

# The VOICE

Nebraska State Teachers Association • October 2023



## A CHANGE IN TUNE

*Grievance hearing strikes a chord with school board, results in win for many.*

*Also inside:*

- The Red Flags in LB753
- Making Your Mark on Dot Day
- Signature Goal Exceeded



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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.

**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:** Kearney Education Association member **Angela Wright** filed her grievance on principles of fairness and respect. Her argument struck a chord with board members. See the story and photos, pages 7-8.

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

JENNI BENSON



## MAKE YOUR MARK ON THE UNIVERSE

When I was a kid, I was very quiet and introverted. I know people can't believe that of me now. Just like all of you, we grow, we change, we fail, we survive, we thrive. All with the support and encouragement of those you can truly count on.

There are pivotal life-changing moments I can remember and use to remind me of how far I have come. I often tell people my life could have easily been a reality show. My dad and mom, who share my birthday, gave me a card once with a button to wear that said, "I have survived damn near everything." I know many of you can relate. We all are judged or judge others by our past choices and mistakes. I firmly believe we all deserve and need second chances, regardless of the judgment of others.

In my classrooms I used an inverted triangle to talk to every student about their place in the universe, ending with a point, a dot—a mark that is self. It was a great lesson about how we can all make a mark in the universe.

Last week I read the book *The Dot*, by Peter H. Reynolds, to more than 100 K-6 graders at Bloomfield Elementary School on International Dot Day. I was not aware of the book until the author was our keynote speaker at NSEA-U.

Peter and his sister, Jane Reynolds, came to Nebraska and attended our conference because Jane, who lives in London, had read an article in the

Lexington Clipper that caught her eye. I had been reading Peter's book "Be You" to children in schools across Nebraska for the past two years.

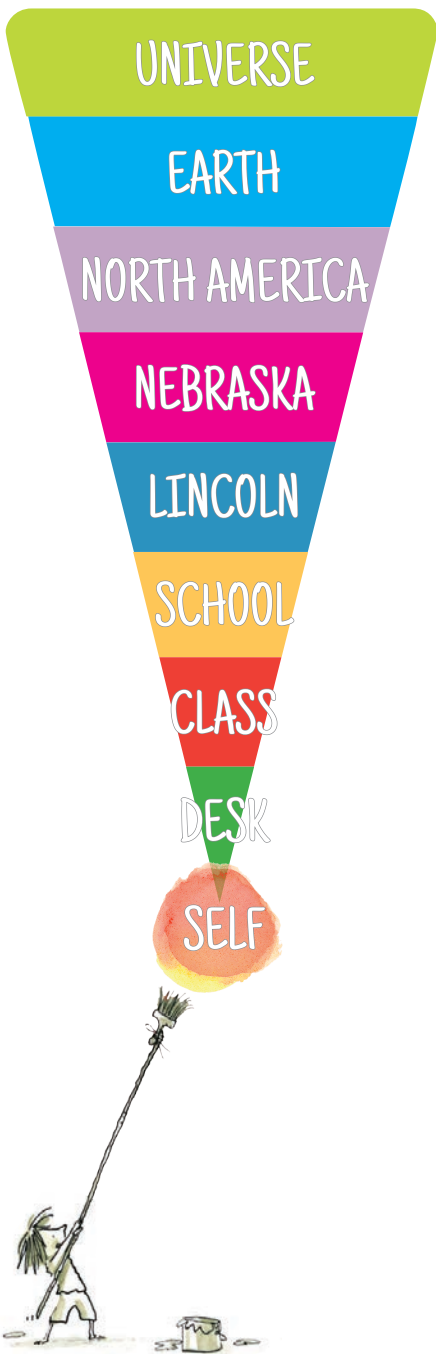
One small article on an internet full of information, yet Jane found me, and I found *The Dot*. The story is short and simple yet carries a deep, important message:

*"The Dot is the story of a caring teacher who dares a doubting student to trust in her own abilities by being brave enough to "make her mark". What begins with a small dot on a piece of paper becomes a breakthrough in confidence and courage, igniting a journey of self-discovery and sharing."*

Peter Reynolds shared how he became an artist with the support of a math teacher. The teacher saw his drawings and instead of chastising him for being off task in math class he nurtured his talent. Many years later, Peter shared that important turning point in his life.

Coming full circle from our own experiences and making a mark on the world. Every day as educators we have the power and the responsibility to instill the belief in all students that they can each make a mark on the world, in their own way.

NSEA empowers our members to be the best they can be for themselves and their students. Thank you, NSEA members, for all you do – you are making a positive difference!



An illustration of "Vashti" by Peter Reynolds.

## SIGNATURES TURNED IN:

# 117,145



## Signature Goal Exceeded

Outside the Lincoln Marriott Cornhusker Hotel on Aug. 30, a group of Support Our Schools Nebraska volunteers gathered around a patio table to sort and count the last remaining petitions before delivering them to the Nebraska Secretary of State. Millard Education Association President and SOSNE petition sponsor Tim Royers tallied the final petition count on a scrap of paper before heading inside. The final number of signatures: 117,145.

Inside the hotel, NSEA President Jenni Benson—along with several not-for-profit organization leaders—prepared to address reporters.

“I’ve traveled all across our state these past 90 days and I am heartened by the support I’ve seen from Nebraskans for their public schools,” said Benson, “Nebraskans from all walks of life, and all areas—rural, urban, small towns and everywhere in-between—have been supportive of the petition effort to put the repeal of LB753 to a vote. Nebraskans want to keep their public schools strong.”

This summer, volunteers and circulators logged thousands of hours gathering signatures from Nebraskans. No event was too big, too small or too humid for NSEA members looking to engage voters on the need to keep public dollars for public schools.

NSEA-Retired member and former Lincoln Education Association president Rita Bennett was so encouraged by the response from voters at the College View Farmer’s Market, that she continued to volunteer her time all summer.

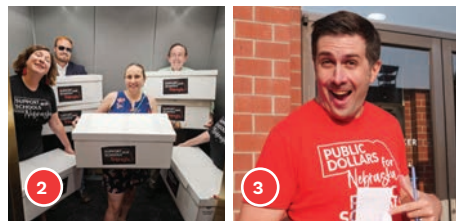
“People flocked to us, excited and eager to sign. So many voters already knew about LB753 and shared our deep concerns about the bill,” said Bennett. “Many were moved to sign because of negative ads being run by the ‘decline to sign’ faction, and quite a few voters asked if they could have petitions so they could get signatures, too.”

Public school supporters exceeded their initial goal and submitted nearly double the number of signatures needed to give voters a chance to repeal LB753.

**“**I’ve traveled all across our state these past 90 days and I am heartened by the support I’ve seen from Nebraskans for their public schools.**”**  
— Jenni Benson, NSEA President

**SUPPORT OUR SCHOOLS NEBRASKA:**  
1. Volunteers pose for a selfie before the news conference. 2. Volunteers help deliver boxes full of petitions. 3. Tim Royers shows off the final signature tally

4. Volunteers sort through the last remaining petitions. 5. Applause erupts as boxes are delivered. 6. Benson gives remarks at the Support Our Schools petition update press conference.



**SIGNED, SEALED DELIVERED** ✓



# THE RED FLAGS IN LB753

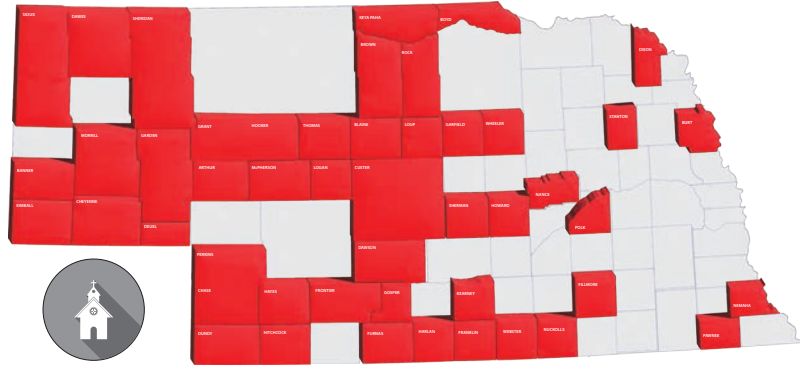
## THINGS TO KNOW



**The Bill:** LB753, passed by the Nebraska Legislature in 2023, creates dollar-for-dollar tax credits totaling up to \$100M for donations by individuals and businesses to organizations granting scholarships to K-12 private schools. <sup>1</sup>



**The Tax Scheme:** Through tax credits, the state is effectively funding private schools in a way it couldn't otherwise under the state constitution. Under LB753, taxpayers can annually divert a portion of what they owe in state taxes to scholarship granting organizations, or SGOs.



## NEBRASKA

48

48 of Nebraska's 93 counties do not have a private or parochial school.

9/10

Public schools serve 9 out of every 10 kids in Nebraska.

## TAX CREDITS ON AUTOPILOT



Unlike other measures considered each budget cycle, these **tax credits would be on autopilot**, reducing revenue available to fund state priorities such as career education in public schools.



A **\$100M revenue loss** represents 8% of funds to be distributed to public schools through the state aid formula in FY 2024.



The annual tax credits are capped at \$25M for three years but **could grow by 25% annually** beginning in 2027 until reaching \$100M in 2033.

## CREDITS VS. DEDUCTIONS

The tax credits linked to donations for private school scholarships are **17 times more lucrative** than tax deductions for other types of charitable donations, including contributions to religious institutions.

Tax credits in LB753 are a dollar-for-dollar reduction in state tax liability. A **\$10,000 donation** nets a **\$10,000 tax benefit**.

Tax payers save less than 6 cents for every dollar donated to other charitable causes. A \$10,000 donation nets a state tax benefit of \$584.

## OTHER STATES:

### Arizona:



The nation's first tax credit scholarship program was introduced in Arizona in 1997 at an estimated annual cost of **\$4.5M**. An expanded voucher program is estimated to cost **\$900M** in FY 2024. <sup>3</sup>

### Iowa:



In Iowa, the cost of taxpayer-funded vouchers for students to attend private school this year is expected to blow past an initial **\$107M** projection. By 2027, it's estimated to cost **\$345M**. <sup>4</sup>

## WHO CLAIMS CREDITS?

In other states, these programs have rapidly expanded in cost. The tax benefits flow largely to wealthy taxpayers. A high percentage of tax credits went to households with incomes earning more than \$200,000 annually. <sup>5</sup>

SUPPORT OUR SCHOOLS

#SOSNE

Nebraska

## LESS STATE AID FOR NEBRASKA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Aid distributed to public schools through the state funding formula could **decrease by \$11.8M** as a result of students transferring to private schools in response to LB753. The Legislature's Fiscal Office noted that the drop in students, however, would not translate to a decrease in fixed costs for public schools. <sup>2</sup>

1. Nebraska Legislature, "LB 753," Jan. 18, 2023.

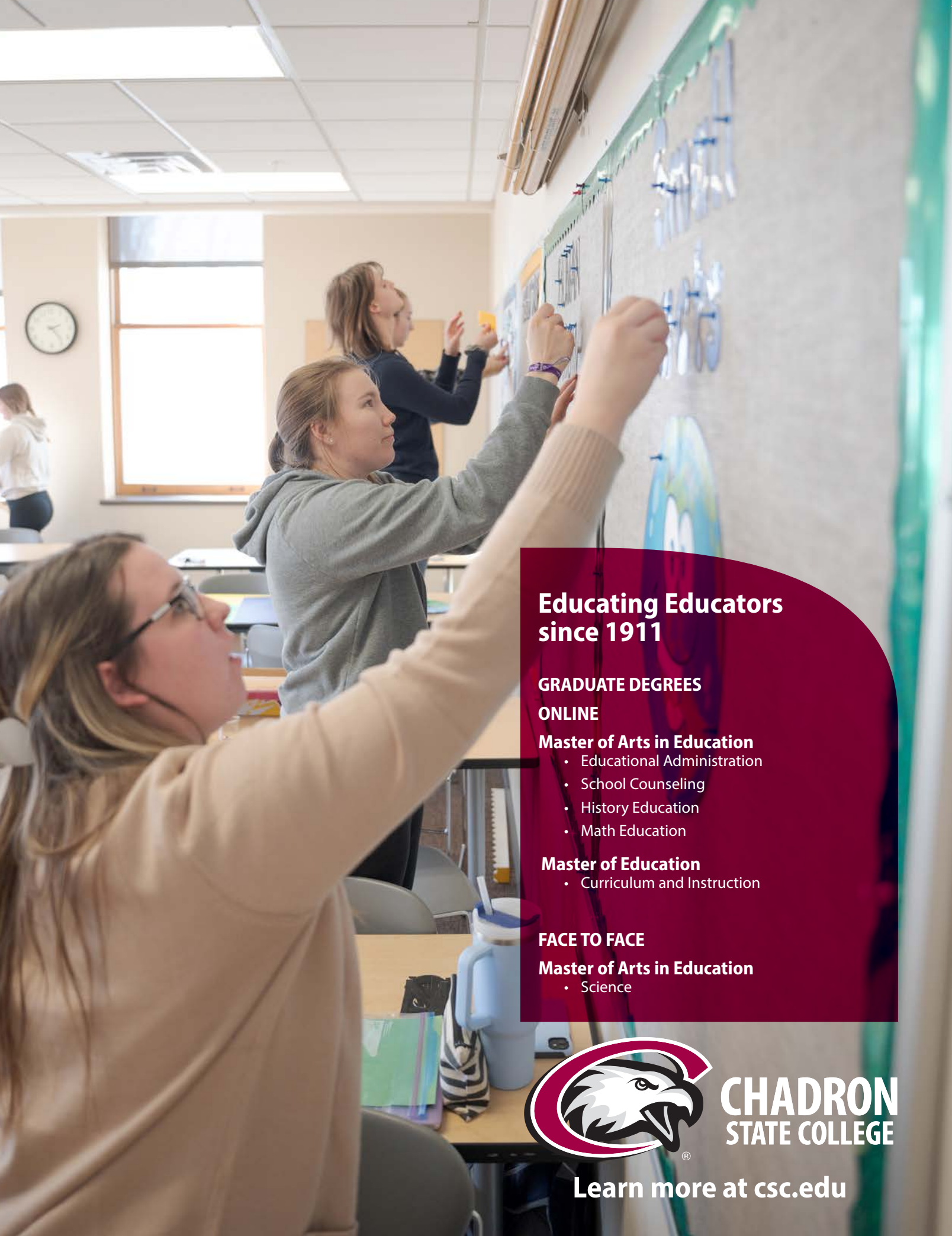
2. Nebraska Legislature, "LB 753 Fiscal Note," April 4, 2023.

3. Arizona Center for Economic Progress, "Arizona School Vouchers, Explained," July 1, 2023.

4. The Gazette, "More than 29,000 apply for Iowa education savings accounts. Majority of

approved students already attend private school," July 6, 2023

5. Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, "Tax Avoidance Continues to Fuel School Privatization Efforts," March 3, 2023.



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Kearney Education Association member Angela Wright with ukuleles and other musical instruments in her Meadowlark Elementary classroom. With the help of NSEA, Wright won a grievance and earned a big win for herself and her colleagues.

# A CHANGE IN TUNE: Grievance hearing strikes a chord with school board, results in win for many

By her own estimation, Angela Wright has met with hundreds of parents over her more than two decades as a teacher in Nebraska.

Wright is a member of the Kearney Education Association (KEA) and teaches kindergarten through fifth-grade music at Kearney Public Schools' Meadowlark Elementary. Wright considers parent-teacher conferences to be a vital part of the educational process.

"I personally value parent-teacher conferences and feel they're an important piece to education," Wright said. "Teaching is a partnership. I can do only so much within my classroom. It takes parental support from home. Parents play a very important role. They're my students' first teachers, so we need to be partners in learning."

In the fall of 2022, district officials decided to set universal dates for parent-teacher conferences throughout the district. This included moving the last night of conferences to the Wednesday workday that led into a four-day weekend. Prior to the change, parent-teacher conference dates were set by each principal. To accommodate some of the scheduling conflicts created by the district-set

dates that fall, teachers who had already made plans after the workday on the last night of the conference in November were given a time frame in which to notify Human Resources and reschedule..

"For those first fall conferences, I didn't have any conflicts, but I knew of teachers who were given the opportunity to reschedule with their students' parents because they had made plans before the district dates were set," Wright said.

That same fall, the district also set spring parent-teacher conference dates of Feb. 8, 13 and 15. Wright planned accordingly and scheduled an out-of-state trip to begin the weekend following the spring parent-teacher conferences.

## Midwest Mess

The only thing predictable about spring in the Midwest is that the weather will be unpredictable. An entire genre of memes poke fun at these

weather patterns to include charming terms like Fool's Spring, Second Winter, and Spring of Deception.

Wright found herself in a not-so-funny Spring of Deception when, on Valentine's Day, a forecasted weather event prompted the district to postpone the final day of parent-teacher conferences and reschedule it for a day that Wright had received approved leave for her out-of-state trip. To add insult to injury, the snow was a no-show for its forecasted time of arrival.

"When they canceled the conferences, Kearney was in a Winter Storm Advisory. But the snow didn't show up until 9 p.m. The conferences would have been over by 9 p.m."

Wright had already contacted the district to discuss her conflict by email and then by phone.

"When I reached our HR director on the phone, I was informed that I would not be given the opportunity

**"When I reached our HR director by phone, I was informed that I would not be given the opportunity to reschedule. My next call was to NSEA."**

**— Angela Wright  
Kearney Education Assoc.**



**“I was very glad I followed through. I’ve been an NSEA member since I was in college and this experience made my dues worth it.”**  
— Angela Wright

to reschedule. My next call was to NSEA,” Wright said.

**Follow the Contract**

For Wright, the issue wasn't the snow, the conferences, or that she would need to use half a personal day—it was about fairness.

“The district canceled with less than 24 hours’ notice and rescheduled the date within a week. I couldn't cancel my reservations without losing my money. And it seemed unfair that I wouldn't be given the same opportunity to reschedule as the teachers who had conflicts in the fall when they had nearly a month to figure out what they were going to do with their plans,” she said. “It wasn't only me. There were lots of teachers who now had conflicts.”

Wright said some of her colleagues were just as upset with the district's decision to reschedule but worried about being new to the district and their tenure. Others told Wright they would just take the days or lose a few hours of wages instead of fighting.

“Maybe they felt it was a little thing to be filing a grievance for, but I felt like I needed to stand up for my rights. It was the principle of the matter and the lack of respect,” Wright said.

Wright worked with NSEA Organizational Specialist Kristen Sedlacek, who advised her on the next steps. Together they followed the grievance process outlined in the KEA-KPS Negotiated Agreement.

“The first step was to meet with my principal, though I knew he had no say in the decision—but it's important to follow the grievance process as it is set up.”

**Support at Every Step**

Wright's grievance was eventually

scheduled to be heard by the school board which she chose to make public.

“Through the process, I ran all communications, including emails and even my statement to the board, through Kristen and NSEA,” Wright said. “I appreciate that we have a process we can go through within our district so these types of issues can be addressed in a safe place for teachers. I also truly appreciate having NSEA on my side. Kristen was there to help - she walked side by side with me through the whole thing.”

**A Change in Tune**

Wright and many of her colleagues, along with Sedlacek, attended the April 18 school board hearing on the grievance. In her statement, Wright wrote, “In all my years working for this district, I have never been so disappointed and discouraged. I was not treated equally to my colleagues

who had conflicts when the change was made in November and who were given the opportunity to reschedule... The decision, along with the rejection of every solution I offered, makes me question the [district's] commitment to teacher retention when small decisions could make such a huge positive impact on morale.”

After follow-up questions from school board members and an hour of deliberation, board members ruled in Wright's favor.

“I felt good about their decision. I just wanted to be treated fairly and equally to my fellow coworkers,” said Wright.

Following the board's decision, the human resource director reversed her decision for other teachers in the district, returning either time or pay to the teachers.

“When we were done with the process, I was very glad that I followed through,” said Wright. “I've been an NSEA member since I was in college and this experience has made my dues worth it.”

NSEA is ready and able to help members. Whether you have a concern or question, are pursuing change, speaking at a school board meeting, seeking increased funding, or advocating for education with state elected officials, NSEA is here to support you and your students. Start by contacting your NSEA Organizational Specialist at 1-800-742-0047 or 402-475-7611.

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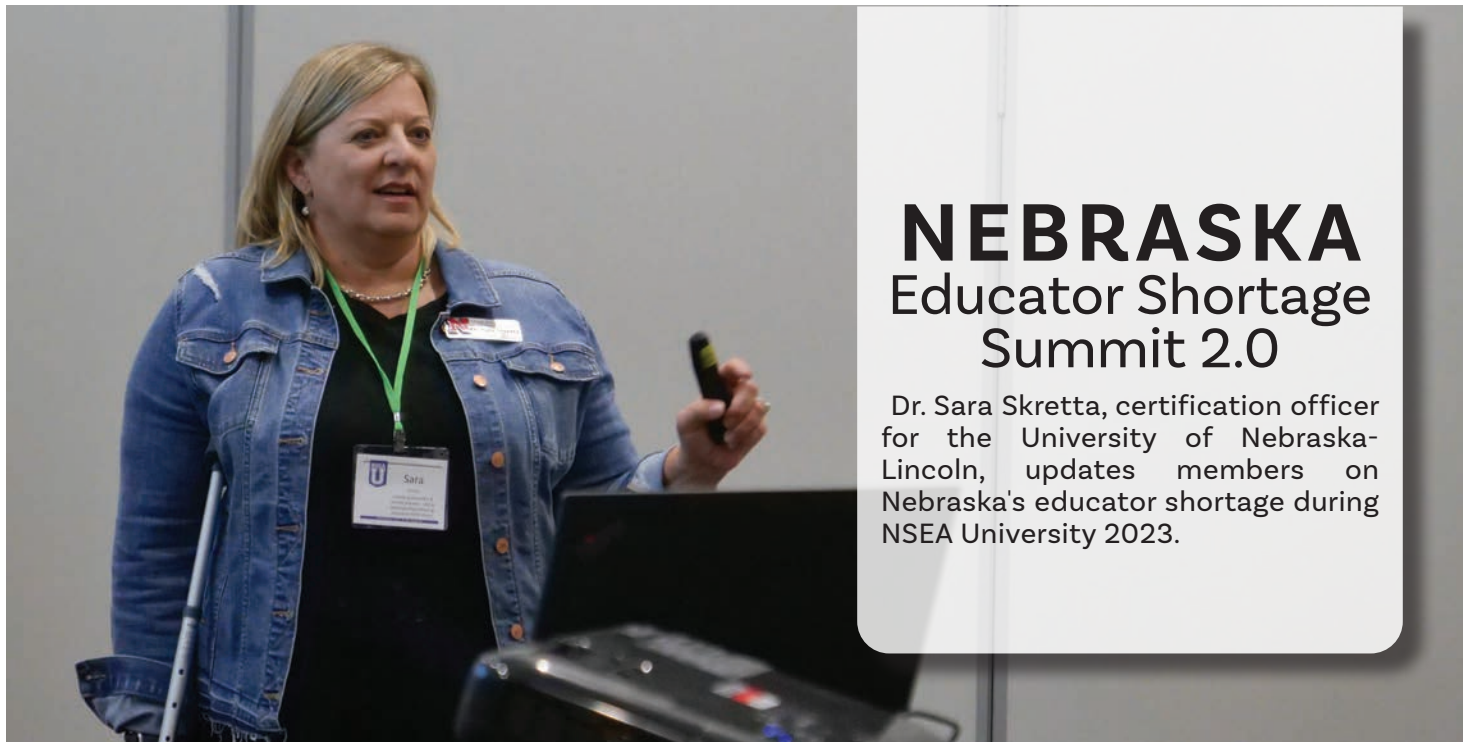
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## NEBRASKA Educator Shortage Summit 2.0

Dr. Sara Skretta, certification officer for the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, updates members on Nebraska's educator shortage during NSEA University 2023.

# Nebraska Educator Shortage Summit

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

NSEA has worked with the Nebraska Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (NACTE) to identify and address barriers that have contributed to Nebraska's educator shortage.

The NACTE is comprised of the 16 institutions in Nebraska with teacher preparation programs. Data collected by the Nebraska Department of Education was compiled by NACTE to look for trends related to the shortage.

NACTE hosted Nebraska's first Educator Shortage Summit last fall to create a plan of action. "We all agreed that unless we are on the same page and working in concert with each other, it will be very difficult to solve the teacher shortage in Nebraska," said Dr. Sara Skretta, certification

officer for the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

There were four priorities that emerged from the summit to help combat the teacher shortage: expanding certification; adopting multiple assessment methods for basic skills competency in teacher prep programs; retention in the workforce; and collaborating to build support for the education profession.

### Educator Shortage Summit 2.0

On October 25 - 26, NACTE will host the Nebraska Educator Shortage Summit 2.0 at Younes Conference Center in Kearney. Scan the QR code below to register.

NSEA and other education stakeholders will attend this year's summit.

# NEBRASKA EDUCATOR SHORTAGE SUMMIT

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Registration, \$150

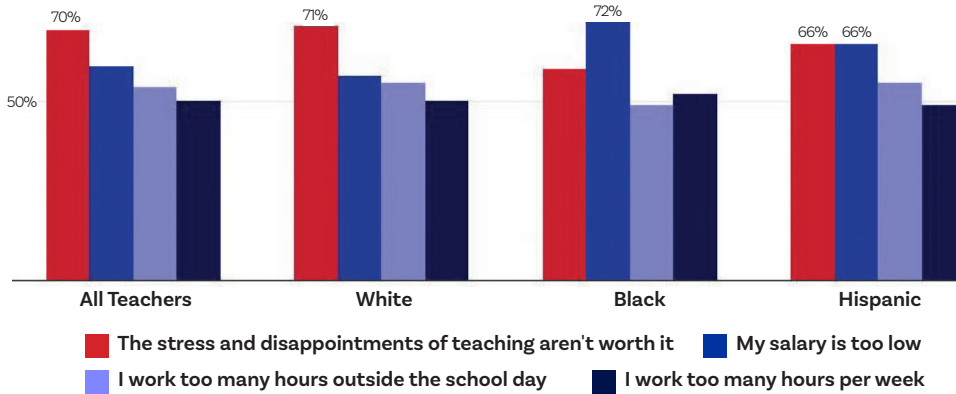
@NACTE\_Summit



# Top Reasons Why Educators May Leave The Profession

(Responses from teachers who said they were "somewhat likely" or "very likely" to leave their jobs at the end of the 2022-23 school year)

Source: RAND, All Work and No Pay - Teachers' Perceptions of Their Pay and Hours Worked.



In a national survey released in September, K-12 public school teachers reported feeling overworked and underpaid. On average, educators estimated working 53 hours a week—seven more hours than the typical working adult (RAND conducted a separate survey of all working adults.) Only 24 percent of teachers are satisfied with their total weekly hours worked, compared with 55 percent of working adults.

A low salary and working too many hours are also top job-related stressors, according to the survey, and are the top-ranked reasons why teachers said they were considering leaving the profession at the end of this school year. The top reason is the feeling that the "stress and disappointments" of teaching are not worth it. But, as the authors point out, dissatisfaction with their compensation, hours worked, or other working conditions could, for some teachers, be driving their disappointment.

### Teachers of Color

The results also point to a disproportionate impact on teachers of color, potentially undermining recent efforts to diversify the teaching workforce. For example, Black and Hispanic teachers, on average, report working more hours per week than their White counterparts, and they are more likely to report working more than 60 hours per week.

Improving pay is critical for

recruiting and retaining educators but higher pay may not be the only key to curbing staff shortages.

"The survey shows that pay, hours worked and working conditions are interrelated, suggesting that pay increases alone—without improvements in working hours or conditions—are unlikely to bring about large shifts in teachers' well-being or intentions to leave the profession," Ashley Woo, coauthor of the report and an assistant policy researcher at RAND, said in a statement.

Survey findings suggest that unless consideration for improving the number of hours worked and overall working conditions are also addressed, many teachers may continue to head toward the exits.

Find the full report at  
[bit.ly/TeacherPayToday](https://bit.ly/TeacherPayToday)  
or scan the QR code below.



Scan for Report

## 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



Hastings Education Association member Diane Biere (left) is the recipient of the 2023 Christa McAuliffe Prize for Courage and Excellence in Education. Christa McAuliffe (right).

# Hastings Education Association Member Earns Christa McAuliffe Prize

Diane Biere believes courage looks and feels different for everyone. Biere could see courage in a loved one who struggled with extreme depression, including suicidal ideation and attempts on their life. Courage for them was surviving the next minute, the next second while seeking help.

Biere could recognize courage in a student's fight with addiction.

Biere could see courage in her mother's life. Surviving an abusive partner was an act of courage for her mother and so was raising children as a single mother. Before passing, Biere could see courage in her mother's fight to live through multiple stroke episodes and illnesses.

"It takes courage to face death. It also takes courage to love others experiencing those battles," Biere said.

## Courage and Empathy

Through her roles as a teacher, a caregiver and a friend, Biere recognizes her own courage lies in empathy.

"Empathy requires courage. Seeing through the eyes of others is a courageous event. It takes setting aside a fragile ego in hopes of understanding a fellow human," she said. "If I could teach my students one lasting quality, it would be empathy."

Biere is an NSEA member and English teacher at Hastings Middle School. She is the recipient of the 2023 Christa McAuliffe Prize for Courage and Excellence in Education.

"I try to put myself in the shoes of others in hopes to display a sense of empathy," Biere said. "I take this knowledge to the classroom."

## Offering Grace

In her nomination letter, Biere lovingly refers to her students as

"young humans" who have sometimes been a handful to handle. Empathy, Biere said, has allowed her to see courage in each of them.

"I find that the combination of grace and accountability ensures challenging times to be more acceptable by everyone involved. I use it frequently" she said.

Biere's colleagues say she has a quiet drive that makes her unstoppable.

"Diane is purposeful in all that she does and has high expectations of her students but in turn gives them the tools they need to be courageous, as well," a nominator wrote. "She inspires students to be more, to do more and to

change the world one day at a time. She empowers others to be the best version of themselves."

**"Empathy requires courage. Seeing through the eyes of others is a courageous event."**

— Diane Biere  
Hastings Education Assoc.

## To Inspire

Biere's ability to inspire her students sometimes starts with lunch. She purposefully builds relationships with students in the first few months of school, often eating lunch in the cafeteria with them.

"Students thrive on being seen and being noticed. I make it a point to notice students, many of whom are blown away when they realize they have truly been seen," she explained.

Biere was recognized as the recipient of the 2023 Christa McAuliffe Prize for Courage and Excellence in Education during Administrators' Days in July.

"I am very grateful to be this year's recipient," Biere said. "I believe our society needs to continue recognizing the efforts of our teachers. I applaud the University of Nebraska for doing just that."

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln College of Education and Human Sciences presents the award to a Nebraska teacher who exemplifies the character of McAuliffe, the first teacher in space, who died in the 1986 Challenger space shuttle disaster.

Like McAuliffe, Biere's desire to help others reaches beyond helping students. Biere is also known as a great mentor to fellow teachers.

"There is no other teacher I have worked with in my career who has been as consistently positive and encouraging as Diane Biere," a nominator wrote.

Recipients of the Christa McAuliffe Prize for Courage and Excellence in Education receive a \$1,000 stipend and a plaque. If you would like to nominate a teacher, complete the online nomination form at: <https://cehs.unl.edu/courage/nominate-teacher/>

Read more about Biere's philosophy of education from Biere herself in the excerpt from her submission letter found at the top right of this page.

# Philosophy of Education

Written By: Diane Biere

Excerpt from Biere's submission letter:

"Middle schoolers are weird. They are obnoxious. They sometimes smell. They make mistakes. They are passionate. They try out new versions of themselves, sometimes every other day. They are inquisitive. They are brutally honest. They are dramatic. They are grown up and fiercely independent one minute, and small children needing encouragement the next. Above all, they are the purest sense of human.

Our time together is shockingly short. These past two years have made this fact alarmingly clear. My philosophy of education, taking into consideration the above characteristics of middle school life, is that our time together is short. I try to remember that. I try to do what is best for each student in front of me for the time I have with them. Of course, my goal as an educator is to educate my students. The knowledge they need to be successful adults is laid in the content they learn in school. It is the other education our young people require that keeps me going. What will matter ten years from now? The answers to that question are the focus.

My brother hated school. His desire to care about his education died when one of his elementary teachers crushed his soul by ridiculing his struggles with reading. That event mattered ten years later. He continued to struggle in school because his mindset had been altered by one comment. One attitude. One opinion. One of my goals as an educator is to create an environment where none of my students will ever face such an experience. I keep his experience in mind every year.

Being hurtful to others will matter ten years from now. When my students are hurtful to others, I encourage them to see others from different perspectives. During their middle school years is the best time to learn the lesson of understanding. One wonderful aspect of middle schoolers is that they are usually receptive. The adults in the country have been unkind to one another these past few years and the children have taken notice. Listening to others has gone by the wayside. My hope is that by insisting on understanding and truly listening to one another, that this generation will begin changing our society for the better."

## KEEP YOUR HEART HEALTHY

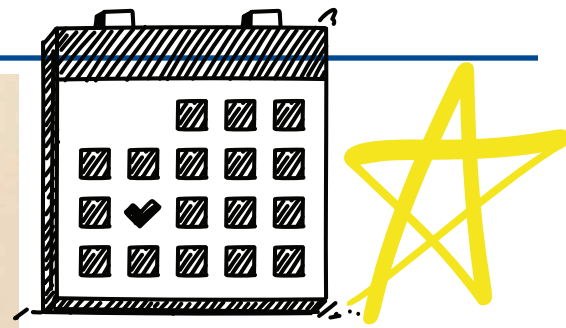
With your EHA health insurance benefits, you have access to a program that can help you:

- Understand your blood pressure numbers
- Create strategies to reduce stress, anxiety and depression
- Identify causes and symptoms of heart disease

Sign up and get started with a nurse today 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 Blue Shield Association.



## Year-Round Collective Bargaining

**OCTOBER  
To do list:**

## Let's Get Ready to Bargain!

Collective bargaining gives educators a voice in their workplace. It helps secure fair wages and benefits, improving not only teacher recruitment, but also retention. Negotiating as a group helps teachers improve compensation, benefits and working conditions. Teachers' working conditions are students' learning conditions. Addressing these issues at the table benefits everyone.

Topics like salary, health insurance, class size, plan time and retirement can all be negotiated. To make that happen, your local association must be recognized by the employer as the bargaining agent for the year or certified as the permanent bargaining agent for your school.

NSEA's Collective Bargaining Specialist Jen Dubas offers the following tips for local associations as the bargaining window approaches this fall:

1. Stay in touch with your NSEA Organizational Specialist about upcoming bargaining opportunities and available resources, including the bargaining calendar and updated sample negotiated agreement.

2. Community college and K-12 locals should prepare and submit their 2025-26 recognition

request letter now so the board can act on recognizing the local as the bargaining agent for next fall's negotiations of the 2025-26 agreement. (Certified locals, prepare your notification letter for the board.)

3. Survey association members about issues and priorities before you head to the bargaining table.

4. Access NSEA's microsearch database of agreements at [www.nsea.org/collective-bargaining](http://www.nsea.org/collective-bargaining).

5. Organize your negotiations team so roles and responsibilities are clear during both preparation and bargaining.

6. Be ready to begin negotiations by Nov. 1 for K-12 and community college locals and by Sept. 1 for state employee groups.

7. Stay in touch with your organizational specialist throughout the process. They can help you comply with the bargaining calendar, learn more about area settlements and be aware of trending language proposals being offered by other district boards.

Remember, educators have more strength in numbers and never is that truer than at the bargaining table.



**Prepare for Negotiations**



**Prevalence Study**



**Annual Financial Report**



**Secure Staff Census Data**

**Schedule and Attend Comp. Study Training**



**Attend Bargaining Dinner**

**On or Before October 30 - attorneys file with CIR for certification election**



**Certification Proceedings/Order**



*Teamwork is important on the court and in the classroom. That's why I'm proud to be part of the larger team of education professionals as a member of NCA and NSEA. The networking and professional growth opportunities offered in both associations have helped me grow as an educator and as a coach.*



# Allison Haines

## Falls City Public Schools

- **Technology and Weights Teacher at Falls City Middle School**
- **High School Volleyball and Middle School Track Coach**
- **Falls City Education Association President**

**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)**

## 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](http://nsea.org/childrensfund).

## Celebrate Nat'l Higher Ed Month

Make time to celebrate the dedicated faculty, staff, and graduate workers who fulfill our students' curiosity and ensure they can realize their dreams.

October is National Higher Education Month, and NEA is asking members and allies to share a story that highlights why higher education is or has been important to them. Text SHARE to 48744 to thank staff, faculty, and to give shout-outs to graduate workers. NEA will highlight Higher Education week stories on its social media accounts throughout the month of October!

**TEXT SHARE TO 48744**  
**TO SHARE WHY HIGHER EDUCATION IS IMPORTANT TO YOU!**

I'm proud to support National Higher Education Month because...

**65%**  
**of all jobs**  
**require postsecondary education and training.**

**CELEBRATE**  
**National Higher Education Month!**

nea NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION nea.org  
 HigherEd

**TEAM Updates**

## Staff changes at NSEA HQ, Omaha Education Association

One retirement and several resignations resulted in three new hires and a rearrangement of staff assignments. David Nielsen has been hired as the Organizational Specialist for the Northeast Unit. Nielsen is a 20-year veteran teacher and long-time Louisville Education Association member.

Nielsen was active in his local association serving as the lead negotiator for the past 15 years. Nielsen takes over for Jason Wiese who was named as NSEA Director of Advocacy.

Chris Garcia takes over for longtime staff associate Tamra Mick. Garcia will work to assist staff at NSEA headquarters. Angie Tasich was hired to assist NSEA staff and Millard Education Association members. Tasich will work from the Omaha Education Association office.

## Connecting ESPs Across the Country

### Consider attending the 2024 ESP National Conference

The 2024 NEA ESP National Conference will be held in Las Vegas from March 22-24 at Caesars Palace. The purpose of the conference is to grow and strengthen the professional excellence of ESP members working in pre-K to Higher-Ed through Association-convened, educator-led, and student-centered learning experiences.

There will be interactive workshops to choose from over the course of three days. Participants

can enhance their knowledge and skills to advocate for students and educators, champion racial and social justice, build community relationships, strengthen and grow membership and positively impact student success.

Conference registration is scheduled to open in mid-January 2024. Any NSEA member interested in attending the conference should contact Judy Roach by email at [judy.roach@nea.org](mailto:judy.roach@nea.org) to learn more.



### EDUCATION SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS



### NATIONAL CONFERENCE





# 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





**“Empowering educators equates to empowering students.”**



## SEED 2.0 and the Power of Efficacy

Fall in Nebraska means that schools are back in session and the role of educators has never been more critical. The quality of education provided to students hinges on the effectiveness of their teachers and school leaders. Recognizing this, the Supporting Educator Effectiveness through Development (SEED) work has emerged as a transformative force in Nebraska's educational realm. With Dr. Ryan Ricenbaw at the helm, SEED is poised to elevate education by fostering both individual and collective efficacy among educators, ultimately benefiting all Nebraska students.

### What is SEED?

At its core, SEED embodies a shift in educational mindset that revolves around supporting and developing educators. It acknowledges that empowering educators equates to empowering students. SEED's philosophy, born out of the Nebraska Teacher and Principal Performance Standards, acknowledges that effective educators are the cornerstone of a successful educational ecosystem. By providing educators with the necessary tools, resources, and continuous growth opportunities, SEED establishes a foundation upon which students can flourish academically, socially, and emotionally.

Central to SEED's approach is the cultivation of both individual and collective efficacy among educators. In John Hattie's research, individual efficacy refers to an educator's belief in their personal capacity to positively impact student learning. Collective efficacy, on the other hand, encompasses the shared belief among educators that, through collaborative efforts, they can bring about meaningful change in students' lives. SEED recognizes that these dual forms of efficacy are catalysts for educational transformation. When educators believe in their ability to

make a difference, their enthusiasm and commitment are heightened.

SEED goes beyond individual growth, emphasizing the power of collective efficacy.

When educators come together to strategize, share insights, and collectively solve challenges, the impact is magnified. SEED's emphasis on collective efficacy fosters a strong sense of community, encouraging educators to learn from each other, adapt to changing circumstances, and make data-informed decisions that positively impact student outcomes.

### Evidence Based Approach

Integral to SEED's success is its data-driven decision-making process. By analyzing both student and educator data, SEED connects individual and collective efficacy with tangible student achievement outcomes. This evidence-based approach enhances the understanding of the direct correlation between educator development and student success. Educators can witness the fruit of their efforts, reinforcing the strength of collective efficacy and spurring them to continue refining their practices.

The Supporting Educator Effectiveness through Development initiative stands as a testament to the dedication of Nebraska's education community. As it continues to evolve, it empowers educators to believe in their potential to shape young lives and reinforces the collective belief that together, they can inspire lasting educational transformation. Through SEED's commitment to efficacy and growth, Nebraska's educational landscape is destined for a brighter future, where every student's potential is unlocked, and every educator's impact is magnified.



About the authors: This article was coauthored by Dr. Julie Downing and Ryan Ricenbaw. Dr. Downing is an Educator Effectiveness Specialist with the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE). Ricenbaw is a Leadership and Learning Network Specialist with NDE.



**Scan this QR Code  
to set up a project!**

# How do you pay for classroom supplies?

More than half of teachers nationally spend more than \$500 a year of their own hard-earned money on classroom materials. That's why long-time corporate supporter, Horace Mann, sponsors the non-profit organization, [DonorsChoose.org](https://www.donorschoose.org), which connects public school teachers in need of supplies with individual donors who want to help.

As an educator, you have one of the most important jobs there is: shaping children's futures. But with school budgets constantly dwindling, your job becomes more and more challenging. Horace Mann is here to help.

DonorsChoose is a website and nonprofit organization that connects public school teachers in need of classroom materials and experiences with individual donors who want to help. Since partnering with DonorsChoose in 2011, donors have contributed more than \$5 million to projects on the website.

Horace Mann also offers workshops that teach educators how to submit DonorsChoose projects, to help improve their chances of getting those projects funded by donors. Visit [DonorsChoose.org](https://www.donorschoose.org) or scan the QR code on this page to set up a project.

**Visit [DonorsChoose.org](https://www.donorschoose.org)**

**DonorsChoose is an independent third-party not affiliated with Horace Mann. Horace Mann provides no guarantee that educators' projects will receive funding through DonorsChoose.**

## NEA Auto & Home Insurance Program Update

In September, NEA Member Benefits announced that Travelers was selected as the new carrier for the NEA Auto & Home Insurance Program. The new NEA Auto & Home Program provided by Travelers is expected to be fully operational by fourth quarter of 2023, well before most current program participants policies expire with California Casualty.

NEA MB began notifying Nebraska members of the change in September to ensure a seamless transition.

Travelers emerged as the standout choice with competitive rates, nationwide coverage, and a brand that aligns with NEA MB's commitment to providing the best customer service to NEA members.

### About Travelers

Travelers is dedicated to ensuring a seamless transition for members by offering competitive rates, which include a member discount and other eligible discounts to minimize premium impacts as existing policyholders move from the current provider, California Casualty. Key member benefits include:

- Money-saving discounts, including multi-policy and safe driver
- Coverage options and packages tailored to members' needs
- Free, no-obligation quotes from licensed insurance representatives

- Online and mobile app policy services with MyTravelers®24/7 claim reporting and customer service.

For questions contact NEA MB today by emailing questions to [askus@neamb.com](mailto:askus@neamb.com).





# Make the most of your new **MEMBERSHIP!**

Find out how NEA Member Benefits can help you:

- Reduce student debt
- Save on travel and everyday items
- Get insurance that fits your schedule
- Sign up for free life insurance
- Plan ahead for retirement

And so much more!

Scan below  
to learn more



**nea** *Member  
Benefits*



TRISH GUINAN

# Message from the Executive Director

## Solve this Math Problem

Since its founding in 1867, NSEA has been the collective and powerful voice for Nebraska public educators.

As a former math educator, I know that numbers are also powerful. Before you stop reading this—in the expectation that my next paragraph will include a multi-step word problem involving multiplication, subtraction and division—I promise you, it doesn't, so please hear me out. 117,145 is a powerful number and it doesn't take a math wiz to solve this equation. When 117,145 Nebraskans affix their signatures to an official petition to put the repeal of LB753 on the ballot, the answer is easy: voters believe they should have the final say on the issue.

## (>) Greater Than

The Support Our Schools Nebraska (SOSNE) effort nearly doubled the number of signatures needed to give voters a say on LB753's tax voucher scheme which diverts public tax dollars to private schools. The petition drive also exceeded the state requirement that 5% of registered voters in at least 38 counties sign the petition.

SOSNE also met the qualification threshold for signatures in over 60% of the state's 20 most populated and 20 least populated counties, as well as in nearly 70% of the counties that have a private school (more than half of Nebraska's 93 counties have no private school).

Few topics unite Nebraskans throughout the state, but they have been overwhelmingly supportive of this petition effort to put the repeal of LB753 to a vote. I believe that this support emanates from some powerful numbers, namely the dollar-for-dollar tax credits in LB753 that will end up costing Nebraska taxpayers \$100 million annually. That is \$100 million that would no longer be available to fund public education and other priorities. I also believe \$100 million number is a powerful number motivating petition opponents.

Betsy DeVos, a Michigan billionaire politician, has largely funded the effort to deny Nebraskans the right to vote on LB753's tax scheme. The DeVos funds were spent in part to pay blockers who harassed and attempted to intimidate SOSNE volunteers and Nebraska voters. In stark contrast to DeVos's blockers was the SOSNE coalition of nonprofits working alongside more than 2,100 circulators, event coordinators and other volunteers.

## (<) Less Than

Support Our Schools Nebraska had fewer than 90 days to launch the petition drive, collect the needed signatures, and submit them to the Nebraska Secretary of State, who has now forwarded the petitions to county election officials. Once all petitions have been reviewed and the statutory requirements met, the Secretary of State will certify the measure for the Nov. 2024 General Election ballot.

I felt a collective sigh of relief from members, leaders and staff once we all had a moment to digest and reflect on this incredible achievement. The issue of giving public tax dollars to private schools has come before Nebraska voters thrice before and all three times Nebraskans rejected the proposals. I have a great deal of faith in Nebraska's commitment to our public schools, teachers and students, and I'm confident that this attempt to bring private school voucher programs to Nebraska will fail for a fourth time.

For 156 years, NSEA has supported educators, students and public education. This remarkably successful petition drive would not have been possible without the support and help from our communities, neighbors, families and friends. A sincere thank you to everyone who supported, in one way or another, this effort.

Working together, we can repeal LB753, continue to build support for our Nebraska public schools, and provide every child with the opportunity to receive a quality public education.

“  
**I felt a collective sigh of relief from NSEA members, leaders and staff once we all had a moment to digest and reflect on this incredible achievement.**  
”

# Celebrating the Profession Across Nebraska



This summer, retired members, new retirees and active members gathered in districts across the state to celebrate the profession while enjoying conversation, innovation, food and prizes.

In August, NSEA-Retired members welcomed new teachers at Grand Island Public Schools (photos 1-3).

Platte Valley Retired Education Association members volunteered to serve at the school district's new teacher breakfast. The following day, many of the retired members returned to help answer questions and pass out lunches for the new staff.

Many NSEA-Retired members in Lincoln toured the Nebraska Innovation Campus and had a reception at the Mill. (photos 5-6).

**Summer 2023:** 1. NSEA-R members Maureen Nickels, Lisa Cunningham, Yvette Englhaupt and Deb Gnuse. 2. Guy Roggenkamp, Lynda Fickes, Linda Dahlstrom, Mary Ann Gerdes, and Danita Stanton. 3. NSEA-R members at a buffet. 4. A Platte Valley Retired Education Association event. 5-6. Retired members at Innovation Campus.

## Last chance to Register! NSEA-Retired Fall Conference

**October**  
**18**

The NSEA-Retired Fall Conference will be held Oct. 18 at the Grand Island Stuhr Museum and will feature breakout sessions both in the morning and afternoon. Attendees will learn about the rich history of Stuhr Museum's expansive facilities. Registration is available at [www.nsea.org/retired](http://www.nsea.org/retired). The event is free for all members and \$10 for guests. Registration and refreshments will begin at 8:30 a.m. The deadline for registration is October 11.



## NSEA-Retired PAC Update

Nebraska boosted the amount of dollars contributed by \$1,500—a 34% increase over 2022.

The dollars exceeded the NSEA-Retired goal of raising donations by 2%. The NEA PAC collects voluntary contributions from members and uses those contributions to support candidates for office who support our public schools and high-quality education for all children.

Please consider a donation today by visiting [EducationVotes.org/donate](http://EducationVotes.org/donate).

You may either make a one-time donation or a recurring monthly donation. When you donate, know that your money is going to support those who support public education.

The NEA PAC thanks all who donated this past year!

# Medicare Insurance Seminars coming this fall!

Medicare is the core insurance for individuals over age 65 and those with disabilities. The coverage can be a bit daunting for those who are new to Medicare, so NSEA-Retired has partnered with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska to provide information seminars across the state to help answer questions members have about Medicare and its coverage.

Members who are turning 65 will receive a letter from BCBS when the schedule is complete, giving the locations and information on how to reserve a space at one of the seminars. The schedule will also be posted on the NSEA-Retired website at [nsea.org/retired](http://nsea.org/retired). One of the seminars will be recorded, and the recording will be posted on the NSEA-Retired website when the seminars have been completed.

A key time each year falls between Oct. 15 to Dec. 7—that is the time when all Medicare subscribers can switch their Medicare drug plan coverage (Medicare Part D coverage) without any penalty. It is also the time when insurance companies increase their sales pressure to promote their specific Part D products.

Choosing a drug plan that is best for you is not intuitive! The lowest premium is not necessarily the cheapest plan; the highest premium is not necessarily the best coverage; the lowest deductible is not necessarily the best plan for you; the cost of a drug will not be the same at all pharmacies. The only way to choose a plan that is right for you is to go to the Medicare website, [medicare.gov](http://medicare.gov), enter your ZIP code and the drugs that you actually use, and five pharmacies that you can access. The website will return the results of the 24 plans that are available in Nebraska along

with the total cost of the plans for the drugs that you actually use (the total cost will include the premium, deductible, and the copays that you make for the drugs), and will allow you to compare drug pricing at up to five pharmacies.

The Medicare information seminars will cover the basics of Medicare (how to sign up, when to sign up, and what Medicare covers), as well as information on Educators' Medicare Supplement, a Medicare supplement that is endorsed by NSEA-Retired

and underwritten by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska.

NSEA-Retired members as well as subscribers to an Educators Health Alliance (EHA) insurance plan and their spouses qualify for enrollment in Educators' Medicare Supplement. Enrollment in Educators' Medicare Supplement brings you specific benefits that are not available to the general public, and our supplement is not available to the general public – only to our members, EHA subscribers, and their spouses.

**Article By: Roger Rea,  
NSEA-Retired Vice President**



## Blue Cross Blue Shield of Nebraska FALL SEMINARS

### 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>Kearney</b>	Monday, Oct. 23 Educational Service Unit 10 - Room B, (76 Plaza Boulevard, Kearney)
<b>Omaha</b>	Wednesday, Oct. 25 Metropolitan Community College Swanson Conference Center, Building 22
<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)

### Webinars:

Thursday, Oct. 26, 9 a.m. to 10 a.m.

Monday, Oct. 30, 2 p.m. to 3 p.m.

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

## Speaking of Education

“A college degree and a teaching certificate define a person as a teacher, but it takes hard work and dedication to be one.”

— Paul McClure

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

OCTOBER

SU	MO	TU	WE	TH	FR	SA
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

October Observances and Celebrations! Plan now to incorporate relevant content into your October slate.

OCT. 1-31	LGBTQ+ HISTORY MONTH
OCT. 1-31	HIGHER EDUCATION MONTH
OCT. 1-7	BANNED BOOKS WEEK
OCT. 1-7	MENTAL ILLNESS AWARENESS WEEK
OCT. 5	WORLD TEACHER DAY
OCT. 9	INDIGENOUS PEOPLES DAY
OCT. 11	NATIONAL COMING OUT DAY
OCT. 15-21	INVISIBLE DISABILITIES WEEK
OCT. 16-21	NATIONAL SAFE SCHOOLS WEEK

# MOVED?



## Have Your Contact Details Changed?

Have you moved? Have you changed your name by marriage? Are you planning to move? If so, you can update your NSEA 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 directions.

Keep your issue of *The Voice* near, as the mailing label includes your membership number, used to access your information. The NSEA website is at: [www.nsea.org](http://www.nsea.org).

SCAN ME

