

The VOICE

Nebraska State Education Association • October 2021

Expanding Horizons

David City teacher reaches students here and across the globe



Also inside:

- NEA names global fellow from Nebraska
- Confident Parent-teacher conferences
- Bargaining: combat the ultimatum
- Strategic Plan survey coming

THE VOICE

Nebraska State Education Association
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Executive Director **Maddie Fennell, NBCT**
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Director of Public Affairs & Communications **Karen Kilgarin**
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NSEA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

President **Jenni Benson, Lincoln**
jenni.benson@nsea.org
Vice President **Robert Miller, Omaha**
robert.miller@nsea.org
NEA Director **Tracy Hartman-Bradley, Omaha**
trhb1000@gmail.com
NEA Director **Linda Freye, Lincoln**
lfrey62@gmail.com

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NEA Foundation names Lincoln educator to receive national award

The NEA Foundation announced Jen Yoder, a special education teacher at Irving Middle School in Lincoln, is one of 45 public school educators who will receive the prestigious California Casualty Award for Teaching Excellence at the NEA Foundation’s Salute to Excellence in Education Gala next February.

The California Casualty Awards for Teaching Excellence awardees are nominated for their dedication to the profession, community engagement, professional development, attention to diversity and advocacy for fellow educators. This year’s awardees represent 45 states.

“At a time when our country has faced tremendous challenges, we all are more aware than ever of public-school educators’ dedication, excellence and creativity. Never has it been more important to honor and celebrate them,” said Sara A. Sneed, president and CEO of the NEA Foundation. “Each California Casualty awardee exemplifies a passion for their students’ learning, leadership among their peers and the best in the teaching profession. We are grateful to California Casualty for its recognition and support and look forward to honoring the 2022 awardees at the Salute to Excellence in Education.”

“To say recent times have been tough on educators is an understatement. We are humbled by the sacrifice, compassion and perseverance of the California Casualty awardees,” said Joe Volponi, president and CEO of California Casualty. “Without a doubt, their students, colleagues and communities will continue to benefit from their efforts, and it is a privilege to honor such excellence.”

Of the 45 state awardees nominated by their National Education Association state affiliate, five will be chosen as finalists for the top national award and will receive \$10,000. The educator selected for the top award will be revealed at the NEA Foundation Salute to Excellence in Education Gala and receive \$25,000. The Salute to Excellence in Education will also be livestreamed.

For a complete list of winners, go to www.neafoundation.org/for-educators/awards-for-teaching-excellence/california-casualty-awardees.

Would you like to write for *The Voice*?

Would you like to write for *The Voice*? Perhaps a 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: Preschool teacher Julie Zrust of David City expands her student reach and professional horizons by tutoring online through VIPKid, helping students in China learn English. Read more on page 7.

Sharing the message: It's about the kids



**NSEA
President
Jenni Benson**

“
**Our kids are
the most
important
investment we
can make.
No child was
given a choice
regarding
their family or
situation. We
need to make
sure we are
considering
ALL students
when we make
decisions.**
”

As I enter my 35th year as a teacher and my fifth year as NSEA president, I continue to be humbled and honored to work with amazing educators across Nebraska. From the bottom of my heart, I thank you all for everything you do.

Everyone has a story to tell. Everyone has a belief system. Everyone has an important job to do.

I have driven more than 100,000 miles in the past five years, mostly in Nebraska, doing Association work. I have visited preschools, elementary and middle schools, high schools and colleges.

It is my job, yes, but I feel it is my calling. It is my passion to connect with people about education.

I visit with everyone as I travel. Clerks, people at church, family, friends, educators, administrators, elected officials, kids...everyone.

I love the conversations we have, and I love the message I get to share on behalf of our members.

What are those conversations? I ask the people I meet to tell me about themselves, about their kids, their community, their schools, their school staff and students, even their taxes. This is the best way for me to learn from real people – not government research or data on a spreadsheet – about the conditions and culture in each of their communities. These are the conversations that pinpoint the problems we as an Association need to address. These also are the conversations that highlight the successes of public education in Nebraska.

What is the message I get to share? Our kids are the most important investment we can make. No child was given a choice regarding their family or situation. We need to make sure we are considering ALL students when we make decisions. We are all role models for them. We need to remember they copy adults' behavior. It

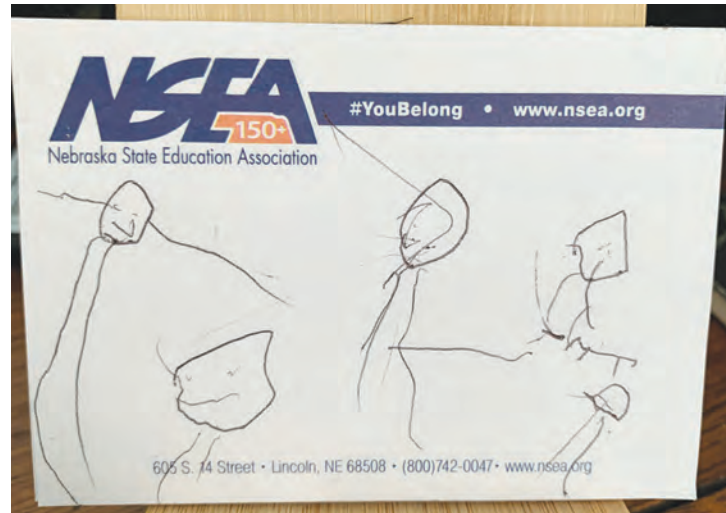
is our job as adults to care about the future of our kids. Our children deserve nothing less.

I recently was at a membership meeting at a coffee house with NSEA Organizational Specialist Jen Dubas. I made a friend of 6-year-old Harley. His mom owned the coffee shop. Harley brought out his brothers, and they all drew on sticky notes for us.

When we were done with our visit, we knew Harley's job was being the PR specialist for his family's coffee shop. Jen sent me the picture of Harley's drawing, and it reminded me again why we do this work. It is always for the kids.

Another story that has stuck with me for years bears the title, "Whose Job Is It, Anyway?"

The story is about four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and



Bright futures: Six-year-old Harley and his brothers reminded me with their drawings that the work we do as educators is always about the kids.

Nobody.

In the story, there was an important job to be done. Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that, because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have.

The story may be confusing, but the message is clear: no one took responsibility, so nothing got accomplished.

We are ALL responsible for ALL children and their success. It is our job as educators to make sure this important job gets done, and that it gets done well.

It has been said that teaching is the profession that creates all other professions. Whether we're preparing our students to own a coffee shop or to be an artist in a public relations firm, or to fill the countless other roles for which we need young people in our society, it all begins at school.

Have a student teacher? Sign them up for NSEA!

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

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



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

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

For more information or to help a new member register, go to www.nsea.org/JoinNow, or contact the NSEA Membership Department at 1-800-742-0047 or membership@nsea.org.

Series focuses on mental health in Nebraska schools

Registration is open for a series of webinars addressing mental health in schools, offered by the Nebraska Department of Education's Office of Coordinated Student Services.

Trainings will be held the third Tuesday of the month from 4 to 5 p.m. CT throughout the 2021-2022 school year.

Trauma Sensitive Schools

Tuesday, Oct. 19, 4-5 p.m. CT

Dr. Susan Lindblad from Hastings Public Schools and Sarah Shanahan from Heartland Counseling Services in South Sioux City will speak on how to create a trauma-sensitive classroom and school building and how to help students who may have experienced trauma. This will be a follow-up to the Trauma Sensitive Schools training in September.

The series is a joint effort between NDE and the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services Division of Behavioral Health and is made possible through Nebraska's AWARE-SEA Grant from the U.S. DHHS Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Each training will be recorded and housed on the NDE School Mental Health webpage at www.education.ne.gov/csss/school-mental-health.

For more information, contact Amber Hartsock at amber.hartsock@nebraska.gov or Mariella Resendiz Alvarado at mariella.resendiz@nebraska.gov.

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Ag Sack Lunch Program goes statewide with new virtual, in-person options

The popular Ag Sack Lunch Program is returning for its 12th year in 2021-2022 and expanding its offerings to include both in-person and virtual presentations designed to increase agricultural awareness among Nebraska fourth graders and their families.

“Last year, our program started offering virtual presentations to schools that could not travel to Lincoln for a field trip because of COVID-19,” Ag Sack Lunch Program coordinator Karen Brokaw said. “Response from the virtual presentations was very positive, and student engagement remained strong. Virtual presentations provide us with a great way to expand the program statewide, allowing us to reach students from schools that do not travel to Lincoln.”

Since the program began during the 2010-2011 school year, more than 49,134 students have participated.

“Over the last 11 years, the Ag Sack Lunch Program has been successful in helping our fourth-graders understand where their food comes from,” Nebraska Soybean Board Executive Director Scott Ritzman said. “Participating teachers continue to tell us their students learn so much from the presentations.”

The in-person program provides a free lunch and an ag-focused learning experience to fourth graders who come to Lincoln to tour the State Capitol as part of their educational



Speaking of agriculture: Ag Ambassador Makayla Burg from Papillion engages fourth-grade students in learning about the importance of agriculture in Nebraska.

curriculum. While they eat, students hear a presentation about the important role agriculture plays in Nebraska’s economy, as well as the crops and livestock species that are raised in the state.

The sack lunches consist of Nebraska-produced food items to help students appreciate where their food comes from. They also receive a deck of cards containing ag facts including the games “Crazy Soybean” and “Old Corn Maid” to take home to play with their families and friends.

The virtual option includes the same lively presentation on the importance of agriculture in Nebraska, connecting the food we eat every day with Nebraska farmers. Students also receive the fact-filled card games.

The program is sponsored by the Nebraska Corn Board, the Nebraska Soybean Board, the Nebraska Pork Producers Association, Nebraska Beef Council, Midwest Dairy, Nebraska Poultry Industries and Nebraska Wheat Board.

Register your class

Registrations for the Ag Sack Lunch Program are being accepted for fall and spring presentations for both virtual or in-person State Capitol visits. Register your class early to ensure availability.

Reservations for the program can be made online at www.agsacklunchprogram.com. For more information, call Karen Brokaw at 1-(402)-432-2299.

What’s going on in the legislature?

The 107th Nebraska Legislature will convene for its second session in January. The 60-day session is expected to cover a wide range of proposed bills that will affect Nebraska public schools.

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

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

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

Subscribe to the Capitol Update at www.nsea.org/subscriber.



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Long distance learning: David City preschool teacher Julie Zrust has a mini classroom set up in her basement, where she spends her early mornings teaching online. Zrust has taught for VIPKid since 2017.

Very Important People: Kids

A big bathtub full of pillows made Julie Zrust want to become a teacher.

Her parents both worked in education, but it was Zrust's first-grade teacher, Mrs. Hoffman, – and the bathtub in her classroom for reading time – that sealed the deal for Zrust's future career plans.

"She was just perfect. She was everything you would want in a teacher," Zrust said. "She was fun. She was exciting. She made me love learning and reading."

Now a David City preschool teacher and 18-year NSEA member, Zrust has been in the classroom long enough to see her first group of preschoolers graduate high school.

She loves teaching so much, she even does it during her time off.

Teaching English 'in' China

Zrust joined an online teaching platform, VIPKid, in December 2017. She has spent nearly four years – and countless early mornings – connecting with students in Beijing, China, and teaching them English.

"It kept popping up on Facebook. I started reading the comments that other people were saying about it and it sounded really interesting," Zrust said.

She wakes up early to teach her first lesson at 5 or 5:30 a.m. – that's 6 p.m. in Beijing. She can fit in a couple of 25-minute, one-on-one lessons before getting her own kids ready for school and heading to her classroom for a full day of preschool.

VIPKid students range in age from 4 to 12, though she tends to focus more on the young students who are just beginning to learn

English.

"It's very basic things like learning how to introduce yourself. I do color words, shapes, the alphabet. There's always a lot of singing involved in my lessons," Zrust said, holding up a toy microphone she uses as a prop.

The lessons and slide shows are pre-made by VIPKid, so Zrust said once she set up her teaching space in her home, she doesn't have to do a lot of prep work.

First, a test run

VIPKid employs about 100,000 teachers and has more than 800,000 paying students.

The company requires a bachelor's degree, but it doesn't have to be in a teaching field. Zrust referred her husband, who holds a biology degree, to join the platform, too.

"They want you to have coaching experience or mentoring experience. My husband has done a lot with Boy Scouts, and he also coached our boys' baseball teams, so he teaches some of the older kids," Zrust said.

VIPKid uses a five-step acceptance process when hiring teachers, starting with an application and explanation of one's teaching experience. If the teacher makes it through round one, they prepare a short lesson with props and a background.

If the judges like what they see, the teacher gets a chance at a longer mock lesson, and then a meeting with one of VIPKid's mentor teachers. If all goes well, they sign a six-month contract.

“
I use a lot more props. I slow down more if there are concepts they're not understanding. I just think about more ways that I can bring things to life for them.
”



Propped up: Julie Zrust uses an assortment of props to reinforce concepts with her students online. Minnie Mouse and Elsa from Frozen are recognized across the globe. A microphone for singing, colored letters and pictures of food round out her toolbox.

Parents are able to book teachers for certain age levels and time slots. The parents can watch the lessons along with their child and give feedback on the teacher's performance. If they like what they see, they tend to book the same teacher again and give ratings for other parents to see.

Enhancing preschool

Zrust uses what she has learned by teaching online to enhance her lessons in her preschool classroom.

"I use a lot more props. I slow down more if there are concepts they're not understanding. I just think about more ways that I can bring things to life for them," she said.

When COVID-19 caused schools to move to an online format, Zrust had a head start because of VIPKid.

"I definitely had a good heads up on being very lively. I felt a lot more comfortable because I was used to having people watching me through an online teaching format," she said.

Bonus income

"My husband and I are always thinking about ways to save money and pay things off fast," Zrust said, "so I thought this was a good way to try to do that."

Zrust pointed to research from the National Center for Education Statistics that showed at least 18% of public school teachers hold a second job outside the school system. A quarter of those work in teaching or tutoring of some kind, in addition to their main teaching jobs.

"A lot of my friends who are teachers have second jobs," Zrust said. "I think it's sad that teachers have to have second jobs, but we just do what we have to do."

Nebraska ranks 30th in the nation for average teacher salaries, up from 43rd in 2010, thanks in part to bargaining on

behalf of NSEA members, and 47th for average starting salary, with an 82-cent pay gap for educators compared to other professionals with the same education and years of experience, according to NEA.

"I think it's important for people to know just how much we do and what is all involved," Zrust said. "Through COVID and the shutdown, I think a lot of parents realized, being at home with their kids, there's a lot they didn't realize went into what a teacher does, and how they have so many different learners and they have to meet so many different needs."

A rewarding experience

Zrust has built a core group of repeat students through VIPKid, but she has taught more than 400 students through the platform.

She stays in touch with some of the families she has taught through a Chinese social media site called WeChat, outside of the VIPKid platform.

"It's really neat to be able to see their progress," she said. "There are 6- and 7-year-olds who can read fluently in English already."

Board seeks input on Strategic Plan

The NSEA is a member-driven organization. Our mission is to advocate for all education professionals, empowering them to provide an excellent public education for every student.

It's time to take a close look at NSEA's Strategic Plan and refresh the Association's goals and desired outcomes.

All NSEA members will receive a survey via email in October, asking for their input on the Strategic Plan.

Members are asked to take a few moments to watch the executive team explain the current strategic plan goals and outcomes, then give your input on what you think are the NSEA's strengths and how the association can improve.

The current Strategic Plan may be found at nsea.org, under the "Who We Are" tab. After collecting and analyzing data from the survey and input gathered from our members across the state, the Strategic Plan Ad Hoc committee will make recommendations for updates to the Board of Directors to bring a report to NSEA Delegate Assembly in April 2022.

The survey will come from Jenni.Benson@nsea.org via [SurveyMonkey](https://www.surveymonkey.com). Please make sure your email inbox is set up to receive messages from this address. If you have previously blocked or opted out of any email messages from SurveyMonkey, go to bit.ly/SurveyOptIn to ensure you receive this one and make your voice a part of this important work.

Bored? Help out with Civic Nebraska CLCs

Civic Nebraska, a nonprofit encouraging robust and modern democracy, is looking for retired teachers or others with an interest in working with youth in an after school activity setting.

Civic Nebraska operates Community Learning Centers in Lincoln and Omaha, partially funded by federal grants. The CLCs aim to provide a safe and healthy environment, academic support and enrichment activities between 3 and 6 p.m. most school days.

The programs are in need of paid part-time providers to support services that lead to improved student learning and development, stronger families and healthy neighborhoods, while helping to align hands-on after school activities with what students are learning during the school day.

For more information, go to civicnebraska.org or email kent.day@nsea.org.

Luth earns Global Learning Fellowship

Celia Luth, a 9th-12th grade Spanish II educator at Grand Island Senior High has been named a 2022 Global Learning Fellow by the NEA Foundation.

Through the Global Learning Fellowship, public school educators develop the knowledge and skills to integrate global competency into their daily classroom instruction, advocate for global competency in their schools and districts, and help students thrive in our increasingly interconnected world.

Luth will participate in a 12-month professional development program that includes in-person workshops, online coursework, webinars by leading experts, peer learning and a summer international field study experience in South Africa, as well as a two-day professional development workshop in Washington, D.C.

While in South Africa, Luth will interact with local educators, students, administrators and policy makers, visit schools and hear from business and nonprofit leaders.

"I am looking forward to working and collaborating with other teachers from all over the country in preparation to go, working with educators in South Africa once we get there, and of course, the visits to the schools where we will be in contact with students," Luth said. "Working with other educators and sharing ideas and experiences helps me feel empowered in my global teaching."

Upon completion of the program, Luth will become part of an active, 400-person alumni group that supports continued growth and leadership.

NSEA member and School Middle School Library Media Specialist April Jorgensen of Lincoln was selected for the Fellowship in 2019-2020. Though her trip to Peru was postponed because of COVID-19, she said other components of the experience have been invaluable.

"I've been able to swap some ideas with other teachers around the country. It was helpful and informative to have all these connections around the country when COVID happened, to share resources and even just learning how other schools were handling it," Jorgensen said.

Luth looks forward to the affect the experience will have on her students.

"Teachers play a critical role in bringing global awareness and understanding to students, as well as preparing them for global activism," Luth said. "We have some dire world issues right now – climate change, infectious diseases, basic human rights, just to name a few. We all

need to work together to make the world a better place for everyone."

The Fellowship is a competitive program, and all applications are reviewed by educators. Educators must be a current K-12 classroom teacher employed by a public school and a current NEA member to apply.

Jorgensen encouraged every educator to apply as a way to bring more global perspectives to the state.

"It's something that would be a huge benefit for Nebraska," she said.

Applications for the 2023 Fellowship will open in Fall 2021 and will be available at neafoundation.org.



South Africa: Grand Island Spanish teacher and NSEA member Celia Luth has been selected as a 2022 NEA Foundation Global Learning Fellow. She will spend a full year in professional development programs and part of the summer in a field experience in South Africa.

Nominate colleagues for NSEA's top honors

Now is the time to discuss who you or your association might nominate for one of the honors to be given at NSEA's Delegate Assembly in April.

Any NSEA member may nominate a member teacher, Education Support Professional or deserving group. Mailed nominations must be postmarked by Friday, Feb. 11, 2022, 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, with required supporting material mailed to the NSEA.

The 2022 Assembly will be held April 22-23 at Lincoln's Marriott Cornhusker Hotel.

Members are eligible for:

- Early Career Educator: To honor a teacher who has excelled in their first five years.
 - 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.

NSEA members are also eligible for:

- The Great Plains Milestone: Honors an individual or group for promoting human and civil rights.
- 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.

Also to be presented:

- Administrator of Excellence: Honors an administrator who strives every day to get students and staff to be successful.
- Friend of Education: Honors an individual or organization that has made a statewide contribution to education.
- Outstanding Media: Honors newspaper, television or radio station for coverage of education issues and promotion of public education.



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Bodtke, Anderson retire, NSEA welcomes new faces

The NSEA headquarters in Lincoln said thank you to 25-year staffer Sally Bodtke at the end of August, and to 15-year associate Jan Anderson at the end of September.

Bodtke served as the associate for NSEA Teaching and Learning, helping to connect education employees, parents and community members with needed resources for quality education. She also managed the NSEA Children's Fund, which provides financial assistance for necessities like warm clothing and eye glasses to help students focus and succeed at school.

In her 15 years a NSEA, Anderson worked as a communications associate and served as conference coordinator, working with members and outside entities to plan the details of events large and small. Most



Bodtke



Anderson

recently, her work centered on plans for the summer NSEA University and the annual spring Delegate Assembly.

New faces at NSEA

Bodtke's role as Teaching and Learning associate will be filled by Brandon Langlois, who began work with the NSEA in last spring as a special issues organizer. Prior to that, his experience included work on campaigns to raise Nebraska's minimum wage and other ballot issues. He also served as a Nebraska legislative aide.

JayLynn Schubauer began Sept. 16 as the new associate for conference coordination, filling Anderson's role. Schubauer holds a degree in hospitality and event planning and has worked in the catering and events space for several years.



Langlois



Schubauer

In addition, Jason Wiese has joined the NSEA staff as an organizational specialist, serving the Northeast Unit including Knox, Cedar, Dixon, Dakota, Wayne, Thurston, Burt and Washington counties.

Wiese comes to NSEA from Arlington Public Schools, where he has taught since 1998. Wiese taught high school social sciences and coached girls' golf, middle school boys' basketball, middle school track and the quiz bowl team.

NSEA also welcomes Nicole Jacobsen as the new receptionist at the Lincoln office. Jacobsen holds a degree in communications with an emphasis in marketing and public relations. Her previous experience includes work with Cabela's, UNICO Group and Echo Electric.



Wiese



Jacobsen

Learn budgeting strategies or plan a vacation!

One perk of your NSEA membership is access to exclusive webinars tailored to the education profession.

A full slate of sessions is set for 2021-22, with topics ranging from building your own budget to saving on vacation. Go to nsea.org/webinars for a complete list of sessions.

NSEA members only

■ **Budgeting (pre-retirement) Series:** Wednesday, Oct. 13, 6:30 p.m. Learn budgeting tips from NEA Member Benefits' Susan Estes.

■ **Financial Planning (pre-retirement) Series:** Wednesday, Oct. 13, 7:30 p.m. Review financial concepts that can affect you during early, middle and late career stages with Security Benefit.

■ **Planning the Perfect Vacation:** Thursday, Nov. 4, 7:30 p.m. Join NEA Member Benefits to learn how you can save on hotels, car rentals and flights through your membership.

■ **Student Loan Forgiveness:** Tuesday, Nov. 9, 5:30 p.m. Learn about tools available to members for reducing or managing student loan debt.

■ **Navigator Program:** Tuesday, Nov. 9, 6:30 p.m. Learn to use the NEA Debt Navigator, which can find forgiveness or cancellation programs you may qualify for.

All school employees

■ **The Power of Executive Functioning Skills:** Learn from educator Becky Korinek about the mental processes that can help you achieve your goals.

Present or be a mentor

NSEA is looking for members who would like to share their ideas and skills. If you are interested in leading a webinar, contact Isau Metes at isau.metes@nsea.org.

NSEA also is always seeking mentors and mentees in the classroom. For more information and to fill out an application, visit www.nsea.org/mentor.

Teachers may be at higher risk for breast cancer

In the past three years, about 600 Educators Health Alliance members have been treated for breast cancer, with approximately three of those members being men. Those 600 members represent 3% of educators who utilize the EHA plan, but an even smaller fraction of the 13% of women and men who are diagnosed with breast cancer in the U.S. each year. Of that 13%, about 1% are men.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention holds breast cancer as the second most common cancer among women in the U.S., next only to skin cancer. Black women die from breast cancer at a higher rate than White women – and some research suggests that teachers are at an even higher risk than those in other occupations.

A study published in Occupational Medicine in June 2007 showed teachers in the U.S., Sweden and China were at higher risk of death from breast cancer. The study linked the data to educators at all grade levels, including preschool, primary, secondary and university teachers, and found that low activity levels and continued exposure to carcinogenic dyes in the school setting may contribute to the cause.

Researchers at the University of California studied 133,500 public school teachers and administrators in the late 1990s and found that female educators were diagnosed

with breast cancer at a rate 51% higher than other California women.

One of the most accessible ways to prevent breast cancer or other disease and illness is to keep yourself healthy. EHA Wellness offers participants wellness challenges and programs to encourage healthy eating, exercise, sleep, hydration and mindfulness. Every other month, EHA Wellness offers a challenge targeting one of these areas. In addition, Core Wellness Trackers encourage participants all year long to accomplish small or large behavior changes that result in decreased risk for cancer and other diseases.

Whether you are preventing illness or battling breast cancer, Headspace, a mindfulness app, can help decrease stress and anxiety. Meditation and mindfulness

have been shown to help with healing and recovery during an illness as well as the prevention of future illness by bringing calm to the body and mind, which decreases overall stress in the body. Headspace offers breathing exercises, yoga, sleep casts for better and deeper sleep, and meditation exercises. Headspace is a free mindfulness and meditation app that is available to all EHA Wellness participants.

These programs are available to members at www.ehawellness.org.



Check up: Regular mammograms and communication with your doctor about new or worsening symptoms can catch breast cancer in its early stages and improve chances of treatment.

Attend NNSTOY All for Equity convening free

The NEA is providing 3,000 free tickets (regular registration cost is \$50) to NEA members to attend the National Network of State Teachers of the Year National Convening: ALL FOR EQUITY on Saturday, Oct. 16, from 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. CT. Topics include “Finding Your Way: 6 Simple Practices to Guide Your Equity Mindset” and “Wooch.een Together: Building Trust in Indigenous Communities.”

Register at bit.ly/3Ayqqz7. Click the green “Tickets” button, then click “Enter promo code” and enter NEALeads. Click “Apply,” select the quantity of tickets, then “Checkout.”

New Program for Type 2 Diabetes

On Sept. 1, the Virta keto-based type 2 diabetes reversal program was added to EHA Population Health. Virta can help you:

- Lower your A1C
- Lose weight
- Reduce your dependence on some diabetes medications

To learn more or to enroll in Virta, visit 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. Virta is an independent company that provides diabetes reversal services for Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska.

From the classroom

Parent-teacher conferences a chance to 'work through it' and form relationships

by Vincent Jodoin

Picture this: your student's parents sit down across the table, and the anger they feel toward you is palpable.

This isn't an uncommon situation at parent-teacher conferences, but there are ways to handle this anger (perceived or real) and use it to the betterment of the situation.



Jodoin

Take a moment and breathe. Then, listen instead of reacting to the emotions. Let the parents speak directly to you, listen attentively and write notes about what they are saying.

Then, breathe twice and repeat what they said in full, followed by, "That is what you said. Is that what you meant?"

Often, hearing those words repeated back can diffuse some of the anger and start a conversation about the underlying issue.

Talk to the parents and say, "I'd like to work through this with you, and I believe we can."

Explain what you cannot do about the situation, and then explain what you can do, laying all viable options out on the table.

Here's an example:

My former school district in Tennessee was home to the state college and the state's college football team.

I taught math and had one parent ask me, "Why can't my kid go to their job and football practice after school instead of staying with you for math work?"

How is that going to do anything for them? You're not even old enough to be a teacher!"

I responded, "What you said was my vocation of mathematics is not as important as your student-athlete's sport, and I'm not qualified or old enough to teach. Is that what you meant?"

Usually, the parents will try to clarify in a less contentious manner. This is great, as now we can slide some emotions off the table and support the student.

Then you say, "I want to work through this with you, and I believe we can." This allows you to stand your ground while being supportive. It also helps with letting you be more direct in your next step.

"While I can't let them retake assignments and go back and change grades, I'd be more than happy to let them make up missing assignments for full credit."

This is a firm way of saying, "I won't compromise on bad effort, but I'll grade full effort for full credit for these works that are missing."

This lets you work through this with the parent instead of either of you leaving the meeting feeling like you lost or overcompromised.

I also sign my email as "in service" with my signature and send emails – good or bad – to parents titled "supporting your student" as a way to make sure the parent knows I'm always working for them and their students' success within the outline we have set from syllabi or student handbooks.

Vincent Jodoin teaches STEM at Columbus Middle School.

Five tips for great PT conferences

Lay the groundwork

Conferences shouldn't be the first time you communicate with parents. Make contact with them consistently about positive things beforehand, so there's already a relationship. Send a survey to parents before conferences to find out what they want to talk about, or have students fill out self-evaluations and talk with the student about their responses as the first step to creating a plan to resolve a problem.

Accentuate the positive

Parents don't want to hear a bunch of negatives about their child. While teachers must be honest when they have real concerns, it's best to frame them in terms of working collaboratively to arrive at solutions rather than listing missed assignments and behavior problems. One way to send the message that you're on the same team is to have parents sit next to you at a table instead of across from you at your desk.

Be specific

Instead of trying to cover everything, have a set idea of specific topics to talk about. That might mean a deep dive into the report card with all parents, or a different topic for each, depending on the needs of the child. In either case, have specific examples of student work to illustrate your point.

Clarify, don't mystify

Make sure parents have a clear grasp on the terminology. Avoid education-specific acronyms and jargon like "IEP," "SLD," and "malleable intelligence" unless you're sure that parents will understand what you mean. Use conferences to dispel myths or misconceptions about education.

Follow up

Parent-teacher conferences are most effective if they're not a one-off event, but instead part of a larger relationship with parents. Give parents tasks to complete with their child when they go home. Ask them to come up with goals for the school year together, or to take home student portfolios and write questions and comments for their children to continue the discussion.



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Higher Ed members reconnect



With students: NSEA leaders, staff and members have been busy at college campuses across the state, attending meetings and events at Chadron State College, Western Nebraska Community College and Metro Community College. Above, Adam Fette addresses a class full of students. Fette is the Higher Education representative on the NSEA Board of Directors and an education professor at Chadron State College.



With colleagues: A member recruitment dinner at Western Nebraska Community College in Scottsbluff on Aug. 26 drew several members including (from left) Marcene Elwell, Carrie Howton and Robynn Whittier, and potential member Violette Kjeldgaard (right).



With members: The Metro Community College Education Association and NSEA hosted a fall breakfast on Aug. 31 to welcome members back to campus and encourage new ones to join. Pictured are (from left); NSEA Vice President Robert Miller, NSEA President Jenni Benson, MCCEA Past President Mary Umberger, NEA Fellow Jackie Lane, and current MCCEA President Marty Vaughn. MCCEA Past President Darin Owens is not pictured.

Webinars focus on media literacy, journalism as a profession

The League of Women Voters of Nebraska will present two virtual webinars related to journalism and the importance of the First Amendment in November.

Both webinars are free and open to the public and are especially geared toward high school and college students interested in learning more about journalism. A Zoom link will be provided closer to the events.

The first webinar, "Media Literacy in an Age of Disinformation," will be from noon to 1 p.m. on Thursday, Nov. 4. The webinar will focus on how to determine if news is credible, how to improve the relationship between media and the public, and the importance of the First Amendment.

The second webinar, "On the Beat: Reflections from Journalists on Their Profession," is scheduled from noon to 1 p.m. on Thursday, Nov. 11. It will feature journalists with ties to Nebraska working at national and state media outlets.

The "Media Literacy" presentation on Nov. 4 will feature Tobin Beck, assistant professor of journalism and political science at Concordia University with more than 30 years of experience in journalism, including with United Press International; Peggy Rupprecht, associate professor of computer science, design and journalism at Creighton University, who teaches classes on media and digital literacy; Ryan Teten, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Nebraska-Kearney, who studies the affects of social media on information consumption; and Mason Walker, research analyst focusing on journalism and media at the Pew Research Center.

The "On the Beat" presentation Nov. 11 will feature Dee Ann Divis, an award-winning journalist reporting for Al Jazeera on commercial space, NASA, robotics and emerging technology; and Tony Herrman, government reporter at the Hastings Tribune. The League also hopes to confirm Nebraska journalists from CNN and BuzzFeed for this presentation.

The webinars are planned by the LWVNE's Defending Journalism and the First Amendment Action Team. For more information, contact communications@lwnvnebraska.org.



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Combating the ultimatum

Tips for reaching an agreement for your local association at the bargaining table

Negotiations for the 2022-23 contract year must begin on or before Nov. 1, 2021. The negotiations process can get tense. Often, administrators, school boards or other bargaining agents will issue an ultimatum to get those negotiating on behalf of your local association to agree to terms you don't really want.

NSEA's Collective Bargaining Specialist Randy Gordon offered some pointers at NSEA University in July.

The ultimatum

"It's basically a demand that's going to have some consequences associated with it," Gordon said. "It usually catches people so off guard, they're not sure what to do next. It's unnerving. It's uncomfortable. It puts a pit in your stomach."

Phrases to listen for that may indicate an ultimatum are "We're done," "Final offer," "Take it or leave it," "We'll never..." or "You'd better..."

But why?

Ultimatums are usually thrown out in frustration or anger. If one party doesn't fully understand the bargaining process, it can cause rage, sadness or a feeling of insult, resulting in an attempt to bring negotiations – and those feelings – to a speedy halt.

A surprise or underestimation of a request, poor preparation or a lack of skill or belief in collective bargaining can also result in an ultimatum.

Factors like timing, exhaustion, misunderstandings, ignorance of the bargaining process and the feeling of being personally attacked (whether intended or not) all come into play, too.

What can we do?

Gordon offered four strategies from The Harvard Business Review for dealing with an ultimatum:

■ **Ignore it.** Change the topic and move on. Continue with your comments and discussion as if the statement was never made. Ask questions about the previous topic to deflect or redirect their attention.

"You are always free to ignore anything said at the table," Gordon said.

He suggested having laptops or tablets open with a Google Doc for your team to



Continuing the discussion: Reframing and asking for clarification on a "final offer" during negotiations are ways to continue the dialogue and work toward an agreement.

chat back and forth during the discussion, instead of passing notes or stepping into the hall.

■ **Clarify.** If it's worth going into it, clarify what they meant. Ask questions like, "When you say never..." or "Wasn't this the same as..." to get more information and encourage dialogue.

"Continue to talk right through the ultimatum, and don't let it throw you off your game," Gordon said.

■ **Discuss.** Address the ultimatum head-on by explaining how it prevents what the other side wants, too.

"Talk about how ultimatums limit the ability to make the agreement valuable for recruiting and retaining teachers, or whatever the hot button issue is for your local," Gordon said.

■ **Reframe.** Ask to tweak the ultimatum a little by asking more questions: "Under what circumstances

would you..." or "How could we adjust..." Remember to keep your emotions out of it.

"Reframing keeps your brain occupied so you don't let that ultimatum cut through and knock you down," Gordon said.

What if it's real?

What if the ultimatum is real? How will you know?

Likely, it will be repeated. A true "final offer" will be said more than once, regardless of if you tried to reframe it.

"Just because the board member said that was the final offer, it's not the final offer until those two attorneys get in the room and discuss it with a resolution officer," Gordon said.

A true ultimatum won't change, either.

"It'll be there for later consideration after people have taken some time to cool off," Gordon said.



Looking for more?

Gordon's presentation was one of many practical, information-packed sessions offered at NSEA University, a three-day members-only professional learning conference held in July.

Watch for upcoming registration details for the July 12-14, 2022, NSEA U in future editions of The Voice, or go to www.nsea.org/nseau for more information.

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Educators are returning to learning, too

NDE's Supporting Educator Effectiveness through Development team explains why



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

The fall brings the new school year and that nostalgia for the smell of books and newly waxed floors. Educators look forward to refreshed students, Friday night lights and hearing the marching band practice in the early morning.

This year educators entered the new year with hopes of moving on from the global pandemic and tentative anticipation that the school year would be manageable. While still feeling the frustration of schooling in a pandemic, educators are grateful for schools in Nebraska opening and hopeful the year will bring more learning than worry – for all.

The hopeful anticipation of the new school year has again been colored by the global pandemic. Because of this, educators need opportunities to reconnect and reboot professional relationships.

Relationships matter

Educators and kids alike may be feeling frayed, anxious and stressed. Dedicating time for both students and the adults in the building to develop a sense of belonging and sustain effective learning are more important now than at any other time in recent history.

Researcher John Hattie states that self-efficacy, a teacher's belief that they can impact learning, correlates positively to student learning. This kind of efficacy grows from a school culture in which teachers have a voice in the growth and development they experience over a career.

Districts cannot afford to let the voice given to teachers during the last school year to become a thing of the past. Teachers are returning to learning, too, just like their students. Teachers have the responsibility to ask themselves: If I could have any kind of support or development this year, what would I have? School leaders and teachers must work together to ensure these opportunities exist once they are identified.

SEED model helps with support

The Supporting Educator Effectiveness through Development (S.E.E.D.) Instructional System is an approach that assists teachers and their leaders in determining the support and development they need throughout a career, which is central to retaining effective teachers for Nebraska students.

The Nebraska Teacher and Principal Standards lay out the expectations of educator effectiveness in Nebraska and rubrics aligned to the NTPPS are based on one critical premise: Educator effectiveness is achieved through the growth and development of individuals in the context of their own experiences and abilities, and is not an evaluative judgement.



These rubrics were written differently because the S.E.E.D. Instructional System asks districts to engage with them differently.

Educators, now more than ever, deserve the opportunity to ask new questions, seek new and validate old perspectives, and learn from others in a way that ensures an inclusive, engaged, purposeful and community-based education system.

The conversations instigated by the rubrics will provide meaningful data that lends to a more transparent measure of effectiveness, and less dialogue driven by opinion, bias or feelings.

It is these conversations that allow teachers to express their recognition of the importance of specific actions, and their desire to seek resources to ensure they are developing the skills they need to be effective.

Educators can be at different levels of effectiveness at any given time. These realities are personal and contextual to each individual, and they require purposeful conversations.

In the S.E.E.D. Instructional System, the expectations of educators are not a secret. Everyone can see the path to proficiency. Teachers should consider how they will return to learning this year. The S.E.E.D. rubrics can be used as a pathway to that growth.

The Educator Effectiveness site can be found at www.education.ne.gov/educatoreffectiveness.

The Nebraska Teacher and Principal Performance Standards can be found at bit.ly/3nybf56.



Dr. Julie Downing,
NDE Educator
Effectiveness
Specialist



Ryan Ricenbaw,
NDE Leadership
and Learning
Network
Specialist

ESPs add value to student experience

Education Support Professionals are critical members of the education workforce. More than 2.8 million ESPs work in our nation's public schools and colleges. One out of every three public school employees is an ESP.

ESPs include sign language interpreters, custodians, IT specialists, bus drivers and others who are not required to hold a teaching or administrative certificate.

They are caring and supportive adults that every student needs to succeed, promoting quality education and positive learning environments.

What do Education Support Professionals do?

Clerical Services

Secretarial, clerical, financial and administrative support jobs

Health & Student Services

Nursing, therapy support, parent and welfare services jobs

Custodial & Maintenance

Buildings and grounds, maintenance and repair jobs

Paraeducators

Instructional and non-instructional support jobs

Food Services

Food services, planning, preparation and delivery jobs

Security Services

School guards, resource personnel, security jobs

Skilled Trades

Electricians, carpenters, painters, heating/air specialists, machine operators and printing jobs

Technical Services

Computer, audio/visual, language technical support, media, public relations, writing and art jobs

Transportation Services

Bus driving, delivery services and vehicle maintenance jobs

All ESPs are eligible for membership in NSEA. To learn more or to join the NSEA, your professional association, go to nsea.org/JoinNow, or contact one of these NSEA Organizational Specialists:

Judy Roach | judy.roach@nsea.org

Jen Dubas | jen.dubas@nsea.org

Liz Figueroa | liz.figueroa@nsea.org

Andrea Longoria | andrea.longoria@nsea.org

No-cost insulin, enhanced mental health coverage

The Educators Health Alliance and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Nebraska have partnered on recent changes that will help members more easily access mental health services and better manage their diabetes.

Insulin therapy at no cost and Virta

Insulin therapy is often an important part of diabetes treatment to manage blood sugar and prevent complications such as eyesight, nerve and kidney damage.

Insulin therapy helps prevent diabetes complications by keeping blood sugar levels within a target range. For a person with type 1 diabetes, insulin therapy is vital for replacing the insulin the body doesn't produce on its own.

Sometimes people with type 2 diabetes or gestational diabetes need insulin therapy if other treatments haven't been able to keep blood glucose levels within the desired range.

A new keto-based type 2 diabetes reversal method from Virta is now available to EHA members. Virta is a nutrition and wellness program to reverse type 2 diabetes using a ketogenic nutrition method.

Virta helps in lowering HbA1C levels, weight loss and up to a 40% cost reduction in diabetes medications.

BCBSNE covers 34 types of insulin therapy as preventive care, meaning members can get their insulin prescriptions filled at no cost. For a list of which insulin therapies are covered, go to bit.ly/3kmsODo.

To learn more about the Virta method available to members, go to www.nebraskablue.com/Campaigns/EHA-Population-Health.

Mental health benefits enhanced

The EHA passed a mental health benefit enhancement that went into effect on Sept. 1.

There are now no member cost shares for covered in-network outpatient office visits for mental illness or substance dependence and abuse services, which will be paid at 100% for individual, group, family and marriage counseling.

Services must be from an in-network provider. This change is only applicable to PPO plans and does not include the \$3,600/\$7,050 High Deductible Health Plan. If a member chooses to participate in this benefit, they must switch to the PPO plan during their benefit election period.

For more information, go to the Educators Health Alliance website at www.ehaplan.org.

NE needs solutions to retain educators

Teaching is hard work! So often, we see educators who have proven themselves great assets to their schools, but who leave the profession too soon for one reason or another. It's beyond time for Nebraska to address those reasons, which are seen even more often with educators of color.

Below is testimony shared with members of the Legislature at a hearing on LR157, which called for an interim study on how schools can recruit teachers and administrators who accurately reflect the proportion of students of color.

We need more teachers of color

The Learning Policy Institute maintains a growing body of research that shows teachers of color provide benefits to all students.

The Institute found that teachers of color boost the academic performance of students of color, improve graduation rates and increase aspirations to attend college, especially for Black students from low-income families.

These students also have fewer unexcused absences and lower likelihoods of chronic absenteeism, as well as more positive perceptions of their teachers.

Teachers of color are a resource for students in hard-to-staff schools. Many report feeling called to teach in low-income communities. Whether these teachers decide to remain teaching has significant impacts on students of color.

We must support the profession

The reasons for the difficulty in recruiting and retaining educators are multi-faceted. The answers are complex and will need ongoing support and coordination, and dollars, over an extended number of years to see results.

The NSEA and the National Education Association have invested more than \$450,000 and thousands of staff hours in recruitment and retention, focusing on teachers of color.

The Educators Rising Program in Nebraska gives high school students the opportunity to explore teaching as a profession, with leadership trainings and competitions similar to those offered by FBLA, FFA and other career and technical organizations. There's more work to do, though.

We need to begin talking about education as a career in elementary schools and offer support starting in junior high and continuing through high school and college. This work needs to be publicly funded at the local and state levels.

We need to eliminate barriers

We need to dismantle the barriers that divert potentially wonderful educators from classrooms.

We need more support for paraprofessionals to receive their teaching certification. Many of these Education Support Professionals would make excellent educators, but they can't afford both

tuition and lack of income while student teaching.

We need to nix the Praxis

Eliminating the Praxis CORE exam as an entry requirement to teacher education could work wonders. Students who have already shown ability through the ACT and successful completion of college courses should not face an expensive test.

In his recently completed study of teacher education in Nebraska, Dr. David Steiner, Executive Director of the Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy, said, "Admissions tests are controversial: (1) they are expensive to take – particularly for multiple-time test-takers; (2) basic pedagogical tests, including the Praxis CORE, have not been shown to correlate with teaching effectiveness; and (3) they reproduce the inequality of prior access to strong education, thereby disadvantaging minority applicants at disproportionate levels. **The Institute recommends that the Praxis CORE not be used as an entrance exam.**"

We must offer financial incentives

We need to provide more scholarships for students and better information on loan forgiveness. NSEA has been providing information to our members, but our students really need this information in high school and early in college to make the right financial choices.

Student teaching should be a paid experience. Chadron State College has worked with local school districts in an innovative program that allows student teachers to learn from master teachers while also providing intermittent assistance as substitute teachers.

We need more of this kind of creative thinking! Student teaching is a time-consuming endeavor that doesn't allow for much, if any, additional employment. We need paid internships and residencies as other professions utilize.

We need to keep teachers teaching

We have a certification problem in Nebraska. Not only is the NDE certification office woefully backlogged, but we make it much too hard for a teacher who has not received their degree in Nebraska to teach in Nebraska.

Once we have teachers in the classroom, they need to have strong programs of support. This is especially true now for our new educators who have had their field experiences truncated by COVID-19.

While there are many more strings in this complex web, studies have shown that having more administrators of color will increase the number of teachers of color. Please know that NSEA will continue our commitment to this crucial endeavor of uplifting education as a profession.



Executive Director Maddie Fennell

“

The reasons for the difficulty in recruiting and retaining educators are multi-faceted. The answers are complex and will need ongoing support and coordination, and dollars, over an extended number of years to see results.

”

An Ode to Teachers

by Rita K. Will

An ode to my teacher friends for almost making it through

The year that no one really knew

Of what was ahead, of what was to come,

Of what was to be, or what could be done.

You all came through, as I knew you would
And only because you understood.

You would do your best, like you always do
Only through a mask, who knew!??

You are true heroes, to all of those kids
You've almost made it through, without
flipping your lids.

I admire you, I do

Because you are the chosen few.

Not everyone can teach kids.

Not everyone can reach kids.

Not everyone can do what you do.

You were and are the glue.

You hold it together day after day.

Let's hear it for teachers! I say

Be proud of your caring,

Be proud that you are daring

To do the job you do

When each day you start anew.

The joys you feel and the love you give
Is ten fold

Because you are there to always mold
Those little kids, their hearts, their minds
And so you form unbreakable binds.

Some days seem forever, some kids are
very trying

And I would be amiss if I said I was lying.

Teachers are strong, teachers are caring

Teachers are loving, teachers love sharing.

And so I say to you

Well done!

Happy Teacher Appreciation Week

Rita K. Will is a retired elementary school teacher and NSEA member. She composed this poem in honor of Teacher Appreciation Week in the spring of 2021.

Have you started a new adventure or hobby? Share details with us by sending your story to NSEA-Retired President De Tonack at dtonack@neb.rr.com.

Sign up for Retired October conference

Fun and learning will be the focus of the in-person NSEA-Retired fall conference on Tuesday, Oct. 26, at the Ramada Inn, 2503 South Locust, in Grand Island.

The morning will begin at 8:30 a.m. with a welcome and refreshments, followed by three breakout sessions with five topics to choose from:

- Crop Art Process and Politics with Art Tanderup
- Medicare Overview and Updates with Ann Kroeger, SHIIP Representative
- Civil War Medicine with Gary Rath
- Residential Solar Panels with Gene and Rose Wissenburg
- Egypt: Land of the Pharaohs - 5,000 Years of History with Roger Rea

After lunch, participants can enjoy music of the 1950s and 60s from Patsy Cline, portrayed by entertainer Melinda Ferree, as well as dessert and prizes.

NSEA-Retired board members will supply items for a silent auction, with proceeds benefiting the NEA Fund for Children and Public Education.



Courtesy photo

Performing as Patsy: Nebraska performer Melinda Ferree will share her Patsy Cline rendition in the afternoon.

The event is free for NSEA-Retired members. The fee for each additional guests is \$10.

A gathering for attendees will be the evening prior, Oct. 25, at 7 p.m. at the Ramada Inn.

Registration will be available online at nsea.org/retired. Select Calendar, Events and Registration, email Rebecca Smith at rebecca.smith@nsea.org or call the NSEA at 1-800-742-0047. The deadline to register is Sunday, Oct. 17.

Medicare seminars planned through November in-person, online

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska will host in-person seminars and Zoom webinars to help retired educators better understand the Educators' Medicare Supplement Plan and Medicare's Annual Enrollment Period.

The sessions will highlight Medicare, Medicare Part D prescription drug plans and the Educators' Medicare Supplement Plan (with optional dental coverage), and include time for questions.

The in-person seminars will be shorter than in the past and have a limited live audience. The Zoom sessions will cover the same material, but in an electronic format with a cap of 30 participants.

All sessions cover the same material, so you only need to attend one. One of the remote sessions will be recorded and posted at ehaplan.org/retiree-info and nsea.org/retired, under the Insurance tab, in mid-December.

Invitations were mailed to eligible participants with instructions on how to reserve your place along with a handout to help follow the discussion.

Visit nebraskablue.com/nseaseminars

In-Person Seminars

■ Oct. 20, Omaha, OPS Teacher Administrative Center, 3215 Cuming Street

■ Oct. 27, Lincoln, Southeast Community College, 8800 O Street, Room S-1

■ Nov. 5, Kearney, Educational Service Unit 10, 76 Plaza Boulevard, Room B

Morning sessions: 9:30-11 a.m.
(Check in: 9 a.m.)

Afternoon sessions: 1-2:30 p.m.
(Check in: 12:30 p.m.)

Online Webinars

Nov. 1, 4 p.m.

Nov. 9, 2 p.m.

Nov. 3, 9 a.m.

Nov. 15, 2 p.m.

Nov. 8, 9 a.m.

Nov. 16, 9 a.m.

Webinars will last one hour.

to register for in-person or online events at least one week prior to the date you plan to attend.

Members may call 877-721-2583 for assistance from 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. CT.

How to cope with common educator health problems

Educators face a range of medical issues from the physical and mental demands of the job. Here's how to deal with a few of the most common.

■ **Voice disorders and hearing loss:** Speaking over noisy classrooms and buses strains the vocal cords. Teachers are more than twice as likely as non-teachers to suffer from vocal problems, according to the NEA. Stay hydrated, look for times when you can rest your voice and ears and avoid shouting when possible. Try non-verbal cues to get students' attention, such as clapping or flipping a light switch, or wear a speaker system.

■ **Eye strain:** Strain can happen when you stare at a laptop or phone for too long without a break and can be exacerbated by dry air, screen glare and existing vision problems. Check screen brightness and desk setup, and take frequent breaks to look at something in the distance. Visit an eye doctor for a check up or to adjust your prescription.

■ **Burnout, stress and mental health concerns:** Mental and physical struggles often go hand in hand, with stress leading to muscle tension, digestive issues and more. When combined with a culture of self-sacrifice and outside pressures, it can be difficult to ask for the help. Talk therapy, support groups with other educators, mental wellness apps and benefits like an employee assistance program can help.

■ **Falls:** Freshly waxed floors, spills in the cafeteria and backpacks on the floor are hazards. Falls can result in broken bones and injuries requiring medical attention, surgery or physical therapy, which might affect your ability to work. Eliminate clutter, and point out uneven flooring or carpet to school administrators. If you fall, seek appropriate care and allow your body time to heal.

■ **Ergonomic issues:** Working in awkward positions long-term can result in serious injury and chronic pain in your back, shoulders, wrists and more. Assess your workspace, and check that your desk, chair, armrests, monitor, keyboard and footrest are adjusted properly for your height and build. If you teach from home, use books or risers to prevent awkward posture, and sit in a chair with lumbar support. Take breaks to move and stretch.

■ **The toll of school violence:** When violence breaks out on campus, it often falls to an educator to diffuse the situation. Being in a leadership role doesn't mean you should sacrifice your well-being. Discuss procedures with colleagues to be prepared. It may run counter to your intuition, but don't step in to break up physical violence if you haven't been trained to do so. You may get hurt or become unable to keep other students and colleagues out of harm's way. If you've experienced violence at your school, seek mental health support.



Health hazard: Hunching over student desks all day can pose a risk for spinal injuries or chronic pain.

Membership benefits can help

Protect your finances with your district's disability insurance, should you need to be away from work for an extended period of time. You also have access to the NEA® Income Protection Insurance Plan, which can help supplement a paycheck gap when you can't work.

You're guaranteed acceptance into the plan, which covers COVID-19 and any other coronavirus-related illnesses, as well as other short- and long-term disabilities. It pays up to 2/3 of your regular monthly income or \$6,000, whichever is less, whether you're totally or partially disabled. Coverage also includes doctor-ordered pregnancy leave.

The money can be used to help cover bills, groceries and other needs, as well as your NEA membership dues if you're disabled for six months or more.

Find mental wellness care in the Sanvello app, as part of the NEA Mental Health Program. This evidence-based mobile app, created by clinical experts, allows members to access on-demand help for stress, anxiety and depression.

Learn more at neamb.com/family-and-wellness.

A win for you

September is Life Insurance Awareness Month, and NEA Member Benefits is celebrating by giving back to educators – providing you with exclusive options to help protect your loved ones along the way.

Learn about the costs of not having life insurance, then enter the Live, Love, Protect sweepstakes for a chance to win one of 13 cash prizes.

Three members will win \$500, and 10 members will receive \$100.

Visit neamb.com/LIAM by Oct. 15 to enter to win.

A win for your team

Give your athletes a chance at an upgrade with a Thomas R. Brown Athletics Grant. Apply to receive \$1,000 for your middle or high school's team.

The California Casualty Thomas R. Brown Athletics Grant was established to provide support to public school sports programs impacted by reduced budgets.

As an employee of the school and a member of a participating education association, you can apply for a grant award for your school's sports program.

Visit CalCasAthletics.com for application deadlines and grant eligibility.

A win for your family

Enroll for a chance to win \$450 in vacation cash!

From Oct. 1 to 31, first-time enrollees in the NEA Travel Program will be entered into a drawing to win \$450 in vacation cash, redeemable when you book a car rental, hotel, cruise, airfare, resort or guided tour through the NEA Travel platform.

Also in October, enjoy an entire month of cruise and travel deals from more than 25 cruise lines.

Visit neamb.com/Travel to enroll and enter the giveaway!

Speaking of Education

“Everybody can be great...because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.”

— *Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Virtual field trip choices abound across Nebraska

Teachers in the panhandle have the opportunity to take their students to Omaha's historic Union Station, and classrooms in southern Nebraska can “travel” to the Agate Fossil Beds in the northwest corner of Nebraska.

How? Through virtual field trips!

The Nebraska Virtual Instruction Source through the Nebraska Educational Service Unit offers more than 130 virtual field trips to Nebraska-based places and experiences.

The NVIS partners with Nebraska Extension, Nebraska Game and Parks, The Omaha Symphony, the Hastings Museum, LUX Center for the Arts, Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo, the National Park Service, the International Quilt Museum and Study Center, and many other organizations to bring these experiences to life.

Many of the field trips are free and can be scheduled to fit your classroom's daily schedule and curriculum throughout the school year. Experiences are available at all grade levels K-12.

Find your learners' next adventure at nvissucc.org/VFTList.aspx.



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

Children's Fund helps students thrive

Where there is a child in need, there is likely a teacher willing to help by opening their wallet. With many teachers already on limited budgets, filling each and every student need just isn't possible.

When schools closed in 2020 because of COVID-19, educators found creative ways to get food to their students who rely on hot lunch as their primary source of nutrition.

Our members see children who go without coats in winter weather, who come to school in the same clothes every day and who can't see the whiteboard because they lack much-needed vision care.

That's why the NSEA Children's Fund was created. Since 1994, donors to the Children's Fund have provided close to \$1 million to help children in need – to buy them clean clothes, mittens, warm hats and shoes without holes in them, or to pay for eye doctor and dentist appointments. Donors have even purchased public bus passes for students when they had no other way to get to school.

During the pandemic in 2020, the NSEA Board of Directors, along with NSEA-Retired, directed a combined \$60,000 to food banks serving all 93 Nebraska counties to help reach students and families who needed meals.

Contributions to the Children's Fund are tax-deductible, and every penny goes to help children. NSEA covers the administrative costs out of its own budget.

Local associations are encouraged to host fundraisers and challenge other associations to contribute to the fund. For more information, to make a donation or to request help for a child in need, call 1-800-742-0047 or go to nsea.org/childrensfund.



“ We were able to coordinate a shopping trip with a student and her mother...the highest priorities were tops and bottoms, socks, and a heavier sweatshirt as she didn't have cold weather clothing. I can't begin to tell you how much difference we are already seeing with this student! She is more happy and confident, and you can tell she is now feeling like 'one of the kids.' She no longer has to dodge questions from peers about why she's wearing the same clothes every day. I am so happy that our NSEA funds are being used to help youth like this! ”

—*Nebraska School Counselor*