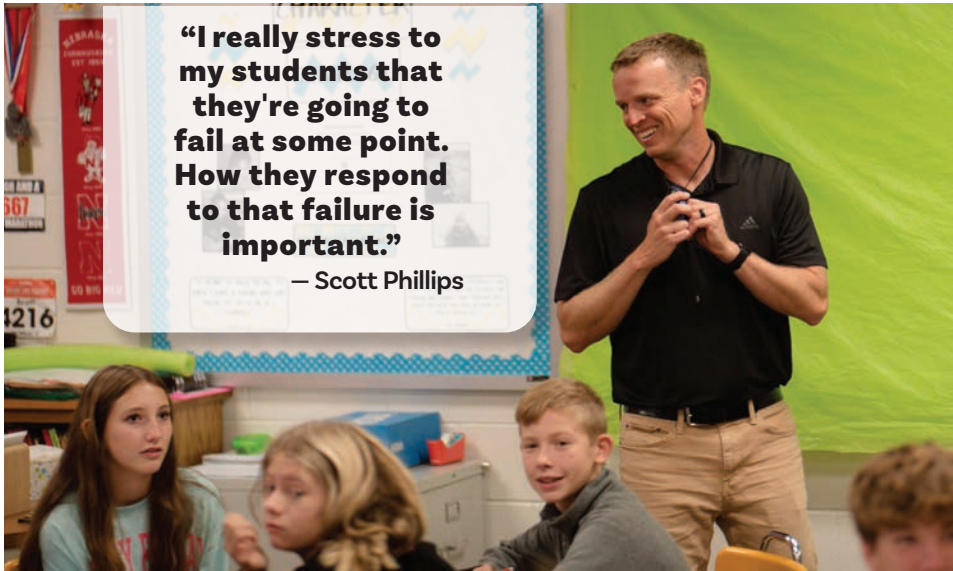
— Scott Phillips  
Aurora Education Assoc.

changed his approach to education. Phillips utilizes a hybrid-flipped classroom model using videos uploaded to his YouTube channel. Instead of direct instruction during class time, Phillips assigns pre-recorded video lectures to his students. Class time is spent engaging students to problem-

solve collaboratively with each other. Phillips calls this approach the "productive struggle" of the learning process.

"I teach a lot about failure because if you're not missing some questions in math, you're probably not being challenged," Phillips said.

Phillips acknowledges that math has an emotional attachment to the confidence of his students. He believes that children—and their parents—either love or hate math solely based on whether they consider themselves "good" or "bad" at math. Phillips says by



**“I really stress to my students that they're going to fail at some point. How they respond to that failure is important.”**

— Scott Phillips

the time students reach 7th grade math, this perception can be deep-rooted and sometimes, even generational.

“I really stress to my students that they're going to fail at some point. How they respond to that failure is important,” he said. “It's OK to make mistakes in math because that's going to help you get better at it. Math is a skill that requires practice.”

### Math is Everywhere

Phillips uses high-energy activities, music, and games to interact with his students. A major emphasis in Phillips' classroom is to show his students how math is used in everyday life. As Phillips remembers it, math was everywhere while he was growing up.

“My dad worked in construction management. So, I always joked that as a kid, I was tripping over air compressor cords and that was my normal,” he said.

Joking aside, in the Phillips household, math reached far beyond textbooks. To make his point, Phillips tapped his dad to guest-star in a lesson plan video on how to use Google Earth to calculate the area of a roof.

“Back in the olden days, my dad would have to get in his truck and drive 30 minutes to an hour, go up on the roof and physically measure it to give his customers a roofing estimate,” Phillips explained. “Using Google Earth, you can measure a roof and calculate the area of the compound shape. In class, I have my students work together to use Google Earth to find the area of the school.”

His mom, too, influenced Phillips' understanding of everyday math.

“She worked in banking and

later worked part-time at Walmart. Sometimes my students kind of scoff at how this applies to their classroom, but I tell them it's the reason I'm so good with percentages,” he explained.

This part-time job meant the Phillips family was eligible for a 10% discount on everything.

“So, I calculated the cost of everything in our cart with the discount applied,” he explained. “Number sense estimation is big for my students. They don't have to know the exact grocery bill before they checkout, but they should have a close estimation of what it should cost. So that way, if it rings up incorrectly, they can kind of catch it in the moment. They can use math

doing everyday things, this is just one example.”

### Teacher of the Year

Phillips says his main goals as the 2024 Nebraska Teacher of the Year will be to help promote excellence as a habit, encourage a healthy balance in life, and to not be afraid to fail but instead, let failure lead to growth.

“Growing older I've realized that failure is a good sign of progress and if we run towards it, we'll gain a sense of comfort in being uncomfortable. If we never push ourselves out of our comfort zone, we'll never see true progress. Teaching is no different and it all starts with the confidence to attempt something innovative, have the courage to try again after you've failed, and teaching our students how to deal with setbacks in a healthy manner,” said Phillips. “Everyone has had a teacher leave a lasting impact on their life and I aim to do that as the next Nebraska Teacher of the Year.”

Phillips was one of three finalists for the Nebraska Teacher of the Year award. Shelly Mowinkel, Milford High School, and Amy Page, Forest Station Elementary School in Omaha, were also finalists and will be recognized as Award of Excellence winners. All are members of NSEA.

Phillips will participate in the National Teacher of the Year competition later this year.

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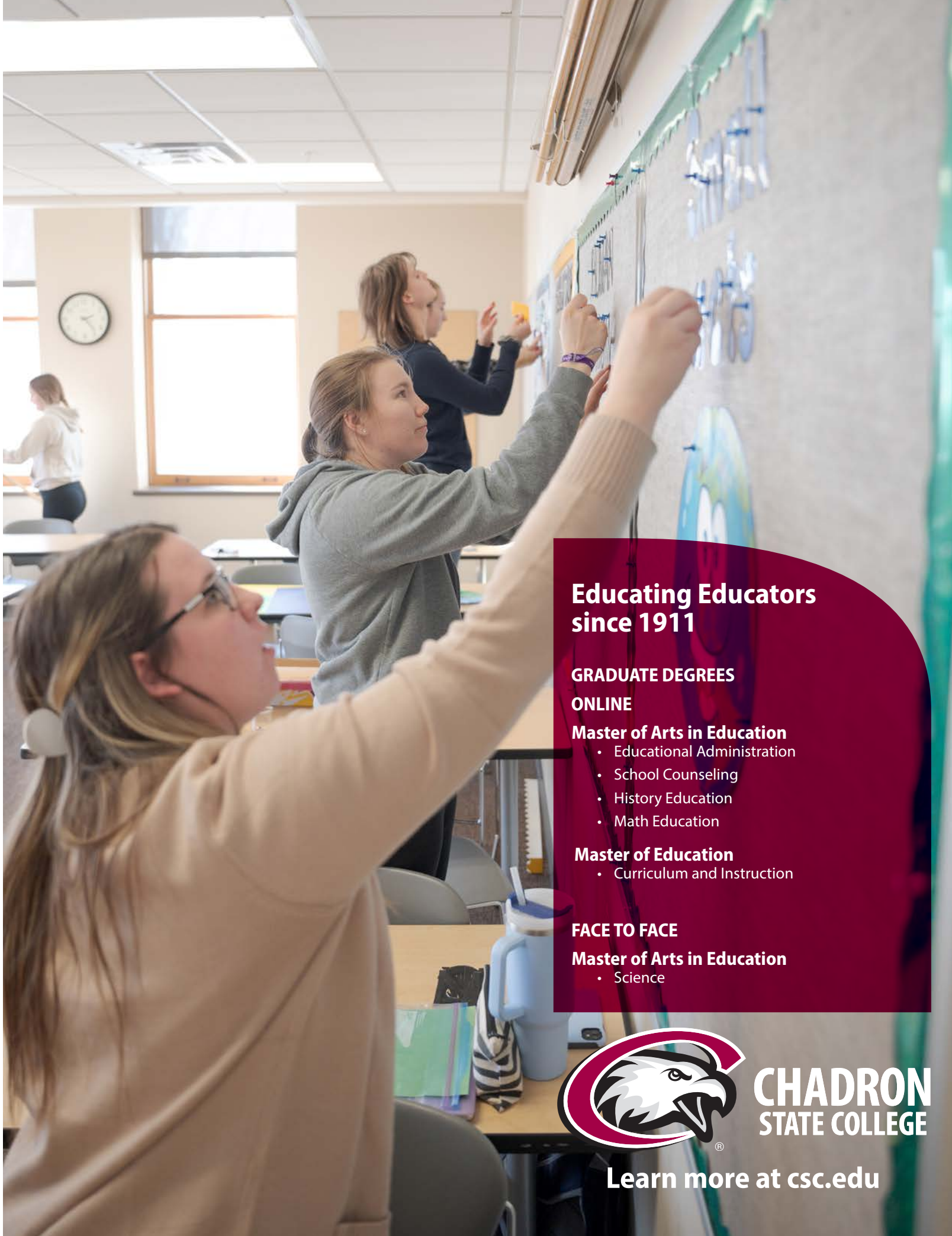


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NSEA members attend the Collective Bargaining Comp Study Workshop during NSEA U 2023 in Kearney.



## Year-Round Collective Bargaining

### NOVEMBER To do list:

## Strong Membership = Power at the Bargaining Table

Nebraska educators know that their job security, salary, benefits and working conditions are only protected and improved through their local association and the NSEA. For 156 years, NSEA has fought for public education, educators and students.

### Membership and Bargaining

Building and maintaining maximum membership in your local association is a source of power at the bargaining table and in the workplace. This requires engaging all members and inviting potential members to join. As local associations continue to work through the year-round bargaining calendar, they should engage members in issues that are important to them in their personal and professional lives through the power of collective bargaining. Providing affordable, high-quality health care benefits is an important tool to improving retention and recruitment. Many agreements contain a pasted version of the 2023-24 premium/coverage table to supplement the specific language that details the terms of the benefit provided by the district. NSEA advises locals to be thorough when proofreading this section of the agreement and watch for deductible amounts, premium amounts and terms of the coverage. Information about the Educators Health Alliance (EHA) rates for 2024-25 can be found on page 11.

### 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 organizational specialist.”



**Check in with your NSEA Organizational Specialist to update them on your negotiations progress!**



**Let your OS know if you will need assistance with bargaining.**



**Attend Bargaining Dinner**

**Commence negotiations on or before November 1**





For more information about the plan, visit [ehaplan.org](http://ehaplan.org).

# EHA Approves 2024-25 Rates

Overall premium increase of only 1.99% is well below the national average

There will be an overall increase of 1.99% in premiums next year for the medical and dental insurance plans used by nearly every Nebraska school district, following action by the Educators Health Alliance (EHA), a consortium of three statewide public school groups that manages the plan. All medical insurance rates and dental insurance rates for active employees and retirees will increase by 1.99% from the 2023-24 rate level.

“The uncertainty brought on by the COVID-19 impact is diminishing and our claim experience has improved to the point that we are comfortable approving a rate increase below the national average,” said Trish Guinan, EHA Board Chair and NSEA Executive Director. “Given the current rate of inflation, we are particularly pleased we’ve been able to maintain our streak of more than 20 years without a double-digit increase in rates, and to average an increase of 4.45% for the last decade.”

Guinan also noted that there will be no benefit changes made in 2024-25.

“We believe it is important, particularly in these stressful times, to minimize the change in benefits to our members. The EHA Board is happy

to pass on the news that no benefit changes will be made for the 2024-25 contract year,” said Guinan.

Guinan said the single-digit increase in premium rates is made possible due to several factors, including:

- The implementation of several new programs to manage pharmacy costs;
- Programs designed to assist in the management of chronic and emerging diseases; and
- Holding the line on health and administrative cost increases.

“The EHA Board has taken some strategic actions to manage our claim costs, especially with respect to a new diabetes claim management program,” said Beth Kernes Krause, EHA Vice Chair and Auburn Public Schools Board of Education member.

“The EHA Board takes its responsibility for plan oversight very seriously,” said Mike Dulaney, executive director of the Nebraska Council of School Administrators. “We believe the rate increase decision reached for the 2024-25 plan year will allow the EHA to continue to provide a quality, affordable health insurance plan well into the future.”

“The EHA Board understands the

financial concerns of our members as well as the fiscal constraints facing school districts,” said Colby Coash, associate executive director of the Nebraska Association of School Boards. “With 80,000 members in the plan, EHA has the largest risk pool in the state, which allows more predictability and stability in rates. This benefits both districts and individuals and their families.”

The Educators Health Alliance is a non-profit corporation that was created to procure quality, affordable healthcare insurance for Nebraska educational employees. The rates set by the EHA Board are for the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska (BCBSNE) healthcare plan used by more than 400 public school districts and affiliate groups in the state. The plan is governed by a 12-member board representing the Nebraska Association of School Boards, the Nebraska Council of School Administrators, and the Nebraska State Education Association. More than 80,000 Nebraskans are covered by the plan, making it the largest health plan in the state.



NSEA Aspiring Education Association member Laura Placido will soon complete the Teacher Career Ladder Program. Placido is currently student-teaching at Liberty Elementary School.

# Para to Teacher: Aspiring Educator Laura Placido's Journey to the Classroom

When Laura Placido graduates from Midland University in January, she will be the first in her family to graduate from college. The daughter of immigrant parents, Placido is not only fulfilling a dream of her own, she's also fulfilling the dream for her parents.

"My parents are very proud of me," Placido said. "Especially my mom. She always wanted to go to school but she couldn't fulfill that dream coming from war-torn El Salvador. My dad dropped out of school in the first grade to help work on the family farm and help raise his 11 siblings. I'm the oldest and my parents really encouraged us to take school seriously."

Placido says navigating the world of higher education was difficult on her own.

"It's hard when your parents don't speak English fluently. They've never had to fill out a FAFSA or navigate scholarship applications," she said.

Placido already had some college courses under her belt and was working as a paraprofessional at Highland Elementary School within Omaha Public Schools when she was encouraged by a colleague to apply for the Para to Teacher Career Ladder Program.

"The para who trained me at Highland Elementary was in the process of signing up for the program," she explained. "My colleague and the Highland principal

told me I would be a good candidate for that program."

## Teacher Shortages

Nationally and in Nebraska many school districts continue to struggle

to find qualified employees to fill key positions. To help combat these staffing issues, many districts are choosing to invest in their own through aide-to-teacher programs like OPS's Para to Teacher Career Ladder Program. Just this summer, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln partnered with Lincoln Public Schools to launch the Para Pathway to Teaching Pilot Program.

Programs such as these also have the ability to address another pressing problem: critical shortages of teachers in fields such as bilingual and special education. Placido will be an asset in both areas.

"Spanish is my first language," Placido said.

## Para to Teacher

It was during the height of the COVID pandemic that Placido was notified that she had been accepted into the Para to Teacher Career Ladder Program.

The program is a grant-funded teacher prep program designed to provide financial assistance to current Omaha Public Schools instructional paraprofessionals to complete a college

**"It has been a lot of work but I'm grateful to those who have supported me through this journey."**  
— Laura Placido  
Aspiring Education Association



or university teacher preparation program and receive a degree in teacher education.

Under the program, the school district will cover the cost of all Placido's teacher courses at Midland University, with some stipulations. (See details of the program in the right sidebar.)

"I am not going lie—it has been a lot of work but I'm grateful to those who have supported me through this journey," Placido said. "I have two kids and a husband who travels for work. I could not have done it without help and support."

When she began the program, her children were ages 11 and 2, but with the help of her family, Placido has made the packed schedule work.

"I would leave work an hour early, around 2:30 p.m., to pick up both girls. My youngest was in daycare at that time and I would get my oldest from school. I would drop them off with my mom and drive to Midlands' campus on 114th and Dodge. I was there from 4:45 p.m. until about 9:15 p.m. at night, every Monday and Wednesday," she said.

Placido would do homework on the weekends and stay up until two or three in the morning to get everything done.

Through the program, Placido was enrolled in four or five classes every Monday and Wednesday. Now, in the student-teaching phase of her degree, Placido is looking forward to her future as a full-time educator.

"I've already been offered some positions at Liberty Elementary, and I've filled out new teacher applications for both a classroom teacher position and for positions as a Special Education teacher. Regardless, I've been promised a position by the time January rolls around."

### NSEA Membership

Laura Placido said she definitely plans to continue her membership with NSEA and will transition from being an NSEA Aspiring Educator member to an Omaha Education Association member once she is hired as a certified teacher with OPS.

# OMAHA Public Schools

The Para to Teacher Career Ladder Program is an Omaha Public Schools grant-funded teacher preparation program. It is designed to provide financial assistance to current Omaha Public Schools instructional paraprofessionals in order to complete a college/university teacher preparation program and receive a degree and/or master's degree in teacher education. Assistance includes college/university tuition, books and fees, as well as other support services.

### Program Details:

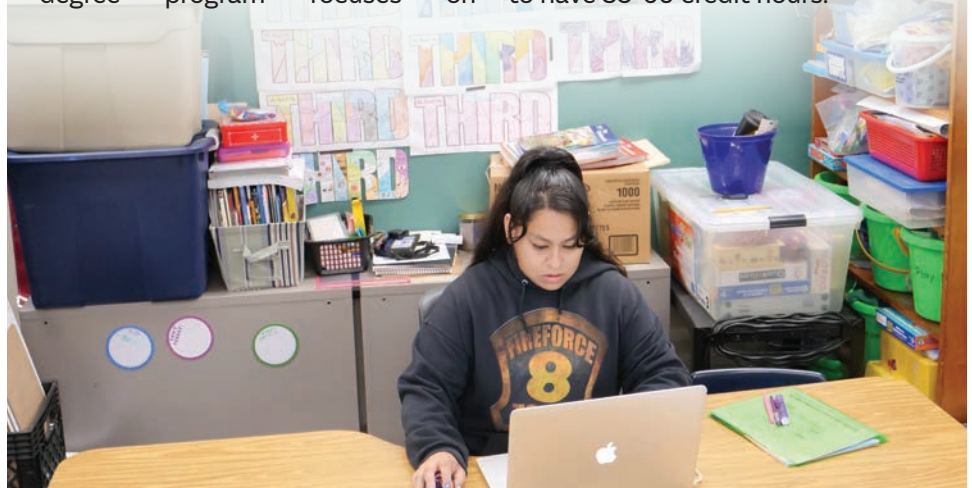
The two- to three-year teaching degree program focuses on

urban education and technology practices in the field. It includes a field endorsement in Elementary Education K-6 and a supplementary endorsement in English Language Learning, Early Childhood, or Special Education.

Students work in cohorts to complete all required endorsement courses in a supportive, flexible, and individualized environment. Students will continue to be employed in classrooms while earning field-based credit. Upon completion of the program, participants must stay employed with Omaha Public Schools for a minimum of three years.

Applications for the next cohort will be available in November 2023.

The program requires participants to have 35-60 credit hours.



## 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://NebraskaBlue.com/EHAPop)



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.

# Apply now for 2024 Belz, Lynch, Krause Grants

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



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 March 1, 2024. Recipients will be notified in March.

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

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

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



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

# Have a student teacher? Sign them up for Aspiring Ed!

A semester of student teaching is a unique time for an educator, and it's the perfect time to surround oneself with support from other new and seasoned educators.

If you have a student teacher in your classroom this year, encourage them to become a member of the NSEA-Aspiring Educators. You may even set aside some time to walk them through the process and help them understand the myriad of benefits they'll receive as a member of the Association.

Feeling especially generous? Pay their Aspiring Educators dues—just \$30 for the year!

Benefits of membership for Aspiring Educators include student loan forgiveness workshops, access to year-round professional development opportunities, big savings through the NEA Discount Marketplace, the \$1 million Educators Employment Liability insurance policy and much more.

First-year educators will also benefit from involvement in

NewGEN, NSEA's New Generation of Educators in Nebraska. The organization is comprised of early career educators in their first seven years of teaching who network and support each other through the challenges of a new teaching career.

For more information or to help a new member register, go to [www.nsea.org/JoinNow](http://www.nsea.org/JoinNow), or contact the NSEA Membership Department by calling 1-800-742-0047 or emailing [membership@nsea.org](mailto:membership@nsea.org).



# WE BELONG

“ It’s a slam dunk - membership in both associations is a no-brainer! The assistance and resources we receive from both NSEA & NCA are a win for educators, students and our community. ”

x2



## Matt McKay & Tyler Shaw Sidney Public Schools

- Varsity Girls Basketball Assistant Coach
- 2021-22 NCA Track Coach of the Year
- Director of High School IT Services & Education
- Former President, Sidney Education Association

- Varsity Girls Basketball Head Coach
- Track & Field Assistant Coach
- Chemistry, Physics & Robotics Teacher
- Sidney Education Association Member

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



# Conversations on RACE & BELONGING

## Diving Deeper

**Conversations About Race & Belonging: Diving Deeper** are virtual 2.5-hour interactive seminars that introduce nuanced topics to practice deep listening and invitational, relational skills to engage in meaningful and intentional conversations, **with no prerequisite.**

Topics will include **Racism & Race, Immigration and Citizenship, and Politics and the Culture Wars.** Sessions will focus on *exploring* essential questions that “call in” others to meaningful discussions that reflect the complicated aspects of the issues; *experiencing* approaches to create spaces for dialogue that present “learning edges,” while remaining relational and invitational, and *sharing* individual stories that build connection and belonging.

Sessions offer opportunities to practice:

- How to create “brave spaces” that encourage learning and expression and which feel safe as an intentional function of the group rather than assumed;
- How to offer and elicit personal stories as a way to engage sensitive topics in a way that draws people into conversation and relationship;
- How to create authentic relational connections that engender the experience of belonging; and
- How to develop engaging and relational dialogue prompts that filter out diversionary tactics intended to polarize and inflame discussions.

**Participants may join any or all programs.**

**TO REGISTER:  
SCAN THIS CODE**

**OR GO ONLINE TO:  
[www.nsea.org/DeepDive](http://www.nsea.org/DeepDive)**



## NSEA Online COURSES

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

The first time you are enrolled in a course, you will need to finish your registration process in the NSEA Learn Upon portal (a link will be sent to you). You may need to check your spam filter to find the email from NSEA Learn Upon.

If you have questions and/or do not receive the email from NSEA’s Learn Upon system within 72 hours, please email [NSEALearningOnDemand@nsea.org](mailto:NSEALearningOnDemand@nsea.org).

### Courses:

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





# TEACHER EDUCATION GRADUATE PROGRAMS

**FLEXIBLE CHOICES: ON CAMPUS. ONLINE. ON YOUR SCHEDULE.**

- > Graduate Secondary Education Programs
- > Graduate Elementary Education Programs
- > Graduate Endorsement Programs
- > Graduate Literacy Programs
- > The CADRE Project (for newly certified teachers)
- > Teacher Certification Programs (for students with Bachelor's Degrees in another field)



**For More Information:**

[ [CEHHS.UNOMAHA.EDU/TED-GRAD](http://CEHHS.UNOMAHA.EDU/TED-GRAD) ]

Dr. Chris Wilcoxon, Graduate Program Chair

Email: [cwilcoxen@unomaha.edu](mailto:cwilcoxen@unomaha.edu) | Tel: 402.554.2119

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UNIVERSITY OF  
**Nebraska**  
Omaha



# Higher Ed member Amy Winters honored with NEA Teaching Excellence Award

Western Nebraska Community College (WNCC) math instructor Amy Winters was honored with the NEA Foundation Teaching Excellence in October.

Winters was one of 43 educators from across the country to receive the award. Educators are nominated for their leadership, excellence in the classroom, family and community engagement, commitment to equity and diversity, and advocacy for the teaching profession.

Winters served as a key contributor to implementing the Nebraska Math Readiness Project at WNCC. This program helps high school seniors improve their math skills before enrolling in a college-level math class.

Winters serves as the math and science division chair, a Phi Theta Kappa advisor, and a faculty representative for the Board of Governors.



Amy Winters

The 2024 educator awardees will be honored at the NEA Foundation Salute to Excellence in Education on May 3, 2024, in Washington, DC. Five of the awardees nominated by NEA 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 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.

## STUDY: Faculty highly influential on student success

The study, conducted by Education Equity Solutions, analyzed academic performance and background data from more than 22,000 community college students.

**KEY FINDINGS**

1. Math faculty are the most important factor in determining a student's successful completion of gateway math.
2. Specific instructional practices can reduce racial disparities in gateway math course outcomes.

Scan this QR Code to see the full study!

A study released in September examining the role of faculty and instructional practices found that instructors and the teaching practices they use are more than twice as influential in predicting learning outcomes than students' prior academic performance.

The findings point to the incredible influence instructors have on student outcomes in introductory college math. Introductory math has long been a hurdle to community college students staying in college and earning degrees.

The study was conducted by Education Equity Solutions, a research organization that promotes equity-centered higher ed policy. Academic performance and background data from 22,827 students in 704 gateway math classes at four California community colleges, as well as a faculty survey and course syllabi, were used to examine the relationship between instructional practices and student success. The courses were taught by 159 different math faculty members between winter 2020 and spring 2022. The colleges' enrollment ranged from 4,000 to 36,000 students representing a racially and geographically diverse group.

Researchers analyzed the data, controlling for variables such as students' race, socioeconomic status and the high school they attended, in order to determine how instructional practices influenced pass rates. They found that instructors were by far the greatest predictor of whether students passed the course.

To review the full study, visit [bit.ly/Count-On-Math-HE-2023](https://bit.ly/Count-On-Math-HE-2023) or scan the QR code on this page.





## Do you have a retirement savings gap?

Long-time corporate supporter Horace Mann can help you develop a plan to achieve your retirement dreams.

Consider these tips to help you close the gap:

- **Identify where you are spending your money.** Write down everything you spend money on for a few months, then take a step back to see what regular expenses are taking money away from your long-term goals.
- **Start planning for retirement now.** Retirement may seem far away for many – which makes it easy to put off saving. Join your employer's supplemental retirement plan as soon as you are able.
- **Pay yourself first.** Consider increasing your contribution to your retirement plan each year. When you get a raise, give your retirement account a raise too.
- **Consult a financial professional.** Whether you're married, widowed or single, it's important to take a look at what your long-term goals are and how you plan to get there.

For more information, visit [horacemann.com](https://horacemann.com) or scan the QR code on this page to find your local Horace Mann representative.

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*Horace Mann Educators Corporation provides individual and group insurance and financial solutions that help America's educators and others who serve the community achieve lifelong financial success.*

## Turn to the NSEA Children's Fund



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

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

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

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

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



# Benefits designed with **YOU IN MIND**

Explore exclusive benefits online:

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- Flexible insurance coverage
- Complimentary life insurance
- Easy retirement planning
- Shopping and travel deals



Scan below  
to learn more







TRISH GUINAN

# Message from the Executive Director

## Effective Praise

I discovered early into my career as a math teacher the power of recognizing students. Giving praise is a simple, yet powerful tool for learning. Recognition isn't just about acknowledging big achievements either. I found that celebrating progress was the best way to keep all my students engaged. I had a leader board of 'most improved' posted prominently in my classroom. It helped me personalize expectations for each student whether they were struggling or outperforming.

Effective praise for me was about communicating that in my classroom the definition of success was effort-based and individualized. Each of my students were valued above any one assignment or test score. I could see each student for their effort and progress. This November, as we celebrate the work being done to support students at all levels in public education with American Education Week, I reflect on what educators need to feel valued.

## Feeling Valued

The ways in which our colleagues, communities and culture value and respect educators are key drivers of successful schools. If you want students who are engaged, creative and successful, you'll need educators who feel inspired and valued. As a young educator, one of my administrators nominated me for an Outstanding Young Educator Award to the Junior Chamber of Commerce in Fremont. I remember that receiving the recognition left me feeling respected and seen. Walking back into my classroom after receiving the recognition gave me confidence in my teaching abilities and validation that my own work was part of a larger community dedicated in creating a better future.

## Show and Tell

NSEA has a long history of uplifting the work of educators. You might say we have a show-and-tell approach to demonstrating to educators that they are valued.

Each year we encourage our members to nominate a member teacher, Education Support Professional or deserving group for a host of awards to be given at NSEA's Delegate Assembly in April. (See page 24). This is our 'tell'. By publicly honoring the work of educators, we value and recognize their commitment to the profession. Research shows that recognition from peers can have a direct influence on an educator's investment in staying in the profession. In an era when public schools are under the microscope and under attack, recognizing educators for their good work should be a top priority for any community.

NSEA, along with the Nebraska Association of School Boards and Nebraska Council of School Administrators, participates in the selection committee for the Nebraska Teacher of the Year. This year, as a member of the committee, I was in awe of the candidates selected to be interviewed. The 2024 Nebraska Teacher of the Year, Scott Phillips, will be an excellent representative for our state as he inspires new teachers and reminds veteran teachers why they chose this profession.

Our 'show' is how NSEA supports you and your students. When educators need expertise navigating difficult contract negotiations, NSEA will show up to support associations in their pursuit. When school funding is threatened by a tax scheme passed by lawmakers, NSEA is at the front lines in the effort to repeal the law.

Whether it's pursuing change locally or advocating for change statewide — NSEA will show up for you.

“  
**The ways in which our colleagues, communities and culture value and respect educators is a key driver of successful schools.**  
”

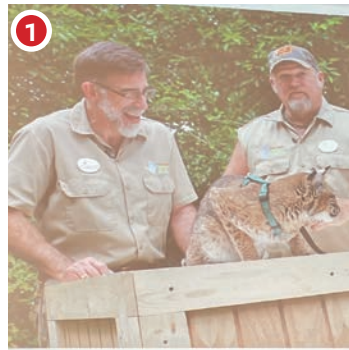
# WHAT A ZOO! LEA-Retired Hosts Fundraising Event

The Lincoln Education Association-Retired (LEA-Retired) gathered in October for their monthly meeting, bringing together a group of dedicated retired educators who continue to make a difference in the world of education. The meeting served as an opportunity for LEA-Retired members to hold important business discussions, plan upcoming events, and engage in meaningful conversations about the future of education.

One significant aspect of the meeting was the focus on fundraising for student-teacher scholarships. LEA-Retired understands the importance of supporting the next generation of educators and ensuring they have the necessary resources to succeed. Through their collective efforts, LEA-Retired members organized various fundraising initiatives to provide financial assistance to aspiring teachers.

In addition to their fundraising endeavors, LEA-Retired also showcased captivating programs during the meeting. This month, they invited John Chapo, a representative from the Lincoln Children's Zoo, who provided an engaging presentation.

The Lincoln Education Association-Retired continues to be a driving force in supporting education in the community. Through their monthly meetings, retired members not only address essential business matters but also champion fundraising efforts for student teacher scholarships and provide valuable educational programs that inspire lifelong learning.



**LEA-Retired Event:** 1. Lincoln Children's Zoo President Emeritus John Chapo presents a PowerPoint at the LEA-Retired monthly event. 2. Pat Etherton smiles for the camera during the LEA-Retired monthly event. 3. Margaret Rasmussen shows off the hardcover book, "The Better Half: Nebraska's Hidden Treasures."



## Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Nebraska FALL SEMINARS

BlueCross & BlueShield of Nebraska information sessions will be held in Lincoln and Norfolk in early November. A webinar will be made available after the in-person presentations. Details are posted on [www.nsea.org/retired](http://www.nsea.org/retired)

### BCBS In-Person Sessions

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

<b>Norfolk</b>	Thursday, Nov. 2 Northeast Community College – Lifelong Learning Center, Suites F and G, (701 East Benjamin Avenue)
<b>Lincoln</b>	Wednesday, Nov. 8 Jack J. Huck Continuing Education Center – Rooms 303 and 304, (301 South 68th Street Place)

### Webinar:

Thursday, Nov. 9, 5 p.m. to 6 p.m.



## Have Your Contact Details Changed?

Have you moved? Are you planning to move? If so, you can update your NSEA-Retired membership information online.

How? Log on to the NSEA website and click on the 'For Members' on the top right side of the home page.

Then click on the blue 'Member Update' button in the center of the next screen, and follow the directions. Keep your issue of *The Voice* near, as the mailing label includes your membership number which is used to access your information. The NSEA website is at: [www.nsea.org](http://www.nsea.org).

You may also update your information by phone by calling NSEA at 1-800-742-0047 or 402-475-7611.



# From the desk of Doane University College of Education:

## *When the teacher becomes the student*



DOANE  
UNIVERSITY

college of  
**EDUCATION**

Every year, dozens of educators invest in themselves through one of our seven advanced degree and certification programs. They graduate with renewed passion — and flying colors.

- **Convenience:** Students are on time and engaged during online, evening and weekend classes.
- **Collaboration:** Students work well with others and make important connections.
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- **Final Assessment:** Students are prepared and confident to start new jobs and step into leadership roles. It has been wonderful having them in our classrooms.

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



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



**LEARN MORE  
ABOUT OUR  
PROGRAMS**

Classes start soon for our Master of Education in School Counseling and Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction programs — apply today!

### **Application deadline**

- January 5, 2024

### **Classes start**

- January 17, 2024

*Learn. Challenge. Empower. Transform.*

## In Memory

We recognize these members whom we've lost recently.

Bill Bridges, 88, Fremont

Emily (Janis) Brown, 70, Fremont

Mary Moberg, Omaha

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



Now is the time to discuss who you or your local 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 2024 Assembly will be held April 19-20 at Lincoln's Embassy Suites 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 a public school administrator who strives every day to help students and staff be successful.
- **Friend of Education:** NSEA's highest honor is presented in recognition of an individual or organization that has made a statewide contribution to education or to Nebraska educators.
- **Outstanding Media:** Honors newspaper, television or radio station for coverage of education issues and promotion of public education.

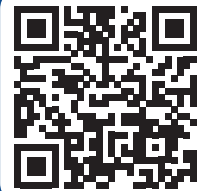
Mailed nominations must be postmarked by Friday, Feb. 16, 2024, and should be sent to NSEA Awards, 605 S. 14th St., Lincoln, NE 68508-2742. Nominations may also be submitted online at [www.nsea.org/DA](http://www.nsea.org/DA), with required supporting material mailed to the NSEA.

## Resources for Educators

Students of all ages can be deeply affected by images and media coverage of war.

When discussing current events such as the Israeli-Palestinian crisis in the classroom, it is important for educators to create a safe and supportive space for students.

Educators can use these resources and guidance to help address the ongoing crisis and support students in the classroom.



SCAN ME

