

The VOICE

Nebraska State Education Association • December 2024

A PUSH FOR PAID FMLA

NSEA sets policy priorities to act on what matters most to members

- **Be a Leader!
Positions Open**
- **Apply Early for
Certificate Renewal**
- **2025 Delegate
Assembly Details**



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Don't Delay! Apply for 2025 Certificate Renewal Early

Educators who need to renew their certificate in 2025 may want to complete their application early to avoid processing delays with the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE).

Each year, the NDE sends certificate renewal reminders to thousands of Nebraska educators. The teaching certificate is valid for teaching in all Nebraska school systems and must be renewed every five years. Certificates expire on August 31 each year. Backlogs at the department in recent years have sent members to NSEA for help to get answers about the process. In 2024, the department hired additional staff to help manage certificate renewals. This year, the department is encouraging certificated teachers who will need to renew in 2025

to apply between the months of January and March.

“This will help with the processing time for their certificates and not put them in a bind if they wait until it gets closer to August when our office has many new grads that are working through the system,” said NDE Director of Educator Certification, Katelyn Larson.

Teachers who are unsure if their certificate expires this year can log in to the Nebraska TEACH portal and check the expiration date: teach.education.ne.gov/#/verifylicense.

To renew, log on to: teach.education.ne.gov/#/ and start an application. The application can be found at the top of the account portal.

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

On the Cover: Lincoln Education Association member Beth Rempfer is in remission after a battle with leukemia. Stories like Rempfer's are the motivation behind a major push for Paid Family and Medical Leave (FMLA) in 2025, as part of NSEA's state policy agenda. See the story and photos, pages 7-8.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

TIM ROYERS

Your Stories Have Power

“We need members, and allies in the community, to speak up and lend their voices in our efforts. Whether it is in the form of testifying at a hearing, calling your state senator, writing a letter, or attending a town hall – only through our collective strength can we succeed in convincing our Nebraska State Senators and the Governor to truly commit to bold action.”

While we may have one eye on the upcoming winter break and some much-needed downtime, countless NSEA members across the state are engaged in doing the important work to advance the education profession. Most of our local education associations are working full steam ahead with the contract negotiations to hammer out agreements that will retain and recruit the very best educators for their students.

Your Advocate

Just as your local association leaders and negotiators are hard at work to support you and your students, your state leaders and staff are committed and working to do the same. Thanks to your input throughout the fall – from surveys, visits to locals, committee meetings, and more – we have the information we need to put together a comprehensive, strong package of bills to advocate for in the upcoming legislative session. We want to make sure that every Nebraskan, from Sioux County to Richardson County, knows what the state should do to help address educators' needs and strengthen our capacity to serve our students.

Your Voice

Putting together a slate of policy proposals derived from your input is just the first step to delivering results. The only way we complete the path is by working together. We need members and allies in the community, to speak up and lend their voices in our efforts. Whether it is in the form of testifying at a hearing, calling your state senator, writing a letter, or attending a

town hall – only through our collective strength can we succeed in convincing our Nebraska State Senators and the Governor to truly commit to bold action.

More than anything else, it will be your stories that will have the most impact.

Build Momentum

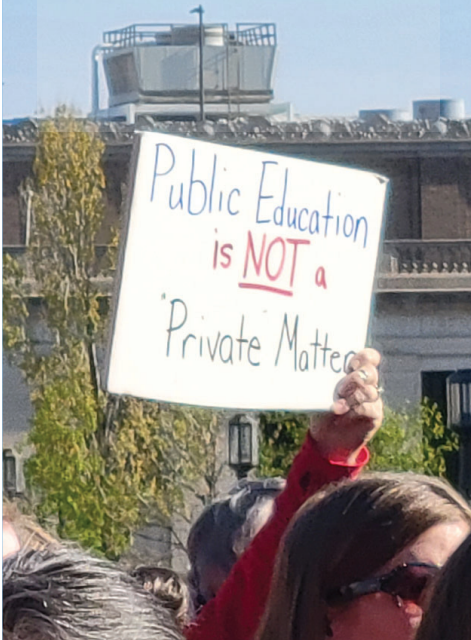
We delivered a resounding victory in the 2024 election with the repeal of LB1402's voucher scheme. Now we need to build on that momentum, leverage the relationships we built during that two-year battle, and fight to address the issues that are having the most profound impact on our lives and the lives and learning of our students.

This month, we will be sharing our proposals with you, our state senators, and the public at large. In January, when the new session of the Legislature convenes, we will roll up our sleeves and get to work convincing lawmakers of the need to vote for the policy proposals we're bringing to them on behalf of our members and students. I'm asking you to join us in this important effort.

Take Care of Yourself

I hope you enjoy the winter break and take some time off to recharge your batteries. Education is an incredibly rewarding profession, but it can also take a lot out of you – so please take care of yourselves.

I'm looking forward to working with you to advance a positive agenda that strengthens the education profession and benefits Nebraska educators and students in the new year.





LB1402 REPEALED: Nebraska Voters Reject Private School Vouchers for Fourth Time

After two years, two successful petition drives and over 200,000 signatures from Nebraskans, voters overwhelmingly rejected the idea of using public funds to pay for private schools. Referendum Measure 435 asked voters whether to retain or repeal LB1402's plan to annually give \$10 million in taxpayer dollars to pay for private schools.

"Thank you, Nebraska voters"

This marks the fourth time in Nebraska's electoral history that voters have decisively vetoed a voucher program.

Certified election results show that 57% of voters chose to repeal LB1402.

"The vote to repeal this latest voucher scheme to come from the legislature is a clear directive to the state senators and the Governor: Nebraskans do not support using public funds to pay for private schools," said Tim Royers, president of the Nebraska State Education Association. "Nebraskans want their voices heard and respected."

When NSEA and a coalition of not-for-profit organizations launched the Support Our Schools Nebraska petition drive in early June 2023, there was no way of knowing that the journey to give voters a chance to repeal school vouchers would span two summers, culminate in gathering more than 200,000 signatures, and require a defense of the petition process in the Nebraska Supreme Court.

"Thousands of volunteers made this effort a success. Also, this vote is a morale booster for our dedicated and caring public school teachers. On behalf of our NSEA members, I sincerely thank Nebraskans for their support of our public

schools," said Royers.

The Fight Ahead

Nebraska wasn't the only state with voucher schemes on the ballot. Voters in Colorado and Kentucky also rejected private school voucher measures. When put to a vote of the people, private school voucher schemes have lost every time. Voters want strong public schools and believe public funds should be used for that purpose.

"Nebraskans want our local public schools to have the resources necessary to help children learn and succeed. They know that taking public funds that should be spent to ensure strong public schools and diverting those dollars to pay for private schools threatens Nebraska's constitutional guarantee of a free, quality public education that is accessible to and able to serve all children," said Jenni Benson, president of Support Our Schools Nebraska.

Time will tell whether state lawmakers have gotten the message from their constituents.

"Elected officials need to respect the wishes of voters and stop trying to impose costly voucher schemes on taxpayers. Public funds should be used to support public schools, which are open and available to all students, and which are accountable to Nebraska taxpayers," said Royers.

The 109th Nebraska Legislature will convene on Jan. 8. NSEA will track proposed bills that could affect Nebraska public education, including any additional attempts to divert public dollars for private schools.

The Power of a Nondescript Coffee Cup: Gerry Brooks' Most Important Lesson

Gerry Brooks, an experienced educator, YouTube star and motivational speaker, is known for using object lessons and humor to inspire. One of his most powerful and enduring lessons revolves around a nondescript coffee cup purchased for just \$1.25. This simple coffee cup, though seemingly insignificant, holds profound meaning and teaches a critical lesson about dignity, empathy, and the impact educators have on their students.

Barbie Boy

“When I was growing up, my generation celebrated Christmas. We had a big tradition in school that each class had a Christmas party and a gift exchange. Students brought a boy gift or girl gift and put it under the tree. On the last day before Christmas break, everybody took a gift from under the tree,” explained Brooks.

As a third-grader, Brooks was eager to contribute. His gift of choice was a set of water guns and balloons—an exciting choice for any young child. However, his excitement was tempered by the memory of the previous year’s gift exchange. Classmate Lenny Staley had tricked Brooks into pulling a Barbie doll during the exchange, which earned him the nickname “Barbie boy” for the entire year.

Determined not to relive that experience, Brooks decided he would pull his own gift this time around. But that decision changed when he saw Roxanne, a classmate boarding the bus with nothing more than a plain, used coffee cup for the gift exchange.

Roxanne's Cup

“Roxanne came from a struggling home. Her mother was a housekeeper at a little hotel in my small community. She had four brothers and sisters, and she constantly came to school dirty, and my peers didn't get that,” said Brooks. “Roxanne was a child with no filter, which I found hilarious because she walked around the building, offending every adult but my peers didn't get that. She was constantly getting into trouble. My classmates shied away from her, but I thought she

was great.”

Brooks’ first thought about Roxanne’s cup was that it would not go over very well with his peers.

“My second thought was, ‘Wait a minute. That is a terrible gift. I'm going to talk Lenny Staley into pulling that gift, and he's going to go home with a used coffee cup,’” Brooks said. “My third thought was if Lenny Staley gets ahold of this cup, he’s going to make fun of my friend Roxanne.”

In that moment, Brooks made a decision: he would give up his water guns and pull Roxanne’s gift instead, ensuring none of his peers would balk at her cup.

Mr. Walters

Roxanne took her unwrapped cup directly to the teacher, Mr. Walters, so he could help wrap the gift.

“They go over to his closet and they’re playing around and all of a sudden, Roxanne turns around and she’s got this beautifully wrapped gift. It had a huge gold bow on it,” Brooks recalled.

Brooks was filled with anxiety during the exchange as students ahead of him selected gifts. When his classmate Renee selected Roxanne’s gift, Brooks braced himself for his classmates’ reactions.

“Renee rips open the paper and holds up the cup. Inside the cup are 10 permanent Sharpie markers, all different colors, and a gigantic king-size Snickers bar. Before she can say anything, Mr. Walters chimes in and says, ‘Oh my gosh, Renee, you got an autograph cup. We’re all going to be able to pick a different color permanent marker and sign our name to that cup and you’re going to go home with a cup with all your friends’ names on it that you’re going to have for the rest of your life. That’s the best gift I’ve ever seen!’”

Brooks said it was at that moment that he decided to become a teacher.

“When someone asks, ‘Why are you an educator?’ I can tell them the time, the place and the teacher who



Gerry Brooks

was standing in front of me. Do you know why? Because I recognized your power as a teacher—as a kindergarten teacher, as an art teacher, as a coach, as district personnel, as a Superintendent, as a principal. I recognize the power of educators to change someone’s nondescript coffee cup into something absolutely amazing,” said Brooks. “I had an educator who understood the most important thing you can ever give a child is their dignity—no matter what home they come from, no matter what pronoun they want to be called, no matter what color their hair is, no matter what sport they’re playing—you as an educator, step up and love, respect, and encourage every child in front of you, no matter who it is. It is life-changing for those kids and everybody watching them.”

Brooks emphasizes that educators hold an enormous responsibility in the lives of their students. The simple act of ensuring a child walks away with dignity can have a lifelong impact.

Daily Reminder

Brooks challenges educators to keep a nondescript coffee cup on their desks as a reminder of the choice educators face—to either lift students up with dignity or tear them down with judgment. The challenge he extends is simple yet profound: always choose love, respect, and encouragement.

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NSEA's 2025 State Policy Agenda priorities focus on reforms to support educators like Lincoln Education Association member Beth Rempfer, who was diagnosed with leukemia in late 2023 and is still navigating a complex system of leave policies.



A Push for Paid FMLA: NSEA sets policy priorities to act on what matters most to members

For 13 years Beth Rempfer has poured her heart into teaching students at Lincoln High School.

"I'm a Lincoln North Star grad, but after starting my career at Lincoln High I have never wanted to teach anywhere else. We get students from all over the world but also students who have had generations of family graduate from this high school," said Rempfer. "It's a very special environment and the teachers here are very supportive of each other."

"Just a Cold"

In late 2023, Beth caught a cold she couldn't kick—or so she thought.

"I work in a high school and I always get whatever the kids get. I had been sick off and on since January. I just kept feeling run down and I was like 'Man, this cold will not go away,'" she recalled.

By the time spring break rolled around, her symptoms worsened. Her throat was sore, and she was feeling more run-down than ever. Back in school after spring break, she could barely make it through the day. She developed a fever. Just three days after the break, another round of tests came back negative, and Beth's

physician decided to run a blood test.

A Diagnosis

The results were shocking. Beth's white blood cell count was so high that the device at the urgent care facility couldn't even read it. It was a sign something was terribly wrong. Beth was sent to the emergency room immediately. Within hours, the doctors had a diagnosis: leukemia.

The news hit her like a punch to the gut. A teacher, age 34, with no family history of cancer, she never could have imagined such a diagnosis. It was surreal.

"I went to the ER and then didn't leave for five weeks," said Beth.

Her chemotherapy was so intense that doctors kept her isolated in the hospital to protect her weakened immune system.

Sick Leave

As a teacher, Beth had limited paid leave, and when she ran out, she had to turn to the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and then disability leave to make ends meet.

"I had already run out of leave for that year because I was so sick with what I thought was a cold. A cold that turned out to be cancer. I had already

gone past my discretionary leave days and was in the no-pay range," said Beth.

In an ordinary year, FMLA would have provided some relief, but it was not a perfect solution. The leave wasn't paid, so the financial strain was significant. She still had bills to pay — medical bills, medication costs, and more. The school district worked with Beth through the FMLA and disability leave process.

"It was lucky in a sense that I was able to get disability," she said. "At least on disability, you're getting a paycheck."

Remission

When Beth returned to school in the fall of 2024, she was welcomed with open arms. Some of her students from the previous year stopped by to say hello, and the English department threw a surprise return party. The outpouring of love and support from her students and colleagues made it clear how much she was missed.

Rempfer is now in remission, though she couldn't return to teaching immediately. This fall she again found herself navigating a complex system of FMLA and leave policies that seemed designed for those with a much

simpler illness. One of the biggest hurdles was the school district's new policy, which threatened the possibility of termination due to being out of both district leave and FMLA. This added another layer of stress. NSEA Organizational Specialist Teresa Matthews and NSEA Advocacy Director Jason Wiese have offered support and practical help to Beth as she deals with this policy and the growing uncertainty about her job.

"NSEA has been by my side through this making sure we've got all the documentation and following up on meetings with the district," Beth said.

Despite the chaos of the past year, Beth never considered leaving teaching.

"I love teaching," she said. "It's who I am."

Push for Paid FMLA

NSEA's 2025 State Policy Agenda priorities (right) focus on reforms to support educators like Beth. Results of a late-September member survey played a crucial role in shaping the agenda. By gathering feedback directly from members, the survey provided insights into the issues and challenges most important to members, including establishing paid FMLA.

NSEA will advocate for six weeks of paid FMLA through new legislation in January. The Education Leave and Support Act would allow teachers to stay in their careers without the strain of unpaid medical leave. The program will be funded by modest payroll contributions from certified teachers and matching employer funds, reimbursing districts for the costs of long-term substitutes.

Member Priorities & Voices

The NSEA member survey results also highlighted key issues such as teacher retention and behavior support for students.

Member voices are needed to help affect these legislative initiatives. Your story can bring attention to and inspire lawmakers to take action for a stronger, more supportive education system.

Any member interested in sharing their story can contact their NSEA Organizational Specialist or call NSEA at 402-472-7611 or toll-free at 800-742-0047. Members can also send questions and information through the 'Contact Us' feature of the NSEA website at www.nsea.org/contact-us.

NSEA Priorities for 2025

- 1. Improve Working Conditions:** Ensure teachers have the resources, planning time, and administrative support necessary to create positive learning environments. Address burnout by reducing non-teaching duties and expanding support services.
- 2. Family Medical Leave:** Establish a program that provides every PK-12 teacher in Nebraska with six weeks of paid FMLA leave.
- 3. Revise State Aid to Education Formula (TEEOSA):** Convene experts and stakeholders to propose substantive changes to ensure equitable and sustainable funding for public education across Nebraska.
- 4. Increase Teacher Salaries and Retention Support:** Advocate for retention grants for veteran educators. Simplify access to existing retention and recruitment grants for early-career educators by making them automatic, requiring no additional paperwork, to attract and retain top talent.
- 5. Strengthen Certification Pathways:** Ensure all student teachers in Nebraska receive compensation for their time. Develop alternative pathways for gaining initial certification through district programs and training.
- 6. Enhance Special Education Services:** Secure additional funding to manage 504 plans, hire paraprofessionals, provide training, and acquire assistive technology to address growing student needs.
- 7. Strengthen Early Childhood Education:** Expand access to early learning programs to ensure all children, regardless of background, are prepared for school.
- 8. Support Postsecondary Educators:** Address issues of low pay, job insecurity, and limited professional development opportunities to maintain high-quality instruction in colleges and universities.
- 9. Expand External Behavior Supports:** Advocate for increased state funding for critical programs, such as Level 3 facilities, that operate outside of schools but are vital to supporting student needs.
- 10. Protect the Diversity of Educators and Students:** Support equitable hiring, cultural competency, and inclusive policies to ensure all educators and students feel valued and empowered. In addition, build upon existing diversity, equity, and inclusion programs.



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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.



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Around the Table: Bargaining Meetings Held Statewide

Knowledge is power, and if local association negotiators hope to do well at the bargaining table this year, investing a few hours in one of NSEA's many November bargaining meetings was a step in the right direction.

The bargaining dinners were held at convenient locations spread across the state, offering local bargaining teams an invaluable opportunity to collaborate and prepare for the important discussions ahead.

At these meetings, attendees delved into a variety of critical topics, including NSEA and local association bargaining goals for 2025-26, state aid updates, property tax levies and lids, and the latest information on health insurance premiums. These sessions also served as a platform for participants to address emerging issues and share insights on legislative developments impacting education funding.

In addition to exploring broad themes, local associations with shared arrays came together to discuss and refine their bargaining goals and strategies. These collaborative discussions fostered the exchange of ideas and enabled teams to identify common challenges and solutions, equipping them with a stronger, unified approach for the negotiation process.

By attending these sessions, local teams left not only more informed but also more prepared to advocate effectively for their members and the communities they serve. As the bargaining season approaches, the knowledge and strategies gained from these meetings will be crucial in ensuring successful outcomes.

This year's meetings were held in Lincoln, Kearney, Beatrice and Gering, just to name a few.

Top photo: 1. Negotiators and leaders gather in Kearney for a Bargaining Dinner. Support Our Schools President Jenni Benson presented on campaign efforts.
Bottom photo: 2. Members from the Beatrice area gather to discuss bargaining strategies.



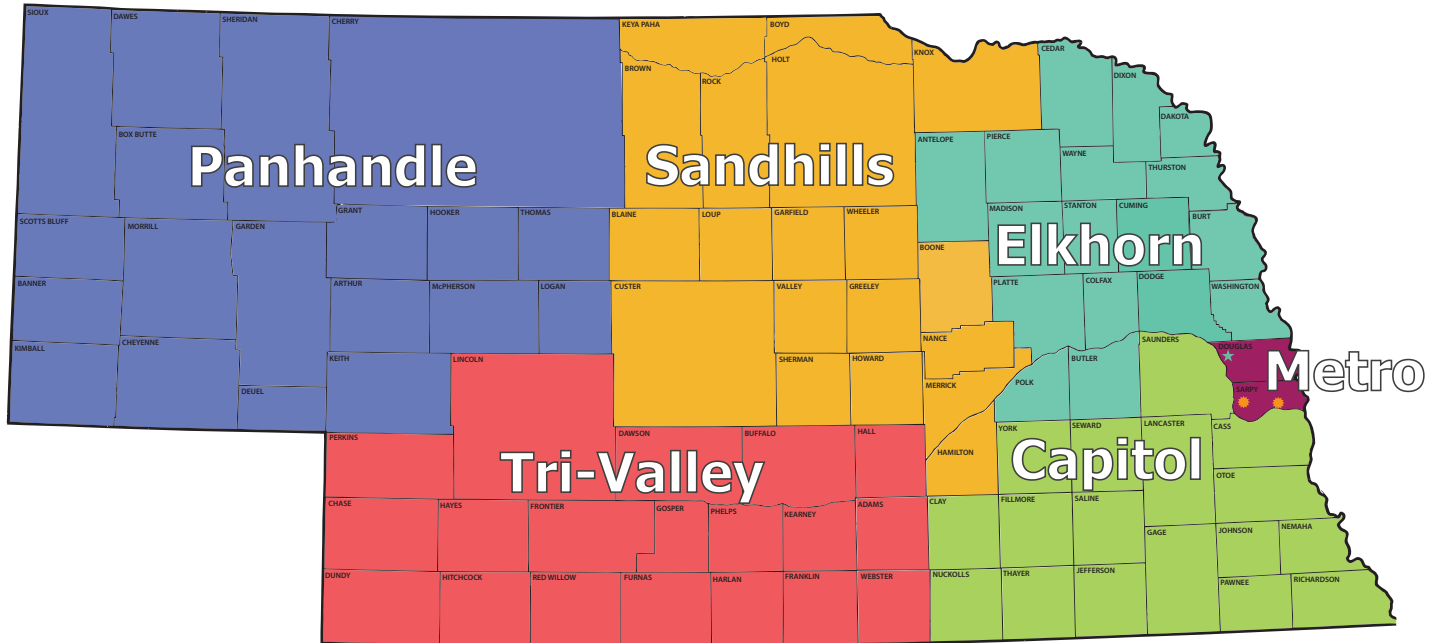
Is your "sleigh"
covered?

The holiday season is here, and for many of us, that means visiting family and friends. As you get ready for your travels, it's a good idea to double check that your "sleigh" has coverage that meets your needs, just in case something unexpected happens on the road. Safe travels!

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In order to comply with NEA guidelines, the ● Gretna Education Association and ● Springfield/Platteview Education Association will be included in Capitol District, and ★ Metro Community College Education Association is included in Elkhorn District.

Your leadership is needed!

Several NSEA leadership positions will be up for election in 2025, and members are asked to consider the role they could play as a leader in the Association.

The window for filing for the 27 open positions on NSEA district boards and the NSEA Board of Directors will begin on Wednesday, Jan. 1, and will close on Sunday, Feb. 2.

Election of members as at-large delegates to the NEA Representative Assembly will occur during the same timeline. Elections for NSEA Secretary/Treasurer, NEA Director and ESP Board of Director At-Large position will take place at Delegate Assembly 2025. Watch the January digital edition of The Voice for details on that filing process.

NSEA members will vote for district positions beginning at 12:01 a.m. on Friday, Feb. 14. Voting will close at midnight on Sunday, March 9.

To file, visit nsea.org and click on "2025 District Elections." Select your district, then choose the office you seek. Candidates will need their 10-digit NSEA membership number. Your number can be found above your name on the mailing label of The Voice. Call NSEA if you have questions: 1-800-742-0047.

The filing process allows candidates to post a 50-word statement for voters

to read. Type the statement in a Word or other text document and then paste the statement into the appropriate box during the filing process.

NSEA encourages minorities to seek office at all levels. NSEA's Minority Involvement Plan says, "It shall be the goal of the Association to seek minority representation on governing and appointive bodies at least equal to the percentage of minority membership for that appropriate level."

Members can elect the next round of NSEA leaders by casting a ballot in the Association elections.

Voting opens on Friday, Feb. 14. On that date, members with valid personal email addresses on file will receive an email detailing the process.

Email Address Needed

NSEA members without a valid email address on file will receive a postcard explaining the voting. If you do not receive a postcard or an email from NSEA by Friday March 7, call 1-800-742-0047.

Update your e-mail address with NSEA by calling 1-800-742-0047 or sending an email to membership@nsea.org. Members should use a personal email account, not a school-issued one.

Vacancies

A statewide look at NSEA leadership opportunities for 2025-26:

CAPITOL DISTRICT

- President
- Two seats on executive committee
- Two seats on NSEA Board

ELKHORN DISTRICT

- Secretary/Treasurer
- Two seats on executive committee
- One seat on NSEA Board

METRO DISTRICT

- Vice President
- Three seats on executive committee (subdistricts 3, 6 and 9)
- Two seats on NSEA Board

PANHANDLE DISTRICT

- Treasurer
- Secretary
- Two seats on executive committee (areas 3 and 6)
- One seat on NSEA Board

SANDHILLS DISTRICT

- Treasurer
- Secretary
- One seat on executive committee

TRI-VALLEY DISTRICT

- Vice President
- Two seats on executive committee (One East, one Central)
- One seat on NSEA Board

EHA Approves 2025-26 Rates

Nebraska educators know that keeping high-quality healthcare benefits affordable is an important part of negotiations. In November, the Educators Health Alliance (EHA) Board of Directors announced the rate and benefit change decisions for the 2025-26 contract year effective September 1, 2025. There will be an overall increase of 5.49% 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) Board of Directors. The EHA is 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 5.49% from the 2024-25 rate level.

“While our medical claims have increased in the most recent months, we are comfortable approving a rate increase below some of the industry surveys we have seen,” said Trish Guinan, EHA Board Chair and NSEA Executive Director. “Given the rate of inflation over the last few years, we are 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 4.77% for the last decade.”

Guinan said the one benefit change made for 2025-26 is an increase in the out-of-pocket maximums.

“We believe it is important to minimize the change in benefits to our members. While we were able to maintain our deductible offerings for the sixth plan year in a row, we did make a change to the out-of-pocket maximums in order to reduce the rate increase,” said Guinan.

The successful rollout of the alternate network product offering to all districts in areas of the state where network competition exists will be continued in the 2025-26 plan year.

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 the expansion of a diabetes claim management program to pre-diabetics and the launch of a new program to manage musculoskeletal claims,” said

Beth Kernes Krause, EHA Vice Chair and Auburn Public Schools Board of Education member.

“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 90,000 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 90,000 Nebraskans are covered by the plan, making it the largest health plan in the state.

What it means for Members: Premium Rate Change

For more information about the plan, visit ehaplan.org.



Medical rates for all Active Employee plans will increase by 5.49%.



Medical rates for all Early Retiree plans will increase by 5.49%.



Dental rates for all participants will increase by 5.49%.



The combined increase for medical and dental coverage is 5.49%.

Apply Today for Retention Grant

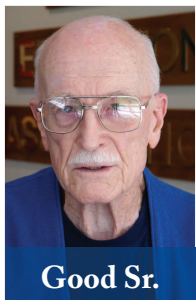
Applications are now being accepted for the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Act Grant Program.

The program provides \$2,500 retention grants to teachers in their 2nd, 4th, and 6th year of teaching. It also provides a one-time \$5,000 high-need recruitment grant to teachers who obtain an endorsement in special education, mathematics, science, technology, or dual credit.

NSEA lobbied to create this program. The application can be found at: <https://bit.ly/NebRetainTeachers>

The application closes on Wednesday, December 18, 2024, at 11:59 p.m. CST.

Former NSEA Editor Honored



Good Sr.

Conrad Good Sr., longest-serving editor in NSEA history, has been inducted into the Nebraska Performing Arts Hall of Fame.

His induction came because

of his love for Big Band music from the 1930s, 1940s and beyond. For more than 30 years Good was the early Monday morning host of 'When Melody was King' on KZUM, Lincoln's listener-supported community radio station.

Good served as editor of The NSEA Voice and its predecessors, Nebraska Education News, and later Ed News, from 1962 until his retirement in 1995. Prior to joining the NSEA staff, Good worked for the Lincoln Journal.

During his NSEA tenure, his peers in the State Education Editors organization honored Good for his writing and photography skills. The Nebraska Performing Arts Hall of Fame, Inc., is a non-profit that works to preserve and promote the history and development of Nebraska's performing arts.

NSEA has published a magazine for members on a regular basis since 1874.



Top photos: 1. Aspiring Educators members take part in the career fair during the fall conference. 2. Aspiring Educators design and paint their own tote bags. **Bottom photos:** 3. Members showcase their uniquely designed tote bags. 4. Aspiring Educators connect with prospective employers representing area school districts.

Aspiring Educators host Career Fair during Fall Conference

The NSEA Aspiring Educators Fall Conference was held on the Wayne State College campus in November. More than 20 AE members from schools across the state gathered for the conference. Members heard from 2023 Nebraska Teacher of the Year Renee Jones, Elementary Principal Tarina Cox-Jones and NEA Aspiring Educators Chair Hannah St. Clair.

Students were also invited to take part in a career fair to connect with prospective employers from area school districts including Bellevue, Fremont, Gretna, Lincoln, Millard, Papillion LaVista, Westside and more.

Through Aspiring Educators, teachers-to-be receive resources, training and an understanding of NSEA support and benefits.



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CHADRON STATE COLLEGE

Chadron State College invites rural students to participate in the expanded SMART tutor program

Nebraska Success Made Accessible through Rural Tutoring (SMART) is expanding its mission to provide high-quality, free tutoring services to K-12 students across rural Nebraska school districts.

The program connects students with dedicated teacher education candidates from the three Nebraska State Colleges: Chadron, Peru, and Wayne.

Program Expansion and Eligibility

- The program now serves students from all school districts affiliated with the Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association (NRCSA), those in districts supported by Educational Service Units 1, 4, and 13, and several other select rural districts.

How the Program Works

- Tutoring services are delivered online, allowing students or parents to schedule sessions between Monday and Thursday.
- Students can either schedule an appointment or select on-demand tutoring.
- Tutors have been admitted to their college's teacher education program, passed background checks, and received comprehensive training.
- Nebraska SMART ensures students are paired with tutors who specialize in their grade level and subject area.



Learn More and Register

For more information or to register for tutoring, visit the Nebraska SMART webpage.



Supporting Educator Effectiveness through Development

Individual Growth & Collaboration: SEED's Evolving Approach to Educator Support

The Supporting Educator Effectiveness through Development (SEED) Team continues to transform educational practices across Nebraska. By shifting the focus toward supporting and developing educators, SEED emphasizes that empowering educators directly leads to empowering students—a core belief aligned with the Nebraska Teacher and Principal Performance Standards. Effective educators form the bedrock of a successful learning environment, and SEED plays a pivotal role in nurturing this effectiveness.

The Power of Efficacy: Driving Educational Transformation

Central to SEED's philosophy is the concept of efficacy—both individual and collective. John Hattie's influential research highlights the impact of an educator's belief in their ability to foster student success. Individual efficacy refers to a teacher's confidence in their capacity to influence learning outcomes. On a larger scale, collective efficacy involves a shared belief among educators that they can enact meaningful, positive change together.

SEED recognizes these dual aspects of efficacy as drivers of educational transformation. When educators believe they can make a difference, their enthusiasm, commitment, and ability to engage students grow. SEED's approach extends beyond individual growth, highlighting the power of collaboration. When teachers unite to exchange ideas, tackle challenges, and share strategies, the collective impact on student achievement multiplies.

Success Story: Hemingford Public Schools

A shining example of this collective efficacy can be found in the ongoing collaboration between Hemingford Public Schools and Dr. Julie Downing. Over the past several months, the district has focused intently on continuous improvement, working closely with Dr. Downing to enhance principal and teacher practices and drive student success. As the administrative team engaged in leadership coaching, district work began to take shape in curriculum alignment, instructional model implementation, educator goal setting, and classroom walkthrough support.

Superintendent Dr. Travis Miller from Hemingford Public Schools praises this approach:

"Too often, professional development comes in the form of solutions looking for a problem. Instead, our experience has

been about meeting the needs of our team in a meaningful and impactful way that targets the actual needs of our schools."

The team has continued their coaching this year. The focus on grade level expectations and teacher goals has intersected in a walkthrough tool to support feedback and development of the Hemingford education team. The SEED team is grateful to work with the Hemingford educators and appreciates the learning that has taken place for our team and the school staff!

Our Vision: A Collaborative Future for Education

The SEED initiative is a testament to Nebraska's commitment to empowering educators and fostering collaboration. By instilling self-awareness and confidence in individual educators and reinforcing the collective strength of teaching teams, SEED lays the groundwork for long-lasting educational change. Through SEED's dedication to professional growth and efficacy, Nebraska's education system is on a path where every student's potential is unlocked, and every educator's influence is magnified.

New Faces, Continued Dedication

The SEED Team recently welcomed a new member while continuing its mission to support educators statewide. Dr. Ryan Ricenbaw remains at the helm as NDE Director of Statewide Teacher and Principal Support, and Dr. Julie Downing continues her impactful work as NDE Educator Effectiveness Specialist.

The team's newest addition, Mr. Jeff Gilbertson, joins as NDE School Leadership Specialist. Since beginning his educational career in 1996, Mr. Gilbertson has made significant contributions as a teacher, principal, and district leader. He began as an elementary teacher in Lincoln Public Schools and later transitioned into administration, where his leadership excelled in both elementary and secondary settings. His dedicated tenure includes roles as an Elementary and Middle School Principal, Secondary Director, and Executive Principal at Grand Island Senior High. In 2022, Mr. Gilbertson was honored as Nebraska's High School Principal of the Year by the Nebraska State Association of Secondary School Principals.

Please don't hesitate to contact our team if we can support you!



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



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TRISH GUINAN

“
For our organization, December and the approaching new year will be particularly significant. We're bidding farewell to some seasoned staff members who have given so much of their time, wisdom, and energy to the Association.

”

Message from the Executive Director

Thankful

With the holiday season now upon us, the whirlwind of activity surrounding the Support Our Schools campaign and the November election already feels like a distant memory. I was filled with an immense sense of relief when Nebraska voters soundly rejected private school vouchers on Election Day—and that victory was certainly something worth celebrating as I enjoyed Thanksgiving with my family.

Reflection and Farewell

The holidays offer a welcome break, a chance to reflect on our collective achievements and challenges. For our organization, December and the approaching new year will be particularly significant. We're bidding farewell to some seasoned staff members who have given so much of their time, wisdom, and energy to the Association.

NSEA Public Affairs and Communications Director Karen Kilgarin announced her plans to retire in 2025. With an incredible 30 years of service to NSEA, Karen has exemplified dedication to the Association's mission and values. Her deep institutional knowledge of Nebraska has driven legislative progress and shaped public opinion.

Before her time on staff, Karen served as the youngest woman ever elected to the Nebraska Legislature. She took a brief leave of absence from the NSEA to serve as Administrative Services Director for then-Nebraska Governor Ben Nelson. She previously worked as Nelson's Deputy Chief of Staff and Communications Director.

Karen has successfully brought millions of dollars in NEA communication grants to Nebraska. A testament to the exceptional quality and impact of her work is that many of those campaigns have earned awards at the national level.

Closer to home, Karen has been a mentor and friend to countless colleagues in her three decades on staff—myself included.

NSEA Organizational Specialist Judy Roach will also be retiring in 2025. Judy has spent 10 years on staff as a steady and experienced advocate for members. She has navigated complex challenges and provided thoughtful, strategic counsel to members that reflect her deep understanding of the education profession.

Before her time on staff, Judy was a veteran educator and a local leader. She taught at Plainview and Norfolk and worked as a counselor at Louisville. She served as a local association president, building rep, lead negotiator and, at one point, guided her local to the Commission of Industrial Relations. NSEA has been fortunate to have her as part of our staff.

In July, longtime Government Relations and Political Field Operations Associate Cathy Schapmann retired. Throughout her 30-year tenure on staff, Cathy tracked thousands of legislative bills and acted as a trusted advisor to NSEA staff and government leaders. Cathy also served as a mentor to many NSEA interns, who have gone on to achieve remarkable success in their chosen fields—a nod to her mentorship and guidance.

Growth and Opportunities

These retirements mark the end of an era at NSEA, but also the beginning of new opportunities for fresh perspectives and growth within our organization.

As we prepare for what's next, I am grateful for the work we've accomplished together and am optimistic for the future successes of our organization and its members.



ELECTIONS AHEAD!

Consider running for one of the leadership roles in NSEA-Retired.

Candidate filing for the upcoming elections will be available online at nsea.org/retired by Jan. 5, 2024. Filing deadline is Feb. 5, 2024.

Open Seats

NSEA-Retired leadership opportunities for 2025-26:

NSEA- RETIRED SECRETARY

- 3-year term
- Term begins Aug. 15, 2025

NSEA- RETIRED TREASURER

- 3-year term
- Term begins Aug. 15, 2025

METRO-1 DISTRICT DIRECTOR

- 3-year term
- Term begins Aug. 15, 2025

PANHANDLE DISTRICT DIRECTOR

- 3-year term
- Term begins Aug. 15, 2025

TRI-VALLEY DISTRICT DIRECTOR

- 3-year term
- Term begins Aug. 15, 2025

LEAD Conference Set for Feb. 17

NSEA-Retired members who wish to become more active and engaged in the Association are encouraged to attend this inaugural event in conjunction with Lobby Day on Feb. 17-18, 2025.

"We are excited to announce the inaugural Legacy Educators Advocacy Development (LEAD) event, hosted by NSEA-Retired," said NSEA-Retired President John Heineman. "This event aims to engage and empower recently retired members of NSEA with valuable information and tools to become more active and involved in the NSEA-Retired organization."

Attendees will receive detailed information about NSEA-Retired leadership opportunities.

Travel expenses, including mileage, hotel accommodations, and meals, will be covered. Further details will be communicated via email.



Action Required: Email Information Updates Needed for some NSEA-Retired members

NSEA-Retired members who have previously used a @cox.net email address will need to update their information to ensure they continue receiving updates from NSEA-Retired. Cox Communications has discontinued email services.

There are three ways members can update their information:

1. Visit www.nsea.org/retired-update to update your contact information.
2. Email membership@nsea.org from your new email address.
3. Call NSEA-Retired at 1-800-742-0047 and request an email update.

Stay connected and make the most of your NSEA-Retired membership!



Have an article idea for the NSEA-Retired Advocate or the NSEA Voice magazine? Send your idea to John Heineman at RingoJohn@aol.com

2025 Delegate Assembly Approaching Fast

Thanksgiving has passed, and the holidays are fast approaching, which can only mean one thing: NSEA's Delegate Assembly is just around the corner!

Plans are underway for the April 2025 Delegate Assembly. Delegates will gather April 25-26 at Lincoln's Marriott Cornhusker Hotel. At the helm of the 165th assembly in NSEA history will be NSEA President Tim Royers.

Delegate Assembly is NSEA's annual business meeting. Members from across the state, representing local associations large and small,

urban and rural, are elected to attend and represent the NSEA's 26,000 members. These delegates manage the business and set the future course of the Association.

A keynote speaker, discussion of educational issues and consideration of updates to NSEA Bylaws and Resolutions are all part of the assembly action. Watch for details in upcoming editions of *The Voice*.

The event also features an awards presentation, recognizing the Early Career Educator of the Year, Educational Support Professional of the Year, Teaching Excellence Award

recipient, and NSEA's 2025 Friend of Education, and more. See award details and deadlines in the article below, on this page.

Members must be elected by their local association in order to attend as a delegate to the assembly. To make your interest in serving as a delegate known, contact your local association president, your local association building or faculty representative or your NSEA organizational specialist.

NSEA is the state's oldest professional association and has held a Delegate Assembly almost every year since, and in some cases, twice a year.

Nominate Outstanding ESPs for Recognition: Celebrate Excellence in Education!



Meet Kim Sullivan

Palmer Education Association Member Kim Sullivan received NSEA's Award for Education Support Professional at the 2024 Delegate Assembly.

Any NSEA member may nominate a member teacher, Education Support Professional or deserving group. 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 their 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 a newspaper, television or radio station for coverage of education issues and promotion of public education.

Nominations may be submitted online at www.nsea.org/DA or mailed to NSEA Awards, 605 S. 14 St., Lincoln, NE 68508-2742. All nomination materials must be received at the NSEA office no later than 5 p.m. on February 14, 2025.

In Memory

We recognize these members whom we've lost recently.

Sherman Hirsch, 93, North Platte

Benjamin Vrana, 84, Columbus

Kathleen Darling, 64, Millard

Turn to the NSEA Children's Fund This Winter



Teachers often go above and beyond, spending their own money to help students in need. But they can't support every child, which is why NSEA created the Children's Fund in 1994.

Donations have provided hundreds of thousands of dollars to assist with expenses like glasses, clothing, medical care, fire relief, and transportation for students. 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.

Apply now for 2025 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 2025 application deadline is Saturday, March 1.

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 success.

Applications must be submitted online by 11:59 p.m. CST on March



Belz



Lynch



Krause

1, 2025. 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. For questions, contact Chris Garcia at 1-800-742-0047 or email Chris.Garcia@nsea.org.

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