

The VOICE

Nebraska State Education Association • February 2022



Chloe Kirschenmann
NSEA Aspiring Educators Member
Wayne State College
Student Teacher

Dollars and Sense: Pay Student Teachers

- Local fights for fair pay
- Emoji mental health check
- NSEA tracks new bills





THE VOICE

Nebraska State Education Association
605 S. 14th Street, Lincoln, NE 68508
nsea.org
402-475-7611 · 1-800-742-0047

Volume 75, No. 6
ISSN Number: 1085-0783
USPS Number: 000-369

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Official publication of the Nebraska State Education Association, 605 South 14th Street, Lincoln, NE 68508-2742. Periodical postage paid at Lincoln, NE, and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: send address changes to NSEA Voice, 605 S. 14th Street, Lincoln, NE 68508.

Published 10 times yearly according to this schedule: September, October, November, December, January, February, March, April, May and August.

Payment of annual NSEA membership dues entitles Nebraska educators to receive *The Voice*. Total cost of producing 10 monthly issues of *The Voice* each year is less than \$2 per member.

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A Great Public School for Every Child.

File for NSEA office, and remember to vote!

Is it time to step forward and consider a leadership role in your association? Starting Friday, Feb. 18, NSEA members will vote for candidates to fill dozens of district leadership posts, as well as openings on the NSEA's Board of Directors. Electees will assume roles in determining the Association's future. But first, those candidates must file.

One NEA Director position and an Education Support Professional At-Large seat will be up for election for three-year terms at the April 2022 Delegate Assembly. Also, because of a resignation, one two-year term for a Higher Education At-Large seat will be elected.

The NEA Director serves on the NEA Board as well as an officer for NSEA. The At-Large positions serve on the NSEA Board of Directors.

All candidates must declare their candidacy by Tuesday, Feb. 15, in writing to NSEA Executive Director Trish Guinan at trish.guinan@nsea.org.

The window for filing opened Jan. 1 and closes Sunday, Feb. 6. To view the vacancies and to file, go to nsea.org and click on the 2022 District Elections link. Select your district, and then select the office of interest.

Candidates will need their 10-digit NSEA membership number. That number can be found above your name on the mailing label of *The Voice*.

All NSEA members are eligible to vote for district officers and Representative Assembly At-Large delegates. Voting will be available online from Friday, Feb. 18 to Sunday, March 13.

All members are eligible to vote for their local association delegates to NSEA Delegate Assembly. Clustered locals will vote March 14-22. Locals with more than 26 members, talk with your local president for your local election timeline.

Call NSEA for more information at 1-800-742-0047.

Read Across America in March and all year long

Keep your students hooked on reading with Read Across America's yearlong calendar of recommended books.

Each month, Read Across America and the NEA recommend three titles – one for young readers, one for middle grades and one for young adults. The books explore a topic related to diversity and inclusion. Find the complete calendar, as well as discussion ideas, at bit.ly/3qrpfyA.

Launched in 1998 by the NEA and guided by a committee of educators, Read Across America is the nation's largest celebration of reading. This year-round program focuses on motivating children and teens to read through events, partnerships and reading resources that are about everyone, for everyone.

The titles and resources featured by NEA's Read Across America include books that students can see themselves reflected in, as well as books that allow readers to see a world or a character that might be different from them.



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 education-related. Submit your questions and your topics to thevoice@nsea.org.

On the Cover: Omaha Public Schools will award stipends to 50-plus student teachers this semester and into 2023 in an effort to relieve financial stress for future educators and recruit more qualified teachers into the profession. Read more on page 7.

What is the meaning of normal?



NSEA
President
Jenni Benson

I was on a recent Zoom call with a state senator and some dedicated NSEA members, and the senator asked, “Do you think in a year or so we will be back to ‘normal’ with our students and learning?”

The question drew thoughtful and passionate responses from the teachers on the call. Some of our younger students have no idea what “normal” school is. All of our students have missed out on something normal during this ongoing pandemic.

Is there a “normal” ahead? Of course there is, it just may be the new normal.

I looked up the meaning of normal to give me a pause for reflection I find necessary everyday as things continue to change on a dime:

normal
ADJECTIVE

1. conforming to a standard; usual, typical, or expected. synonyms: usual, standard, typical, stock, common, ordinary, customary

NOUN

1. the usual, average, or typical state or condition.

“

As I reflect on what is normal, I am aware my normal is very different from yours. I am aware we are all dealing with many things...but it is important we remember to love each other through whatever we are dealing with.

”

This year, February may look much different with a rise in the number of COVID cases significantly affecting staffing and attendance. As I write this, several school districts are closed or are closing for a few days. By the time you read this, it could be a much different situation. Our new normal varies day to day.

I have been interviewed this week about a wide range of topics, like legislative bills – normal for this time of year. It is vital we all stay informed and engaged by signing up for the Capitol Update at www.nsea.org/subscriber.

Other interview topics included personal protective equipment, staff shortages, COVID and more – normal topics for the times for sure. Please check out our NSEA social media and our YouTube channel for the latest videos at www.youtube.com/user/NSEAMedia.

What other “normal” does February hold? Well, Valentine’s Day of course. Is it normal with COVID? Can our children share the traditions of making a box and getting a card from their classmates? I hope we are able to share the love as much as we can for our students and our families.

As I reflect on what is normal, I am aware my normal is very different from yours. I am aware we are all dealing with many things.

Valentine’s Day for me took on a new normal when my son was born 37 years ago. This year Major Jacob Absalon will head to Korea for a nine-month deployment. He will spend his third Valentine’s Day deployed. This time he leaves behind a wife and a 6-month-old son. His normal is different for sure.

I wrote an article in 2009 for the Lincoln newspaper when Jacob was deployed to Afghanistan the



A special valentine: My son, Major Jacob Absalon, will spend the next nine months deployed to Korea on his third deployment.

first time. I pulled it up and thought I would share a bit of it. My normal then is much different from now, but some things have not changed.

Local view: This is the true meaning of love (reprinted from the Lincoln Journal Star)

“Twenty-four years ago, Feb. 14, 1985, a baby boy was born to a single college student. He had dark curly hair, a chubby face and skin the color of coffee with cream.

He was born into an uncertain future, with an absent African-American father and a young, unsure mother from a pretty dysfunctional family.

People these days are quick to form opinions and judge other people. It is amazing to think that a baby born today just like that one born 24 years ago would face just as unsure a future.

But from that uncertain beginning came Lt. Jacob Paul Absalon, 2007 graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point...

Jacob is an amazing young man who graduated from Lincoln High School with many honors, awards, memories, and friends. He was an all-American kid; he is an all-American soldier...

...I thought back 24 years to my best Valentine’s Day, when the doctor said, “It’s a boy.” My dreams and wishes were for his health, happiness, and a blessed life. Now my prayers are for his safety, for all soldiers and their families, as my only son is now fighting for all we take for granted. I already miss him. But for my family, for friends, for strangers, for you and me, Lt. Jacob Absalon is what love is all about.”

One thing should always be normal, and it may be cliché, but it is important we remember to love each other through whatever we are dealing with.

Vacancy report shows shortages in most PK-12 endorsement areas

Nearly 500 teaching positions remained unfilled in the fall of the 2021-22 school year, according to the Nebraska Department of Education.

The NDE released the results of its annual Teacher Vacancy Survey in December. All 244 PK-12 public school districts, 177 nonpublic school systems and 17 Educational Service Units were surveyed, with a 74% response rate.

Districts/systems reported 482 positions as unfilled with fully qualified personnel, and 68 left completely vacant for 2021-22. For the purposes of the survey, a fully qualified teacher holds an Initial, Standard or Professional Nebraska teaching certificate with the appropriate endorsement for the assigned class. "Unfilled" refers to a position that was filled by someone other than a fully qualified teacher, while "vacant" refers to a position not filled at all.

Of those 482 positions, 138 positions (28%) were in districts/systems with less than 500 students. Of the returned surveys, 44% had unfilled positions at the start of the school year.

The endorsement areas with the largest number of unfilled positions were:

- Special Education 86.5 unfilled, 8.5 vacancies
- Language Arts 50.5 unfilled, 3 vacancies
- Elementary Education 47.5 unfilled, 10 vacancies
- Science 39.89 unfilled, 5.65 vacancies
- Career Education Areas 32.25 unfilled, 4.5 vacancies

- Mathematics 29 unfilled, 7.5 vacancies
- World Language 25.65 unfilled, 3.5 vacancies
- Music Instrumental/Vocal 20.53 unfilled, 2 vacancies
- Speech Language Pathology 20 unfilled, 3 vacancies
- School Counselor 20 unfilled, 1 vacancy
- Early Childhood Education 18 unfilled, 2 vacancies
- School Psychologist 17.5 unfilled, 2.5 vacancies
- School Library 13 unfilled, 0.5 vacancies
- Art 12.90 unfilled, 0.5 vacancies
- ESL/ELL+ 9.50 unfilled, 1 vacancy
- Social Studies/Social Science 9 unfilled, 0 vacancies

The main reasons given for the unfilled roles were "No applicants" (40%) and "No fully qualified applicants" (25%).

Of the 17 endorsement shortage areas, six have been designated shortage areas each year for the last 15 years: Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Special Education, Speech Language Pathology and World Language.

In addition to these, eight others have been designated shortage areas each of the last five years: Career Education Areas, Art, Early Childhood Education, Health and/or Physical Education, School Counselor, School Library, School Psychologist and Music/Instrumental/Vocal.

Find the full report from the Department of Education at education.ne.gov/educatorprep/teacher-shortage-survey.

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February marks 200 years of public schools in Nebraska

Long before smart boards, Chrome-books or even electricity, teachers found new and innovative ways to impart knowledge and critical thinking skills to Nebraska's youth. That's something to celebrate all year, but especially this month.

"Feb. 6 will be the 200th anniversary of the first formal classes in Nebraska," according to David Bristow, historian and author in charge of publications for History Nebraska, formerly the Nebraska State Historical Society.

The first gathering of students with a teacher that could be called a public school in Nebraska happened in February 1822 at Fort Atkinson, the first United States Army post established west of the Missouri River.

The fort was built on the recommendation of Lewis and Clark on what was then known as the Louisiana Purchase – before Nebraska became a state. The fort was north of Omaha, near present-day Fort Calhoun, along the Missouri River. The fort was built in 1819 and abandoned in 1827, having been used mainly for the fur trade, river traffic and Indian relations.

Early Education

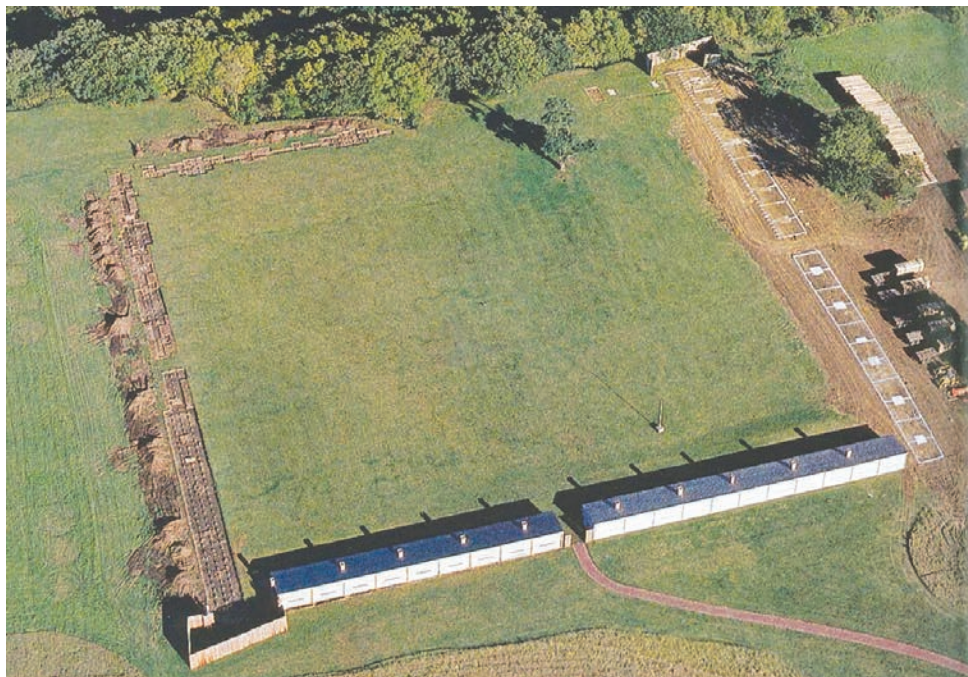
The article, "Early Education in Nebraska" by Helen Siampos printed in *Nebraska History Magazine* details the early days of Fort Atkinson and how public education got its start on that land that would later become Nebraska.

"General Atkinson's soldiers, located far from a base of supplies, planted crops, raised livestock, built and operated a sawmill, and burned brick. As soon as the welfare of the regiment had become routine, the commandant turned his attention to the welfare of the children at the post," Siampos wrote.

Documentation from the Sixth Infantry under Col. Henry Leavenworth contained an entry from Feb. 4, 1822:

"The school room being completed, a school will commence on Wednesday next under the direction of Sergeant Mumford, who has been appointed teacher and will be respected accordingly..."

"Thus on Wednesday, February 6, 1822, four hundred miles from the nearest outpost of civilization, the first school was opened upon the soil later to be known



At the fort: An aerial photo from the State Archeology Office shows the partly reconstructed Fort Atkinson, where the first public school convened in 1822 on what would become Nebraska soil. The original fort was gone long before photography was invented, but archeological excavations of the 1960s showed exactly where the original buildings stood. (Photo courtesy History Nebraska)

as Nebraska," Siampos continued. "The Indians were sufficiently friendly to make possible conducting this first school in a small log building outside the post. Here Sergeant Mumford, the first teacher, directed his little band of scholars in the rudiments of the three R's."

Free public schools

According to Siampos, the Nebraska Territory was settled by white families in 1854. On March 16, 1855, Nebraska's first government passed a free public school act.

"By this act the office of territorial superintendent of schools was combined with that of territorial librarian, and counties were selected as the subdivisions of school government. A county superintendent was to be chosen by popular election. This official was responsible for dividing his county into districts, and notifying the residents to proceed with the organization of their schools.

"Each county was to levy a tax of not less than three nor more than five mills on all taxable property in the county and to distribute the revenue thus raised among

the districts on the basis of enumeration of white children between the ages of five and twenty-one years. The bulk of control rested in a local board of education consisting of three members for each district. To this board fell the organization and management of the district school.

"An average 'regular' school building was about 22x32 feet and 12 feet high, and cost, including furniture, about \$1,000. They were made of rough logs and had sod roofs. Since they were used for all public gatherings, they were built larger than was necessary for school purposes.

"Although the county superintendent could certify teachers as he saw fit, it was customary to have school teachers examined by the local school board for proficiency in spelling, reading, writing, geography, history of the United States, and English grammar...There was little money to pay the teacher – the average monthly salary of a man was about \$30 and that of a woman, about \$26."

Read the complete story of education's start in the state of Nebraska at [history.nebraska.gov](https://www.history.nebraska.gov).



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“It felt like we were on ‘Oprah’”

OPS designates general fund dollars to pay student teachers

“YOU get a scholarship! And YOU get a scholarship! And YOU GET A SCHOLARSHIP!”

Chloe Kirschenmann was in shock when she first learned she would be earning money while student teaching.

“I have never heard of anyone ever getting paid while student teaching,” she said. “It felt like we were all on an Oprah episode!”

When Omaha Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Cheryl Logan made the announcement, Kirschenmann and her fellow student teachers were surprised, to say the least.

“We all kind of thought it was a joke,” she said.

It’s no joke

OPS recently made the decision to award a \$9,000 stipend/scholarship to each of its 50-plus student teachers who are in the classroom for all 16 weeks of this semester. Those serving 8 weeks will receive \$4,500. Payments will be made every two weeks.

The payments will come from the district’s general fund budget, according to Bridget Blevins, spokesperson for OPS.

“Our district established the stipend for student teachers as part of our investment in future educators,” Blevins said. “This is one element of our immediate and long-term work to recruit and retain top talent for the community we serve.”

The district will also give cooperating teachers – those who agree to take on a student teacher for the semester – a stipend of \$1,500.

Long-term investments

The stipends will be awarded each semester through July 31, 2023, and are just part of OPS’ plan to attract and keep more qualified educators.

“In September 2021, our district changed the 2021-22 calendar to add several non-student days for teacher planning, work and professional learning,” Blevins said.

Other long-term investments in the district’s staff pipeline include its paraprofessional to teacher program, high school education academies, Next Level Learning paid student internships and utilizing students as contracted interpreters.

“Omaha Public Schools also introduced our Concierge Team, which provides flexible hours for those who may be able to work 5, 10, 15 or 20 hours per week to assist with numerous non-instructional responsibilities,” Blevins said.

These programs are a huge benefit to future teachers like Kirschenmann, a senior at Wayne State College and member of NSEA’s Aspiring Educators.

“The responsibilities of a student teacher are almost identical to any other teacher,” Kirschenmann said. “We are essentially being trained to do everything that our cooperating teacher does so that we can gradually take over for them toward the middle to end of the student teaching experience.”

Save money, save stress

Kirschenmann is wrapping up her degree in K-8 elementary education with endorsements in K-6 writing and K-12 English as a Second Language. She is student teaching fourth grade at Standing Bear Elementary School in Omaha.



An Aspiring Educator: Chloe Kirschenmann, an NSEA Aspiring Educator, is among nearly 50 student teachers at Omaha Public Schools who will be paid for their time and effort as pre-service teachers. She hopes more school districts will follow suit to help alleviate financial stress on future educators.

For the past four years, she has been saving money to pay for her student teaching experience.

“I originally decided to student teach in the Omaha area because I had an aunt that I could live with. I knew this was something that I needed to do in order to save money and not pay for rent, utilities and food,” Kirschenmann said. “It is very difficult to balance working a job on top of student teaching. It worried me a lot to not have any money coming in and only leaving.”

The stipend came as a big relief for Kirschenmann and other student teachers in similar situations. It’s not uncommon for a potential educator to change their major or abandon hope of becoming a teacher once they realize the strain four months of no income will create.

“This scholarship will help immensely with easing the stress of paying bills and worrying about money. Student teaching is a full-time job itself, so working another job outside of school gives a lot of student teachers a lot of stress and causes exhaustion,” Kirschenmann said. “I’m really hoping that this sparks interest to other school districts to start giving their student teachers some sort of payment for their time and hard work.”

NSEA continues to work with state lawmakers to establish a statewide stipend program to pay student teachers.

NSEA tracks hundreds of bills that could affect education

Almost 600 new bills introduced in January for short session debate

Bill introductions wrapped up Jan. 20, and senators introduced 593 new bills and 9 proposed constitutional amendments for consideration in the short 60-day session of the Nebraska Legislature.

As the session continues, the major education issues of interest are expected to revolve around spending over \$1 billion in federal COVID-19 relief aid, school financing issues, addressing the shortage of school employees, and providing safer working environments for students and teachers.

Your NSEA Government Relations team is hard at work tracking 76 different education and school finance related legislative proposals, as well as other bills that affect systems like broadband connectivity and food security.

NSEA pushed to get many of the increased school employee pay and loan forgiveness bills introduced, including one (**LB 1182**) to reimburse school employees for personal protective equipment they purchased with their own money.

Revenue cap bills of great concern

Two serious threats target the property tax revenue stream that – because of a limited state funding support – remains the primary source of revenue for Nebraska’s K-12 schools.

Sen. Tom Briese of Gordon introduced both **LB 986** and **LB 987**, in a continued effort to limit funding.

This comes during the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic when schools are being asked to do more with already squeezed resources. The NSEA has serious concerns about the financial implications of these proposals and their effect on our state’s public school students.

LB 986 would prohibit school districts from raising property taxes beyond the greatest of 2.5%, Consumer Price Index inflation, 40% of student enrollment growth, 25% of LEP student growth or 25% of poverty student growth.

Property tax requests would have to decrease with increases in state funding and could increase with decreases in state funding.

A school board could exceed the limit by 7% if student enrollment is under 471, by 6% if enrollment is between 472 and 3,044 students, by

5% if enrollment is between 3,045 students and 9,999 students, and by 4% if enrollment is over 10,000 students. Additionally, a 60% majority of voters could vote to exceed the limit. Districts may carry forward unused tax increase authority.

LB 987 would prohibit school districts from raising property taxes beyond the real growth value increase (increase in value from new construction or additions to existing buildings), 3%, or Consumer Price Index, whichever is greatest.

A majority of the school board could vote to exceed the limit, as long as the 3-year average remains at or below 3%, and a majority of voters could vote to exceed the limit. The limit would not apply to improvements for fire or flood mitigation, environmental hazard, accessibility, safety code, natural disaster, CIR wage adjustments or payment of bonds.

Increases are allowed to compensate for reduction of state aid. School districts could carry forward 1/2 of unused increase authority. As proposed, the bill would sunset in 2029.

Schools are already subject to levy limits and spending caps, so adding yet another limitation may

Subscribe to legislative updates that affect YOU

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.

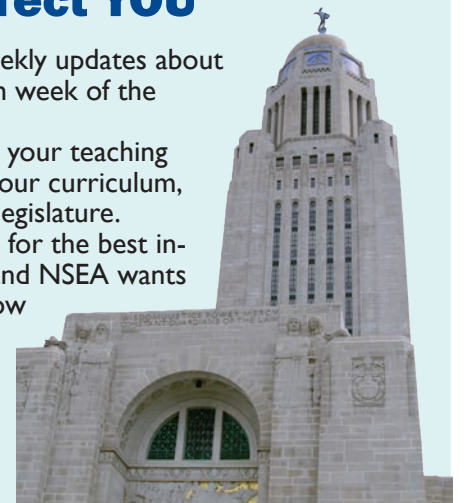
Every decision made regarding education is a political decision. How you receive your teaching certificate, the standards you teach to, the number of students in your classroom, your curriculum, the resources you can access and the amount on your paycheck are all tied to the legislature.

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, and how you can take action.

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

Please note, NSEA has changed platforms for legislative alerts.

Please check your spam folder and approve sender capitol-update@nsea.org if are not receiving it, or contact cathy.schapmann@nsea.org for assistance.



Get the details

NSEA will host a members-only Legislative Update on Thursday, Feb. 17, beginning at 6 p.m. CST on Zoom.

NSEA Director of Political Action Brian Mikkelsen will share what's going on in the 2022 legislative session and how proposed bills could affect public education.

Register at:

www.nsea.org/PDforMembers

leave schools constantly struggling to meet their revenue needs year after year. Both bills would limit local control and hinder schools' ability to respond to emergencies or replace needed equipment, like a school bus.

The revenue caps would create a disconnect for school districts in future years because the state aid formula calculates resources based on valuation while the proposal caps property taxes levied, meaning some schools with growing property values will lose state aid and not be able to make it up by accessing the increased valuation because of levy or budget restrictions.

Both proposals are being falsely portrayed as providing property tax relief, but what they seek to do is defund Nebraska's K-12 public schools.

Bill could expedite Social Security tax phase out

LB 825, introduced by Sen. Brett Lindstrom of Omaha at the request of the NSEA-Retired and the NSEA, will accelerate the phase out of state tax collected on Social Security benefits over the next four years.

The bill was heard in the Revenue Committee on Jan. 19 and advanced to General File.

Last session, Lindstrom introduced **LB 64**. Its passing phased out the state tax on Social Security benefits over 10 years, but paused the process in year 5.

Because of this pause, new legislation contained in **LB 825** is required to continue the phase-out past the year 2026 or the phase-out will be halted when the tax exemption is only at 50% or half the amount collected.

Social Security and pension income are intended to keep our elderly and disabled citizens out of poverty. Our public school employees rely on their Social Security benefits to make ends meet during their retirement years.

Currently, Nebraska allows single tax filers with \$43,000 or less in adjusted gross income (\$58,000 if married filing jointly) to exempt that amount from their Social Security income. **LB 64** began the phase out of this exemption, and **LB 825** would ultimately provide a full exemption.

NSEA at the Capitol

The NSEA is keeping a close eye on numerous other bills that have the potential to affect public schools, students and educators.

Those bills listed below are at the top of NSEA's watch list, though this is not an exhaustive list. Watch the Capitol Update for weekly alerts and ways to take action.

NSEA PRIORITIES

LB 641 – Requires that education support professionals be paid during an epidemic if a school closes. This is a carryover bill from the 2021 session to more clearly define the roles of education support professionals.

LB 690 – An NSEA-initiated bill that expands the basic skills demonstration needed to obtain a teaching certificate or administrator's certificate to include coursework, in an effort to eliminate the need for the Praxis CORE entrance exam.

LB 696 – An NSEA-initiated bill that provides a \$1,000 retention payment to all non-administrative school employees.

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

LB 768 – Prohibits the State Board of Education from developing, approving, distributing, adopting or promulgating any academic content standards in a new content area that is not authorized in existing statutes.

LB 888 – Adds the Holocaust and other acts of genocide to the definition of "multicultural education" for school districts.

PROFESSIONAL AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

LB 945 – Aims to attract new teachers by providing up to \$25,000 in student loan repayment assistance for service as a classroom teacher in a public or private school in Nebraska. Each new teacher would receive \$5,000 per calendar year in repayment assistance for no more than five consecutive years, not to exceed \$25,000.

LB 960 – Eliminates certain basic skills competency requirements to obtain a teaching certificate which are making it difficult for qualified individuals to get into classrooms.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

LB 364 – NSEA's efforts helped kill this carryover bill that would have created the Opportunity Scholarships Act. Under the Act, individual and corporate taxpayers would qualify for a dollar-for-dollar tax credit for the amount contributed to a scholarship-granting organization. The bill was defeated by filibuster, but later reintroduced under a new bill number.

LB 1014 – Provides \$60 million for a three-year pilot program to provide direct assistance to parents of low-income K-12 children for educational expenses to address learning loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The \$2,000 per child per school year could be used for private school tuition, tutoring, digital learning subscriptions, exempt school curriculum and other K-12 educational services.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

LB 887 – Aligns the work of the coordinating commission of secondary education with the responsibilities of the Board of Trustees in matters involving state colleges, prohibiting religious tests.

STUDENT AND EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS

LB 872 – Permits the wearing of tribal regalia by students attending any public or private school or college, excluding weapons and items endangering student safety.

RETIREMENT PLAN

LB 700 – A technical clean-up bill introduced at the request of the Nebraska Public Employees Retirement System to eliminate school employer and member reporting requirements regarding early retirement inducements. The bill allows paid time off for school plan members to attend live webinar sessions offered during regular work hours.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

LB 838 – Appropriates \$15 million to NDE to provide aid to employees or self-employed individuals who provide child care or education programs for children and to providers of activities that support early childhood workforce recruitment and retention.

STUDENT HEALTH

LB 642 – Creates a mental health liaison in each school district and a Nebraska Department of Education fund for reimbursement to districts at 80%, another carryover bill from last session.

LB 710 – Removes the \$25,000 asset limitation for SNAP (food assistance) eligibility, but maintains

household income eligibility between 131 and 165% of poverty guidelines.

LB 754 – Extends through the 2023-24 school year a pilot program to study the efficacy of commercial air filters in classrooms to remove common pollutants and particulate matter and to study their impact on academic and behavioral performance. The program was created by LB 630 passed in 2021.

LB 758 – Adds early childhood programs to the Nebraska Farm-to-School Program Act.

LB 852 – Requires that each school district designate a behavioral health contact in each building or other division by Aug. 1, 2023. NDE/DHHS will provide each district with a list of local behavioral health resources.

LB 976 – Establishes community health clinics to increase access to mental health and substance use treatment through partnerships with law enforcement, schools and hospitals.

LB 1075 – Uses \$1.8 million from the Federal Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund to authorize DHHS to provide funding for pediatric trauma centers in Nebraska to purchase technology to support mental health through telehealth and telemonitoring.

OTHER

LB 699 – Provides \$100 million in federal American Rescue Plan funds to enhance innovation and technology infrastructure, with funds to be distributed as grants.

LB 792 – Provides for two new residential facilities and upgrades to the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center facility in Kearney, aligning with the recommendations of the Department of Health and Human Services' five-year plan.

LB 914 – Requires the Public Service Commission to create and maintain a broadband map and data repository, as Federal Communications Commission maps are not quality.

LB 916 – Adopts the Rural Municipal Broadband Access Act, which states that if no private entity is providing reasonable broadband service to an area, then the municipality will notify any area providers. If those providers do nothing to provide access, the municipality can create its own broadband service.

For the complete list of bills and notification about weekly hearings as they are scheduled, subscribe to the NSEA Capitol Update at www.nsea.org/subscriber.

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GIEA files petition with CIR

Says district is taking economic advantage of educators

The Grand Island Education Association believes its bargaining unit members are being paid inconsistently with its agreement with the school district. The association filed a petition with the Nebraska Commission of Industrial Relations against Grand Island Public Schools Jan. 21, alleging a violation of the Industrial Relations Act.

The petition claims the school district is misclassifying several members of its staff who are filling vacant positions as long-term substitutes and paying them much less than they would make under GIEA's collective bargaining agreement.

As a result of a case brought before the Nebraska Supreme Court by the NSEA a decade ago, Nebraska law recognizes that an employee who is hired to fill an open position is not a substitute.

"The Court acknowledged that a legitimate substitute is considered someone who assumes the duties of another employee due to their temporary absence. If the regular employee is not expected to return to their position, then there exists a vacancy to be filled by a member of the bargaining unit," said Nick Welding of Norby & Welding LLP, NSEA's attorney who filed the petition on behalf of GIEA.

The petition points out that those misclassified employees are part of the GIEA bargaining unit and should be paid under GIEA's agreement with the district. The district, however, is paying them as substitutes.

Welding said the district's substitute rate tops out at \$200 per day, but that takes certain factors, like retiree status, into account. Most of the misclassified staff are making \$160-\$180 per day, which equates to several thousand dollars less than the starting salary for a contract employee. Plus, the subs aren't getting benefits like health insurance.

"They could be making \$250 to \$300 a day if they had a contract," said Michelle Carter, GIEA president and a fifth grade teacher at Dodge Elementary. "A full day's pay for a teacher who has been here at least five years is over \$300."

Welding said last August, the association submitted a written request to district administrators for information regarding the identity of those misclassified employees, as well as their assignments, workload, compensation and other details.

Carter said the district underwent a



Leading the fight: Michelle Carter is president of the Grand Island Education Association, which is pursuing a case with the Commission of Industrial Relations to get contracts for misclassified employees who are filling full-time teacher vacancies.

change in human resources directors during that time, and with the hustle and bustle of the start of a new school year, everyone was busy, so they tried to be patient.

"We waited and waited and waited. It took over a month for us to get the information," Carter said, "but it wasn't everything we asked for. There were lots and lots of holes."

Administrators responded with partial information, but did not disclose each employee's full-time equivalency, compensation or terms and conditions of employment, leaving some misclassified employees off the list entirely.

"Then we started gathering the information ourselves," Carter said. "We had our building reps do the research in their own building, finding out who was considered by the district as a long-term sub and what their terms were."

In October, the association filed a grievance with the district's HR department. The multi-step grievance process then requires a meeting with the superintendent and, if it progresses further, a hearing before the school board.

After asking for an extension, HR denied the grievance on the basis that the people the "substitutes" are filling in for would be returning.

"But we've found many of them have resigned or been reassigned, so they're not coming back," Welding said.

The association then took it to the

next step in the grievance process, filing the complaint with the superintendent.

"I delivered that myself, and again we waited, and the deadline passed," Carter said. "According to our grievance procedure, they should have had a meeting within 10 days."

When the association reached out again, it received a response nearly identical to the one from HR, and no meeting was held.

The association then took the grievance to the school board, which had 25 days to hold a hearing. That time passed with no reasonable response from the board and no hearing.

"None of the grievance procedures were followed," Carter said.

The association kept refining its list of misclassified employees, keeping track of who was filling which position and for how long.

"We were at the point that we were just going to drop it and never speak of it again, or we were going to move forward with the litigation," Carter said. "Our goal wasn't to end up in litigation, but we felt our hand was forced, partly because we were never given a meaningful opportunity to address our concerns through the grievance process. The people we are fighting for are our colleagues. They are working side-by-side with us and performing the same duties we are but for much less pay."

"The teachers being treated as substitutes are performing an important function in a difficult situation and are not able to enforce the agreement on their own. They're not offering them contracts or benefits, but they are filling vacancies. The school is taking economic advantage of them," said Scott Norby of Norby & Welding.

The petition argues that the refusal of the district to compensate staff misclassified as substitutes as bargaining unit members goes against the negotiated agreement, violates the integrity of the collective bargaining process and is a practice prohibited by state law.

"Our goal is to get these folks the compensation the district has agreed to pay its regular teaching staff," Carter said. "They are part of our bargaining unit, and they deserve to be paid as such."

Last chance to nominate for 2022 NSEA awards

Members and local associations, as well as administrators and friends of education are eligible for top 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.

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.

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.

BCBSNE to cover over-the-counter COVID-19 tests

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska is actively working toward implementation of the over-the-counter COVID-19 testing guidance in partnership with its pharmacy benefits manager, Prime Therapeutics.

Beginning Jan. 15, 2022, there will be a \$0 cost share for up to eight individual OTC COVID-19 tests per member per 30 days through the member's pharmacy benefits.

Prime Therapeutics has established a preferred network of pharmacies to support members in obtaining at-home tests without member cost share. This network includes approximately 65,000 pharmacies nationwide.

Members will be able to obtain



OTC COVID-19 tests at no cost through any of these preferred pharmacies. A list of the preferred pharmacies is available at www.nebraskablue.com.

Tests purchased from a non-preferred pharmacy, online retailer or retail store can be submitted for reimbursement through the existing pharmacy paper claims process. These claims will be reimbursed at a maximum of \$12 per individual OTC COVID-19 test.

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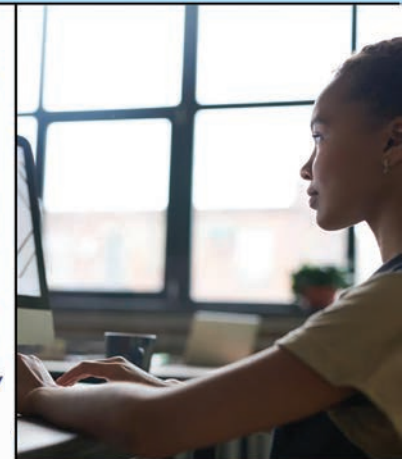
- Add your voice to our member-written NEA Federal Legislative Program
- Hear real-time Congressional updates!
- Take action on our Legislative priorities to support schools, communities and our members

Tuesday, February 1
7:30pm EST/4:30pm PST

Thursday, February 17
7:30pm EST/4:30pm PST

Thursday, March 3
9pm EST/ 6pm PST

These are 50 min sessions
via Zoom for NEA members only



RSVP: bit.ly/NEAlistening

Questions? smccann@washingtonea.org or jbarksdale@nea.org

Crete students use emojis for daily mental health check-in

Emojis aren't just for texting and Facebook anymore.

Those little smiley faces – or angry faces – are being used by educators at Crete Public Schools to get ahead of student mental health concerns.

Karen Williams, Ed.S, school psychologist at Crete Intermediate School, said the morning check-in has helped many students set themselves up for more successful days by getting their concerns out of their head as soon as they start classes each day.

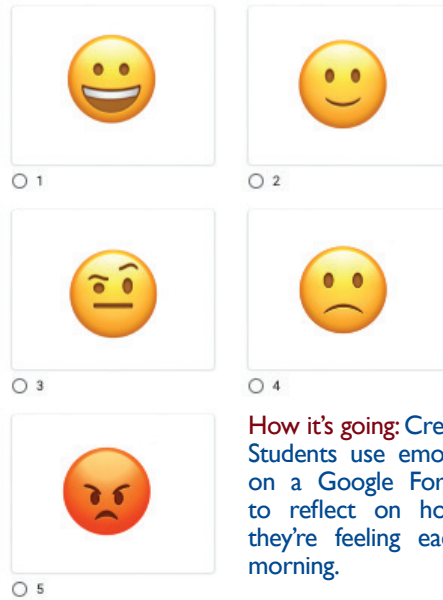
Students spend just a moment filling out a Google form, choosing from a set of five emojis that illustrate how they are feeling that morning.

The results are sent to their home-room teacher, who then follows up when a student selects an emoji that indicates something might be weighing them down.

“Putting their thoughts and ideas first thing in the morning check-in allows them to decompress and for staff to have more meaningful and intentional conversations with them,” Williams said.

Students at Crete Intermediate have been using the system for the last five years, though it has evolved and changed in that time. Crete Middle School students recently joined in, too.

“This idea was inspired by *The Incredible 5-Point Scale* book by Karl Dunn and Mitzi Curtis,” Williams said. “We used this book to train staff



How it's going: Crete Students use emojis on a Google Form to reflect on how they're feeling each morning.

(including paras) to teach and practice what each point in the 5-point scale means to get more accurate data when students were rating themselves.”

When Crete began the morning check-ins, it was done manually, not digitally.

“Students would pick up a stick that had their name on it, and they would put it in the cup that had the number and face of how they were feeling,” Williams said.

Students who placed their sticks in the 3, 4 or 5 level would first speak with their teacher in a non-invasive, confidential way. The teacher would use their professional judgment on

whether a referral to the school psychologist was needed.

During the 2019-20 school year, the district switched to an electronic method, where students now check-in through a Google Form on their Chromebooks – a more efficient and confidential way to collect the data.

Students who rate themselves at a 3, 4 or 5 then answer a follow-up question: “What is making you feel this way?”

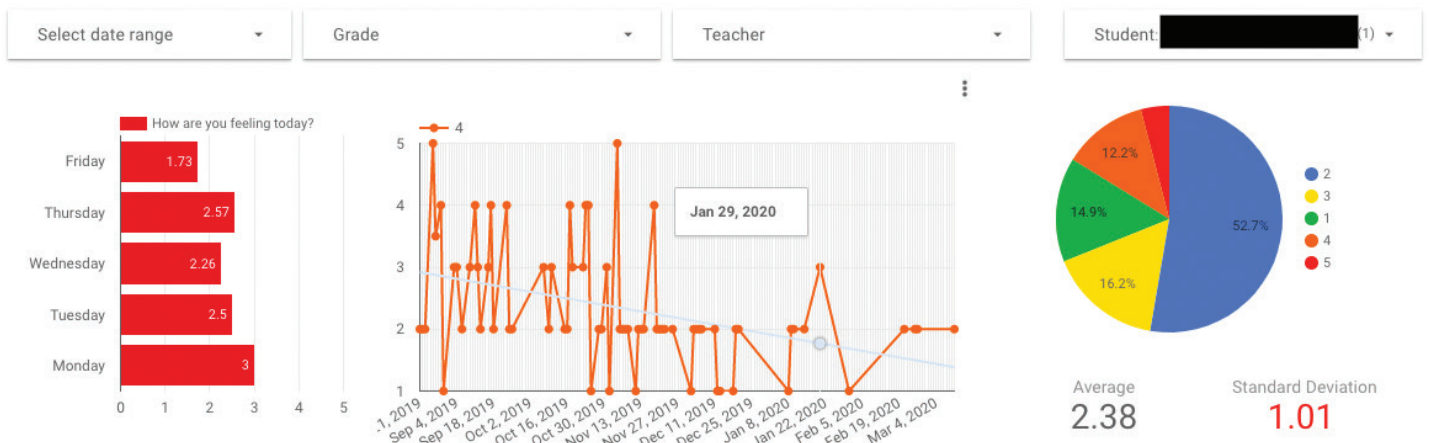
The data are uploaded onto a DataStudio site, where responses can be charted to monitor individual, group and the entire building's social-emotional health on a daily basis. Filters allow staff to see response patterns by date, grade, class and student.

“We were able to collect data in this manner and identify patterns in students' responses,” Williams said.

The information helps her and other school staff provide individual behavioral, social and emotional interventions when needed.

“Students whose data indicate significant emotional instability (based on the grade's average and standard deviation) meet with the school psychologist or school counselor,” Williams said.

Mental health resources are provided to students through small groups at lunchtime, individual counseling, counseling with the district's psychotherapist, or referrals to community mental health services or other agencies.



What's trending: Teachers and staff can track responses for individual students, class sections or the whole school, which helps identify trends in mental health from one day to the next or over a longer period of time.



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Two Teachers of the Year, five Educators of Excellence recognized

Seven deserving teachers were honored Jan. 6 during the Nebraska Teacher of the Year and Excellence in Teaching awards luncheon in Lincoln.

The ceremony recognized the recipients from both 2021 and 2022, as COVID-19 halted the in-person celebration last year.

Among those honored were 2022 TOY Lee Perez, an English as a Second Language teacher at Alice Buffett Magnet Middle School in Omaha, and 2021 TOY Paul Timm, a 7-12 science teacher at Lyons-Decatur Northeast Public Schools.

The 2021 Excellence in Teaching Award winners were Michael Sandstrom, a history teacher at Chadron High, and Sarah Staples-Farmer, an English teacher at Lincoln East High.

The 2022 Excellence in Teaching winners were Mikayla Bruner, a 7-8 honors English teacher at Westside Middle School in Omaha, Abby Jones, a Spanish teacher at Gibbon Public Schools, and Kim Pickering, a business and economics teacher at Lincoln High.

Commissioner of Education Dr. Matt Blomstedt and then-president of the State Board of Education Maureen Nickels spoke, congratulating the recipients and thanking them for their outstanding work.

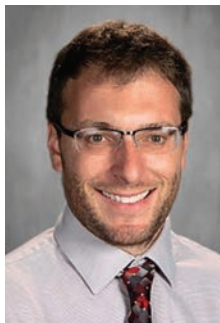
The 2020 Nebraska TOY Megan Helberg of Taylor took the podium, reflecting on her year in the role and encouraging the honorees to look for the good in every situation.



Perez



Timm



Sandstrom



Sharing the light: Past Teachers of the Year pass a candle light from person to person, each sharing a quote that has inspired them over the years in their profession as an educator. The 2022 Nebraska Teacher of the Year Lee Perez joined the luncheon via Zoom.

“If you can’t find any good, create it,” Helberg said.

Timm shared his experiences as TOY in 2021, which included a trip to Washington, D.C., along with Helberg, to meet First Lady and educator Dr. Jill Biden and President Joe Biden.

Perez joined the ceremony via video conference to deliver his address, in which he reminded viewers that kindness is always important both in and outside of school.

“What students learn in the classroom transcends into real life,” Perez said.

He thanked the NSEA and the Omaha Education Association for their support during these difficult times and made his message of support clear to other educators:



Staples-Farmer



Bruner

“It’s OK to not be OK. Focus on empowering our students to be the best version of themselves.”

The ceremony concluded with the sharing of the light, when former TOYs were invited to pass a light while sharing their favorite motivational quote.

Each award recipient received a plaque and gifts from the program’s sponsors, which included the NSEA, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska, the Nebraska Association of School Boards, the Nebraska Council of School Administrators, the Nebraska Department of Education, the State Board of Education, the Northwest Evaluation Association, the University of Nebraska and Dillard’s Gateway Mall Lincoln.



Jones



Pickering

Former NSEA president Lichty remembered

Dr. Dennis Lichty, 79, of Norfolk, formerly of Plainview and Wayne, died Dec. 11, 2021, in Omaha following complications resulting from a car accident. Lichty served as president of NSEA in 1976.



Lichty

After graduating from Plainview High School in 1959, Lichty pursued his lifelong love of teaching, earning his degree in elementary education from Wayne State College, as well as a master's degree and doctorate from the University of South Dakota.

Over the course of his career, he taught at the elementary, junior high, high school and collegiate levels. He also spent time working at the State Department of Education in Lincoln.

Lichty retired from Wayne State

College in the spring of 2016, ending a career that spanned five decades. He truly loved the world of education and was quite literally a lifelong learner.

He was a mentor for young teachers and a supporter of the NSEA Aspiring Educators, known at that time as the Student Education Association of Nebraska.

"You could just see his passion for education. Everything about him was for the kids," said Denton Beacom, a current fourth grade teacher at Logan View Elementary and a member of the NSEA Board of Directors.

Beacom met Lichty in 2014 as a student at Wayne State College, where Lichty was an education professor and later became dean of the College of Education. The two became fast friends.

"I was having some scheduling issues, and he brought me into his office and we sat down and fixed some things," Beacom said. "He was always extremely helpful. Even after I graduated, we talked quite frequently and I went over sometimes after school to visit with him."



A true leader: Dennis Lichty speaks to the 1976 Delegate Assembly as president-elect.

Beacom said Lichty's experience at all levels of education was beneficial to those he helped prepare for the classroom.

"It was clear he had been in the classroom for a lot of years himself. He showed what it was like to be a terrific teacher for students at the college level," Beacom said.



Help a colleague: Share your knowledge

Do you know a little something about education? Are you willing to share your insights with colleagues? If so, NSEA wants YOU to present a breakout session at NSEA University.

NSEA U is a three-day, members-only professional development conference planned for July 12-14 at Nebraska Innovation Campus in Lincoln. It features guest speakers and breakout sessions to help educators grow professionally while relaxing and networking.

If you have a proposal for a professional development session that would be useful to other Association members, submit your proposal at bit.ly/NSEAU22-RFP.

Questions? Contact Michelle Raphael at michelle.raaphael@nsea.org or call (800) 742-0047.

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Contributions to the Children's Fund are tax-deductible and may be made online at nsea.org/childrensfund or by mailing a check to the Nebraska State Education Association ATTN: Children's Fund, 605 S. 14th St., Lincoln, NE 68508. Local associations are encouraged to host a fundraiser (such as a Jeans Day) to benefit the Children's Fund.



NSEA DELEGATE ASSEMBLY • APRIL 2022

Focusing on why teachers stay

Supporting Educator Effectiveness through Development

One doesn't have to look very far to find social media posts about teachers leaving the profession. Recruitment and retention have become priority issues for many Nebraska schools. In an era where it is easy to find testimonials on why teachers leave, the S.E.E.D. Team is asking a different question: Why do teachers stay? What conditions need to exist to retain effective educators?



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

Three conditions, really

In a review of the research, three big ideas emerge as to why teachers stay. First, the teacher and district are a good fit. Susan Moore Johnson writes about the importance of finding a “match” in the context and community in “Where teachers thrive: organizing schools for success.” Educators need a sense of belonging in the educational community in which they teach.

Nebraska's state slogan says, “Nebraska, it's not for everybody” and indeed in education, some districts are not “a fit” for some educators and vice versa. As educators find their first teaching job, begin to build a life and perhaps start a family, they make choices about their preferred place and context. The S.E.E.D. Educator Effectiveness System is being designed to help educators and districts identify aspects of their educational community necessary to help them be more effective.

Secondly, teachers are more inclined to stay when the system values their voice. Moore Johnson notes teachers thrive when there is intention and voice in how their time is used. Teachers appreciate time dedicated to professional tasks like curriculum implementation, engagement and data-informed decisions. Educators also have more opportunities to be effective when systems have agreed-upon routines, discipline and communication protocols.

Effective systems help teachers thrive. As the S.E.E.D. Educator Effectiveness System works to implement the shift toward more support and development for Nebraska's educators, these system conditions become a priority.

Third, teachers must sense the system is dedicated to both the support AND development of educators. Research indicates having support from administrators and colleagues is a major factor influencing teachers' decisions to stay in a position or educational community.

“What Influences Itinerant Teacher Job Satisfaction and Intent to Stay,” a study by Laura Barrett of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, reports positive correlation between retention and support and encouragement from school

administration, as well as cooperative efforts among staff members.

Support or development?

In their essay “Empowerment Evaluation: Knowledge and Tools for Self-Assessment, Evaluation Capacity Building, and Accountability,” Janet Clinton and John Hattie describe this culture of support and development as more “additive than punitive.” To be effective at this, education leaders must first understand the nuances between support and development, and more importantly teachers must perceive these support and development efforts to be authentic and not just extra tasks to complete.

The S.E.E.D. Team believes support is provided for foundational STUDENT-facing initiatives, such as a teacher's effective use of materials, classroom procedures and behavior interventions. Development, on the other hand, is TEACHER-facing personal and professional growth over their career. Teacher development occurs when educators have the opportunity to engage in activities such as working toward professional goals, building personal awareness about equity in the classroom or seeking an advanced degree.

Once an understanding of the distinction between support and development is gained, teachers and their leaders must work together to determine conditions required to ensure the system is responsive to teachers' strengths and needs.

Teacher input is more important now than ever before. Nebraska's 2021-2022 Teacher Vacancy Shortage Survey Report shows 143 districts/systems reporting a total of 482 unfilled teacher positions, compared to 118 districts reporting 321 unfilled positions in 2019-2020. In a November poll conducted by the Nebraska State Education Association, “nearly 1 in 3 respondents said they plan to leave the profession at the end of the school year.”

The most qualified voices to inform Nebraska efforts in educator effectiveness are the educators themselves. The time is now for districts to re-evaluate the ways in which they elevate educator input and teacher leadership so that every Nebraska student experiences success. The S.E.E.D. Educator Effectiveness System can help.

Resources:

Visit the Educator Effectiveness site at www.education.ne.gov/educatoreffectiveness. The standards are available at bit.ly/330g138.



Dr. Julie Downing,
NDE Educator
Effectiveness
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Ryan Ricenbaw,
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Cartwright to speak at NEA Higher Ed conference

Two NSEA members were selected to present at the National Education Association Higher Education Conference March 18-20 in Baltimore, Maryland.

Jame Cartwright will speak about The Career Academy, a joint venture between Lincoln Public Schools and Southeast Community College.

Cartwright is a member of NSEA and on the early childhood education faculty at the Southeast Community College Career Academy.

Will Aviles of the University of Nebraska at Kearney was chosen to present "Organizing and Member Engagement at a Rural University." Aviles is the president of the UNK Education Association and is a professor and chair of the Political Science department.

Though Aviles will be unable to attend the conference, NSEA Organizational Spe-

cialist for Higher Education Rich Wergin will lead the presentation.

It will explore how a students-first approach is used to organize great educators to form a more cohesive group at UNK. "There needs to be buy-in in every college, every program, and at every level in order to work," Aviles said. "In a university of 4,500 students located in central Nebraska, all employees are involved in creating an exceptional experience for each individual who attends. Students, their parents, educational support professionals, faculty and administration, together with members of the community, all play a part in the educational process. We have developed some great ideas while growing our higher ed units in Nebraska."

Cartwright will discuss how Lincoln Public Schools and Southeast Community College are taking a new approach to sup-

port students after graduation through The Career Academy.

Through the academy, LPS has a paraprofessional education reimbursement program in which it assists in paying for college, in hopes that Career Academy students stay with the district after graduation. LPS also guarantees Career Academy students an interview for a para position within the district and gives preference to hiring them because of their involvement and success at the academy.

"The hope is that this program retains students at TCA with the added benefit of a guaranteed interview and the potential of financial assistance for college after graduating high school," Cartwright said, "but that it also encourages students in LPS to stay with the district that provided them support along the way."



Cartwright



Aviles



Wergin

Webinars planned to help with student debt, leadership

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

In February, learn about leadership roles available within the association, how to navigate the complicated world of student loans and how your brain can help you achieve your goals.

Go to nsea.org/webinars for a complete list of sessions and to register.

NSEA members only

■ **NSEA Opportunities 101:** Thursday, Feb. 3, 7:30 p.m. CT. Join NSEA officers to learn about leadership opportunities within the association.

■ **Student Loan Forgiveness:** Tuesday, Feb. 8, 5:30 p.m. CT. Learn about tools available to members for reducing or managing student loan debt.

■ **Student Debt Navigator:** Tuesday, Feb. 8, 6:30 p.m. CT. Learn to use the NEA Debt Navigator, which can find forgiveness or cancellation programs for which you may qualify.

■ **Budgeting:** Tuesday, Feb. 8, 7:30 p.m. CT. Learn budgeting tips from NEA Member Benefits' Susan Estes.

■ **Budgeting:** Thursday, Feb. 10, 6:30 p.m. CT. Learn pre-retirement budgeting tips from NEA Member Benefits' Susan Estes.

■ **Financial Planning:** Thursday, Feb. 10, 7:30 p.m. CT. Review financial concepts that can affect you during early, middle and late career stages with Security Benefit.

■ **Student Debt Navigator:** Tuesday, March 29, 7 p.m. CT. Learn to use the NEA Debt Navigator, which can find forgiveness or cancellation programs for which you may qualify.

All school employees

■ **The Power of Executive Functioning Skills:** Tuesday, Feb. 1, 7:30 p.m. CT. Learn from educator Becky Korinek about the mental processes that can help you achieve your goals.

■ **Member Benefits Overview:** Tuesday, Feb. 15, 7:30 p.m. CT. Learn the value of association membership with NEA Member Benefits' Susan Estes.

■ **Security Benefits:** Thursday, Feb. 17, 7:30 p.m. CT. Hear from Joe Flynn of Security Benefit as he shares financial planning resources.

■ **Member Benefits Overview:** Tuesday, March 22, 6:30 p.m. CT. Learn the value of association membership with NEA Member Benefits' Susan Estes.

Present or be a mentor

NSEA is looking for members who would like to share their ideas and skills. If interested in leading a webinar, contact Michelle Raphael at michelle.rafael@nsea.org.

NSEA is always seeking mentors and mentees in the classroom. For more information, visit www.nsea.org/mentor.

Wood longtime advocate for ESPs

Education support professionals help make schools work. They drive the buses, feed the students and clean up at the end of the day – but they also help in classrooms and, in Jenny Wood’s case, make language accessible and conversations understandable for their students.

Wood is a sign language interpreter at South Sioux City, where she has been the past 16 years. She joined the NSEA in 2007.

“I wanted to have support, have my voice heard and give support to other ESPs,” Wood said.

Since then, she has served as a local building representative, a negotiator and chief negotiator for ESPs for the last three years.

On the statewide level, Wood represents ESPs of the Elkhorn District and co-chairs the NSEA ESP committee, also sitting on the ESP Task Force.

“Jenny is an advocate for our ESPs in Nebraska. She put in a lot of time to create the ESP Task Force,” said NSEA Organizational Specialist Judy Roach, who works with ESPs. “She is always willing to help with whatever we need.”

Roach asked Wood to present at the 2021 NSEA University, and she jumped at the opportunity.

“She did a great job!” Roach said. “I appreciate all she does for South Sioux City, NSEA and NEA.”

Wood has attended several Delegate Assemblies over the years, as well as the local ESP conference in Norfolk. Nationally, she traveled to NEA ESP conferences in Orlando, Florida in 2018, Las Vegas, Nevada in 2019 and participated virtually in 2021.

“When I attended the conference in Las Vegas, Judy Roach, Travis Vo and I created a task force,” Wood said. “The task force is a group to recruit ESP members, retain membership and offer professional development. Travis and I introduced a new business item at the 2019 DA to allow an ESP member to hold a seat on the NSEA board. It was approved by the DA.”

“Jenny is an exemplary example of one of our ESP leaders,” said



ESPs nationwide: Jenny Wood, a sign language interpreter at South Sioux City, writes goals for Nebraska ESPs during the NEA ESP conference in Las Vegas.

NSEA Organizational Specialist Jason Wiese, who nominated Wood to attend the 2022 NEA ESP conference. “Jenny is always willing to do what it takes to grow the association and public education.”

Outside of school, Wood spends time with her husband, Jeff, who is a paraprofessional at South Sioux City. She is also licensed as a community sign language interpreter

in Iowa and has been a member of Junior League of Sioux City for 13 years.

The Junior League is a women’s organization that promotes volunteerism in the community and provides training and opportunities to practice leadership skills.

She also serves on the administrative council at her church, enjoys going to movies and likes to travel.

An advertisement for BlueCross BlueShield Nebraska. The background is a blurred image of a person in a teal shirt. In the top right corner, there are blue icons of a cross and a shield. The main text reads "KEEP YOUR HEART HEALTHY". Below this, it says "With your EHA health insurance benefits, you have access to a program that can help you:" followed by a bulleted list: "• Understand your blood pressure numbers", "• Create strategies to reduce stress, anxiety and depression", and "• Identify causes and symptoms of heart disease". At the bottom, it says "Sign up and get started with a nurse today at [NebraskaBlue.com/EHAPOP](https://www.NebraskaBlue.com/EHAPOP)". The BlueCross BlueShield Nebraska logo is at the bottom left. Small text at the bottom right says "Health benefits for EHA are provided by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska, an independent licensee of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association."

The teacher shortage crisis: Where do we go from here?

by Sydney Jensen

As a teacher, instructional leader, and a parent: I'm scared.

Anecdotally, each time over the past year a colleague shared they were Googling “jobs for former teachers,” weighing the financial implications of taking a leave of absence, or considering early retirement, the fear that we are heading toward a reckoning brewed with a bit more tenacity in the pit of my stomach.

Then, right here in Nebraska, NSEA released the results of their fall 2021 member survey. The results should have all of our stomachs doing backflips.

The following results stand out:

- 84% of respondents say they had an increase in student mental health concerns;
- 64% report an increase in personal mental health concerns;
- 57% of teachers said they are working more hours than last year;
- 64% are more stressed; and
- 30.2% are actively planning their exit from the profession.

The survey results confirmed what many of us with boots on the ground already knew to be true. Teachers are quitting. They are choosing new jobs that offer higher pay, better health benefits, the ability to work from home, and lower stress occupations.

This leaves me wondering: where do we go from here?

When we factor in the low enrollment in teacher prep programs and the potential 1,000-plus teacher exodus in May 2022, we find ourselves in a challenging situation.

My fear is that this opens a large window of opportunity for vouchers and other privatized education options to take root in Nebraska, a threat to public education that voters and policy makers have thus far been able to prevent.

If charter schools and schools-for-profit make their way into Nebraska, then public education stands to lose



Sydney Jensen

even more funding, adding more to the plates of an already overwhelmed teacher workforce. Additionally, it leaves our teachers facing a drastically more difficult school year on the coattails of an already historically demoralizing 2021-22 year.

And it's not just a teacher shortage.

The survey also revealed that 88% of the NSEA members surveyed said their districts have a support staff shortage and 97% said their district is experiencing a substitute teacher shortage.

Teachers are covering classes at a frequency that is unprecedented. This looks like combining classes when subs are not available, covering classes during designated planning hours, and shouldering the load that is normally shared between two co-teachers when one is absent. We have support positions going unfilled due to a combination of low pay, nominal pay increases over time, and the high stress that these jobs present as an occupational hazard.

These additional challenges make the day-to-day of teaching more exhausting, overwhelming, and mentally draining than ever before.

It also begs the question, when everywhere is hiring, what are our

school districts doing to attract and retain high-quality teachers and staff? What's luring candidates to the classroom when seemingly greener pastures are in such great supply?

Our federal, state, and district leaders must hold teachers in high regard as practitioners who are trusted to do their job effectively, or this staffing shortage will continue to worsen.

That sounds simple enough, but the actions that communicate a high regard for teachers take a little more than donuts in the staff lounge every quarter. For starters, here's what I propose:

- Compensation that is competitive, exceeds a living wage, and honors the value of a masters degree or greater when one is held.

- At least 40% of daily contract hours dedicated to protected time to plan lessons, give feedback, grade, communicate with families, and observe colleagues as a means to improve instruction.

- Access to high-level professional development opportunities that allow teachers to connect with and learn from others in their field.

- Fully funded classrooms – no teacher should be purchasing Ticonderoga #2 pencils using their own paycheck.

I want this to be the new normal. I want post-pandemic public education to shine a new light on the magic that teachers create in their classrooms every day, and provide the tools and resources to multiply that magic exponentially. Is that where we're going from here?

Sydney Jensen is the 2019 Nebraska Teacher of the Year. She teaches high school English in Lincoln, is an adjunct professor at Doane University in Crete, and is an advocate for teacher and student mental and emotional wellness supports. Her TED talk, “How can we support the emotional well-being of teachers?” is available at [ted.com/talks](https://www.ted.com/talks/sydney-jensen-how-can-we-support-the-emotional-well-being-of-teachers), and follow her on Twitter @sydneyjensen.

Governance Day planned for Feb. 15

The 2022 NSEA-Retired's Governance/Lobby Day will be held virtually, with an in-person component, on Tuesday, Feb. 15.

The day is a chance for NSEA-Retired members to learn about issues affecting public education and advocate for change in state legislation.

The Zoom meeting will run from 10 a.m. to noon (members may sign on after 9:30 a.m.).

Retired President Dr. De Tonack and Jason Hayes, NSEA Director of Public Policy and Legislative Research, will give a legislative update and overview of procedures for visiting with senators.

Sen. Lynne Walz, chair of the legislature's Education Committee, will be the guest speaker, with Q&A time to follow.

Members within driving distance are then encouraged to meet in the Capitol Rotunda at 1:30 p.m. (1445 K St., Lin-

coln) to visit with and lobby senators.

Participants also are encouraged to write their senators.

Register for the event online at nsea.org/retired. Click "Calendar, Events & Registrations." The deadline to register is Monday, Feb. 7. The Zoom link will be provided to registered participants.

For questions or more details, contact De Tonack at dtonack@neb.rr.com or (402) 525-4264.

LEA-Retired visits U.S. Indian School in Genoa

After the LEA-Retired Book Club completed reading "This Tender Land" by William Kent Krueger, six members visited the National United States Indian School in Genoa.

The school was one of more than 300 boarding schools established by the government and churches in the late 1900s.

The Genoa school was in operation from 1884 to 1934 and was one of the largest of its kind in the United States.

In 1932, enrollment reached 599 students from more than 40 Tribal Nations.

The school was established using a military model utilizing 640 acres and 30 buildings. Classes were held on blacksmithing, carpentry, harness making and tailoring for young men ranging in age from 4 to 22 years.

Women were trained in the culinary arts, sewing, nursing and housekeeping.

By 1900, nearly 21,000 Indian children, or about 78% of all Indian children who attended school, were living away from their families at one of the boarding schools.

The schools were designed to "Kill the Indian to save the man." Students were forbidden to speak their native language and were required to convert to Christianity.



Lifelong learners: LEA-Retired members (from left) Norma Daberkow, Arlene Rea, Karla Bachman, Diane Knapp, Margie Nowak and Sara Ewerth visit the National United States Indian School in Genoa as part of their book club activities.

Krueger's book tells the story of four orphans attending the Lincoln Indian Training School in Minnesota.

For more information on the Genoa Indian School site, go to genoaindianschool.org.

Retirees still involved, still serving communities

Retired educators often continue serving their schools and communities years after they've left the classroom.

The following is a list from other state retired affiliates reflecting the variety of ways they continue to serve. Whether through a local retired group, a group of friends or individually, these ideas may "stir you" to continue to serve in a variety of ways.

Work with the community

- Donate supplies to nursing homes.
- Collect backpacks and school supplies.
- Support parenting classes.
- Gather donations of diapers and wipes.

- Donate time and items to food pantries.
- Trade puzzles, books and toys with others.
- Volunteer.
- Donate books to young children.
- Provide meals for families with cancer patients staying in nearby hospitals.
- Volunteer at an adult literacy center.
- Gather coats, mittens and other supplies for school children.
- Deliver items to shut-in retired teachers in the community.

Assist active educators

- Support a flea market with new and used items for the classroom.

- Speak at a college education class.
- Offer mentoring and support, through a "buddy system."
- Assist in a local school project such as developing a playground.
- Help locals recruit and retain members.
- Adopt a local school in need to provide appropriate support.
- Work with your local Educators Rising group at the high school or an area Aspiring Educators college group.

Already doing some of these? Let us know so we can share your story! Send a message to NSEA-Retired President De Tonack at dtonack@neb.rr.com.

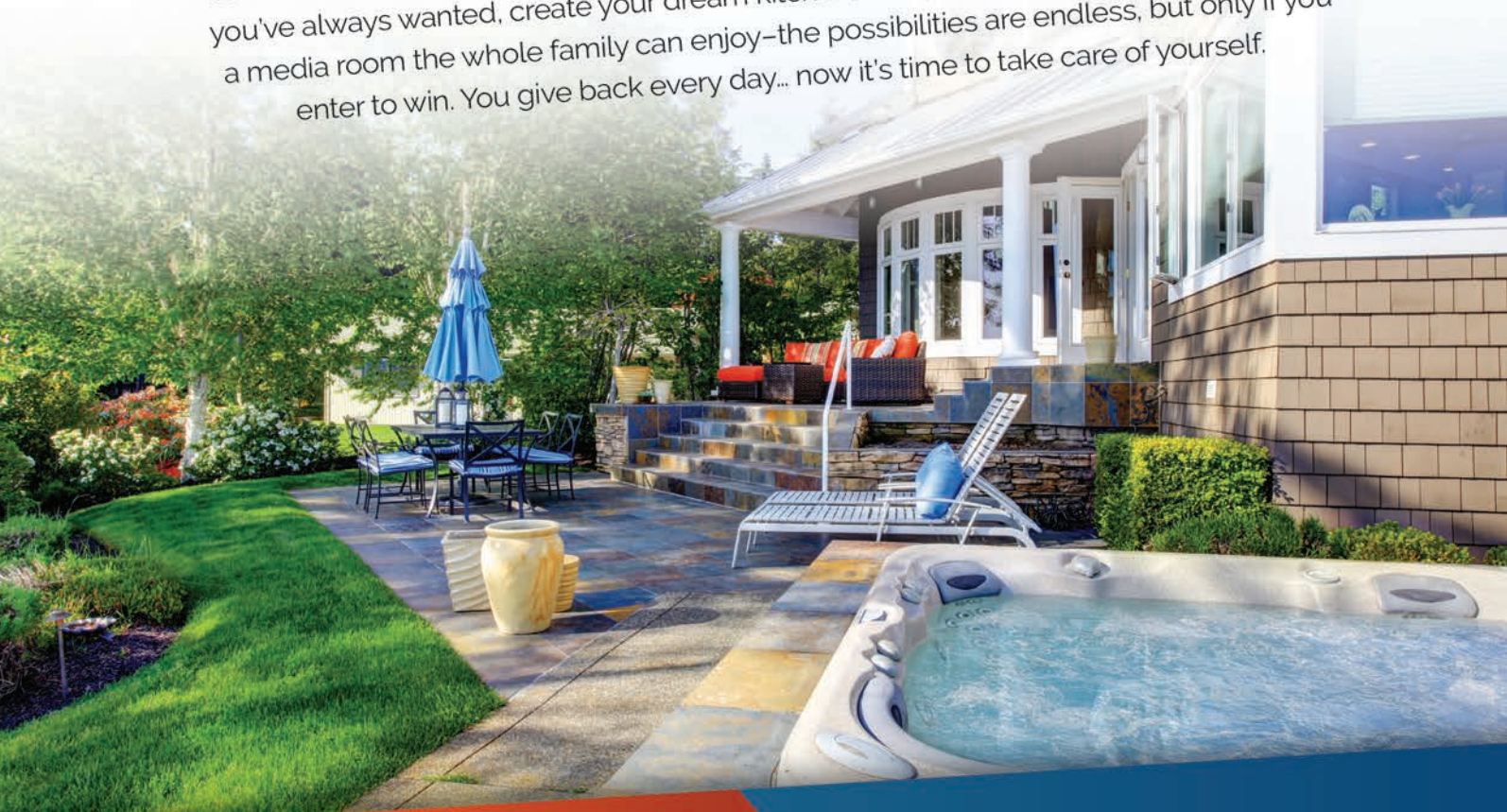
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Speaking of Education

“If we regulated medicine the way we regulate teaching in this country, we would still be treating fevers with leeches.”

— **Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond**,
education research analyst

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



Financial wellness can reduce stress

Financial wellness is a popular topic these days, but what does it mean to be financially well?

Financial wellness describes a state in which you feel in control of your finances. It's important because many Americans do not feel in control of their finances.

According to the 2020 Stress in America™ survey, nearly two in three adults (64%) say money is a significant source of stress in their life, and around half of adults (52%) say they have experienced negative financial impacts because of the pandemic.

The results aren't surprising. Work and money-related worries consistently rank at the top of the survey. Financial stress affects health, productivity and relationships, and it can cause depression and anxiety. The only way to combat financial stress is to increase financial well-being.

Four elements of financial well-being include goals for both now and in the future:

- controlling day-to-day and month-to-month finances and expenses;
- having the capacity to absorb a financial shock;

- being on-track to meet financial goals; and
- having the financial flexibility to make choices to enjoy life.

At any given time, some factors are within your control, and some are not. Your financial behavior is guided by your personality, attitudes, knowledge and skills, and the actions you take.

Of course, you can do things to increase your financial wellness, like making a budget, saving money and reducing debt. Unfortunately, few people actually do these things. The personal savings rate is low, as most households don't have a formal budget and most people cannot cover an emergency expense over \$1,000.

There's no one-size-fits-all solution, but by keeping financial wellness top-of-mind, you can take actions to improve your financial stability, which can lead to less stress.

Establish a foundation of sound financial knowledge and actions, and you can start achieving the long-term financial goals that lead to financial wellness.

Information provided by Horace Mann, www.horacemann.com.

Encourage K-3 students to enter creative contest

Every young person has a story to tell. Nebraska Public Media invites students to tell their imaginative stories using creative writing skills and illustrations in the 2022 PBS KIDS Writers Contest.

The contest, sponsored by Nebraska Public Media, is open to all Nebraska students in kindergarten through third grade. First, second and third place winners will be selected from each grade level.

Submitted stories can be fact, fiction, prose or poetry and must include at least five original color illustrations.

Entries must be postmarked by Thursday, March 31, and mailed “Attention: 2022 PBS KIDS Writers Contest” to Nebraska Public Media at 1800 N. 33rd St., Lincoln, NE, 68503.

For more contest rules, details about how to enter and helpful writing resources and ideas, visit NebraskaPublicMedia.org/write.

Aspiring Educator speaks at Wayne State ceremony

Sabrina Donatila Sack of Waverly was one of three student speakers at the Wayne State College commencement ceremony Dec. 17. She was active in NSEA Aspiring Educators, as well as the Northeast Nebraska Teacher Academy. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in elementary education with endorsements in English as a Second Language and reading/writing. She plans to teach elementary education in Omaha.