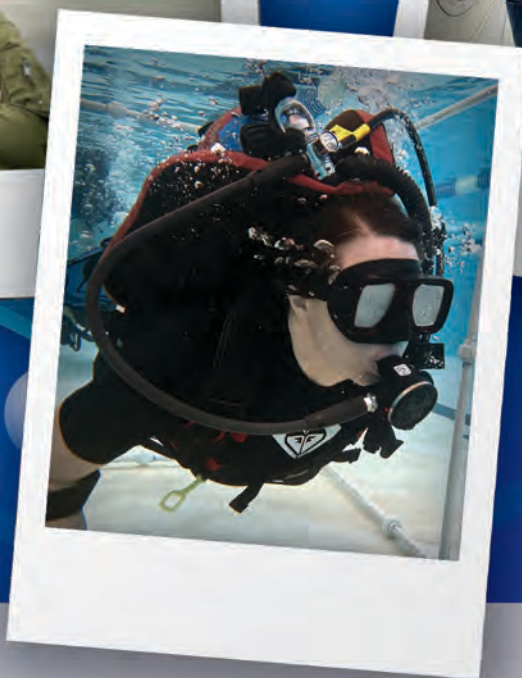


# The VOICE

Nebraska State Education Association • March 2023

## SUPPORT FOR SCIENCE

Members push to make STEM more accessible to all students



Also inside:

• NSEA U '23

• Legislative Update

• Milken Award Winner!



Nebraska State Education Association  
605 S. 14th Street, Lincoln, NE 68508  
www.nsea.org  
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Asst. Dir. of Visual Communications	Kristi Capek
Multimedia Communications Specialist	Kelsey Foley

**NSEA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

President	Jenni Benson, Lincoln jenni.benson@nsea.org
Vice President	Robert Miller, Westside robert.miller@nsea.org
NEA Director	Linda Freye, Lincoln lfreye62@gmail.com
NEA Director	Edward Ventura, Jr., Omaha venturaomaha@gmail.com

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# Are you Nebraska's next Teacher of the Year?

If you are open to challenges—and the rewards that come with those challenges—consider applying to become Nebraska's next Teacher of the Year.

The 2024 recipient will become a spokesperson for education and the teaching profession, will travel the state and country, and be continually recognized for excellence. Since 1972, the Nebraska Teacher of the Year program has recognized outstanding Nebraska certified teachers who work in a pre-kindergarten through grade 12 classroom setting, and who plan to continue in an active teacher status in a state-approved or accredited school.

Application forms for the 2024 Nebraska Teacher of the Year will soon be available through your school administration or at the website listed below. Teachers may nominate a colleague for the honor or self-nominate.

The application seeks information on educational background and personal development, community involvement, philosophy of teaching and learning, and commentary on the teaching profession. A panel will review applications, and up to five finalists will be selected for interviews. Once selected, the 2024 Teacher of the Year will maintain a regular teaching schedule while also participating in a year of professional learning through the National Teacher of the Year Program.

The NSEA, Nebraska Council of School Administrators, Nebraska Association of School Boards, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska, Data Recognition Corporation, and the State Board of Education present cash awards or grants to the Teacher of the Year and other finalists. For additional details, go to [www.education.ne.gov/toy](http://www.education.ne.gov/toy).

Those interested may reach program coordinator Lora Sypal at (402) 471-5059 or [lora.sypal@nebraska.gov](mailto:lora.sypal@nebraska.gov).

## Would You Like to Write for The Voice?

Would you like to write an item for *The Voice*? Perhaps an opinion column or an article on what is working in your classroom? Submissions can be classroom-related, humorous, inspiring or otherwise teaching related. Submit your questions about the process, and your topics to us at:

[thevoice@nsea.org](mailto:thevoice@nsea.org)

**On the Cover:** NSEA members are taking steps to ensure all students have access to STEM. Read this story on page 7.



# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

JENNI BENSON

## I Wish You More Than Luck; I Wish You Love.



February is the “love” month. March is about “luck.” Luck is very subjective and selective. Sometimes, so is love. There are songs and books written about love and luck.

Think about the times you were lucky. Or did something happen not because of luck but because of your skills? Or was it because you loved and were loved?

Have you heard a student say, “You are so lucky,” to you or another student? Our students don’t choose their situations in life. It isn’t about luck. I do believe, however, that love can make or break our students’ lives and our own lives.

I know as educators, you are working hard. I want you to make time for what you love. Because, as I’ve just been reminded, time is not limitless.

I was lucky to find the love of my life at age 50. In 2012, I was driving my youngest daughter to college in Texas. I thought I was looking forward to empty nesting. I was married for nearly 30 years before I got divorced. I was not looking for love again but during our road trip, my daughter said, “Mom you need to start dating.”

I think my immediate response was, “GROSS.” But she went on to tell me there were lots of dating sites. I told her I had created a profile on Match.com but there were some strange profiles on the site. Middle-aged people who wrote things in their profiles like, “not looking for drama,” or “no messy families,” and “must be in great shape,” just to share a few.

Well, life is full of drama, families



*“May you have all the happiness and luck that life can hold and at the end of all your rainbows, may you find a pot of gold.”*

**– Irish Blessing**

are messy and being in shape is relative. I remember telling my daughter that I was not going to pay \$16 a month to access more details. But she took my future into her hands by paying the website access fee.

Within seconds, Mike Benson messaged me. A month and several messages later, with encouragement from a good friend, I went on a date with Mike.

Mike was the only “match” I dated. The rest, they say, is history.

Mike was like no one I had ever met. For the first time in my life someone was taking care of *me*, putting *me* first. He wanted to be with me every minute, because he loved me. I lucked out. We were married in 2014 and we

were so lucky to share almost 11 years together.

Four years ago, Mike started having a wide range of serious health issues. I became his caregiver. Last year we moved into a house with my middle daughter. Our multigenerational home was just what we needed to care for each other.

On Jan. 15 we celebrated Christmas with 30 members of our family. It was perfect, we were so lucky all the “grands” were together.

Mike’s luck ran out, but our love lives on.

Michael John Benson died at age 62 on Jan. 19 following a massive stroke. Last month I wrote about finding balance. I never dreamed this month I would be balancing Mike’s death, service, family and grief. I appreciate all the outpouring of support and love. I am very loved, lucky and blessed. And how lucky I have been to have found someone who made saying goodbye so hard.

I wish each of you the blessing of love. Find love in what you do and who you are.

## What to Do if You Receive a RIF Notice: Call NSEA.

Notification Deadline: April 15

APRIL

15

It happens every year: Some K-12 Nebraska teachers receive Reduction in Force (RIF) notices informing them that their teaching contract may not be renewed for the coming year. The statutory deadline for school districts to hand out RIF notices is April 15.

However, thanks to legislation proposed by NSEA years ago, there is a statutory procedure that allows a teacher to ensure that the Reduction in Force process is followed correctly and fairly. In some instances, the process can result in saving the teacher's job.

The best way to deal with a RIF notice is to be prepared. The moment you receive a RIF notice, a countdown begins. To preserve your rights when facing a RIF you must always request a hearing. The hearing must be requested within seven days of receiving the RIF notice (five days for community college faculty). While your situation may never reach an actual hearing, immediately calling NSEA will give you and NSEA's Advocacy department time to determine what steps are in your best interest.

Email a copy of the notice to your NSEA Organizational Specialist. Once a copy of the RIF notice is received at NSEA headquarters, members will be encouraged to request a hearing to preserve their rights.

"The only way to preserve the rights of the teacher affected is to request a hearing. Doing so gives us time to sort out the issues and help the member make the best possible decision on how to proceed," said NSEA Director of Advocacy Isau Metes.

"Teachers receiving settlement or buyout offers in lieu of a hearing should contact the NSEA before agreeing to anything," she added.

If you have questions concerning the RIF process, contact your NSEA Organizational Specialist or Metes by calling 1-800-742-0047.



## Four Reasons to Celebrate in March

NEA's 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.



### 1. NATIONAL READING MONTH

March is National Reading Month! Use NEA's book suggestions to bring Read Across America to your community. Find the complete calendar at [bit.ly/NEA-READ](https://bit.ly/NEA-READ)



### 2. WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

Bring women's history to your readers with selected titles that feature authors, athletes, astronauts and many more influential women. Get the list at [bit.ly/WomensHistory-Booklist](https://bit.ly/WomensHistory-Booklist)



### 3. READ ACROSS AMERICA DAY

Read Across America Day celebrations will be held on March 2. The titles and resources featured by NEA were selected by a committee of educators just like you! Find more at [bit.ly/NEA-READ](https://bit.ly/NEA-READ)



### 4. PI DAY

Circle around to readers and get everyone in on Pi Day fun! Find the specific Pi Day lists at [bit.ly/PiDayBookList](https://bit.ly/PiDayBookList)

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Lisa Moody shares her special Milken Educator Award moment with her students. Moody is a fierce advocate with high expectations for her K-6 special education students, both academically and socially. Photo Credit: Milken Family Foundation

# Omaha Education Association Member Wins Milken Award

Lisa Moody and her special education students gathered in a gym at Jefferson Elementary this January expecting a schoolwide assembly. Instead, Moody, her students and colleagues were joined by local and state dignitaries and the media for the surprise of a lifetime. Moody was presented with a national Milken Educator Award. Sometimes hailed as the "Oscars of Teaching," the national honor from Milken Family Foundation is bestowed upon a select group of K-12 educators across the country for excellence in education. Moody joked that she wasn't surprised there was a Milken winner among her colleagues at Jefferson Elementary, but she was surprised to find out that she was the selected recipient.

"There are 70 individuals in this building that deserve this award. I was waiting to applaud for whoever was called. I think I went a little numb when they announced my name. I didn't believe it," she said.

Milken Educator Awards Vice President Stephanie Bishop, along with Nebraska Deputy Commissioner of Education Dr. Deborah Frison,

presented the award which included an unrestricted \$25,000 cash prize.

"Today we celebrate and honor Lisa for her excellence in instruction and dedication to her students, school and community," said Bishop, who herself is a 2001 Virginia Milken Educator. "Her innovative teaching and deep understanding and compassion for her students make a lasting impact in their lives and the lives of her colleagues. I welcome her to our Milken Educator Network and look forward to her contributions."

### A Unique Perspective

Moody, an Omaha Education Association (OEA) member and K-6 special education teacher, is a fierce advocate and holds high expectations for her students, both academically and socially.

"We all can learn and achieve our goals — it may just take practice to figure out how to make it work. I have that unique perspective, because I've had to do that my whole life," Moody explained.

Born with cerebral palsy, Moody said she's dealt with living in a world that wasn't built for her every day life. It

was a natural fit, Moody said, that she would take this perspective and apply it to her work as an educator.

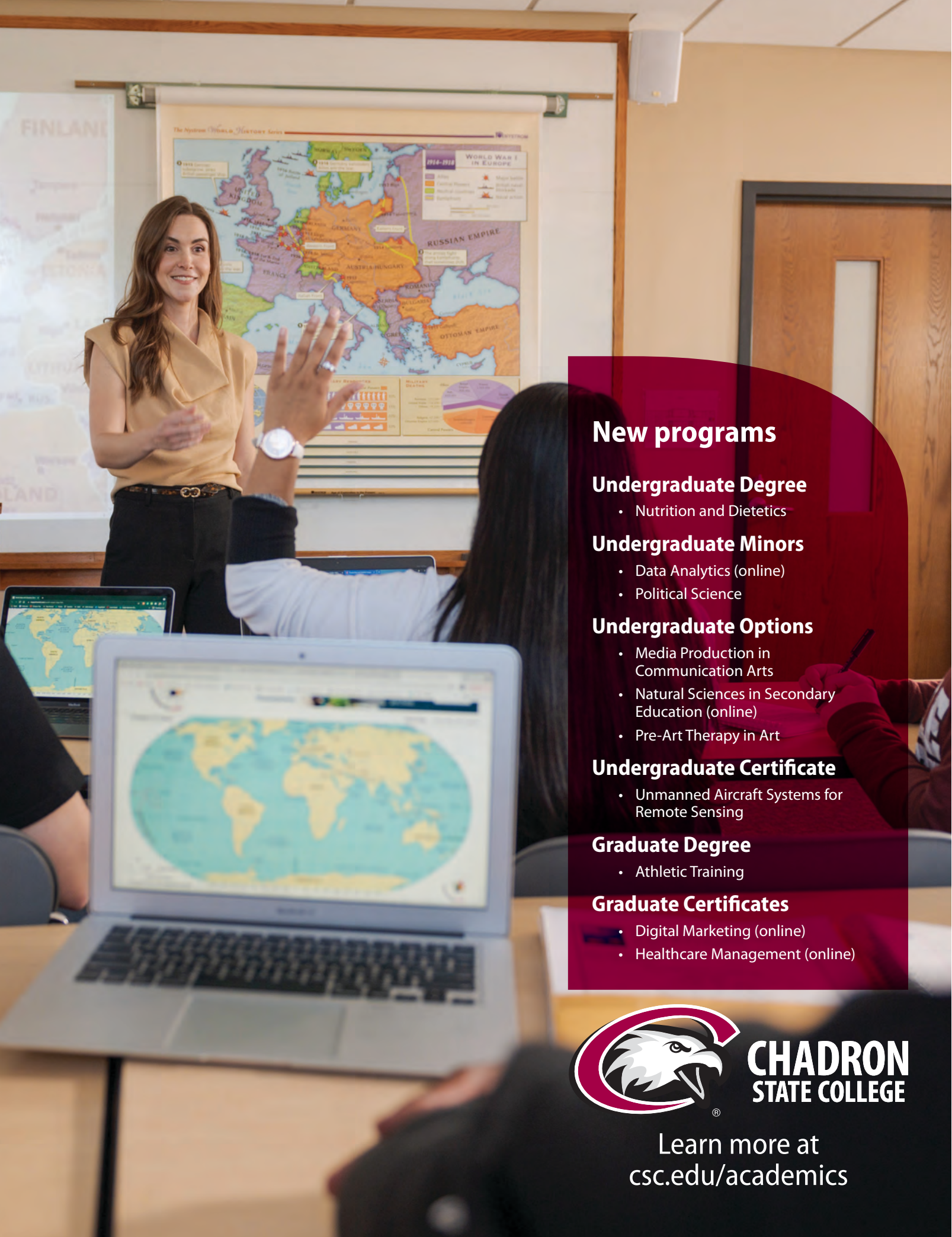
"What better way to serve kids than to work with kids with special needs? I can be a role model and an example of what it's like to keep persevering," she said.

### Inclusive Education

Faced with a shortage of special education teachers at Jefferson, Moody spearheaded a new hybrid, inclusive education program, mainstreaming students in her Alternate Curriculum Program into general education classrooms. Special education students learn basic social skills in the classroom while working with Moody on academic subjects and life skills. The program has now expanded to several schools throughout the district.

Milken Educator Awards inspire and uplift with the unique stories of educators making a profound difference for students, colleagues and communities.

"Teaching is the best job in the world. It's the hardest job in the world," said Moody. "It's also really rewarding."



## New programs

### Undergraduate Degree

- Nutrition and Dietetics

### Undergraduate Minors

- Data Analytics (online)
- Political Science

### Undergraduate Options

- Media Production in Communication Arts
- Natural Sciences in Secondary Education (online)
- Pre-Art Therapy in Art

### Undergraduate Certificate

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### Graduate Degree

- Athletic Training

### Graduate Certificates

- Digital Marketing (online)
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Left: McKenna Rogers scuba dives in a microgravity simulation exercise to learn how NASA astronauts train for space. Center: NASA Nebraska Space Ambassador Pam Petersen stands in front of a NASA sculpture. Right: Katie Hammond (left) and McKenna Rogers (right) inside the Johnson Space Center.

# SUPPORT FOR SCIENCE: Members push to make STEM more accessible to all students

McKenna Rogers was two years into earning a pre-med degree when she realized she wanted to be inside a classroom.

"I knew I liked science, and I knew I liked helping people," McKenna said. "At the time, I was coaching and mentoring and I loved doing that. It didn't click until halfway through my sophomore year that I should probably switch my major to education and teaching."

McKenna was student teaching with Katie Hammond's 8th grade science class at Mickle Middle School when she discovered a love for space.

"I have a passion for science but the way I learned about space when I was growing up was through a textbook," she explained. "Watching how Katie taught space and finding my passion for it as a student teacher is an example of how a great teacher can affect your life."

McKenna and Katie are now both full-time educators at Mickle Middle School. They teach 7th and 8th grade science—which encompasses a space science curriculum. This February both women attended the Space

Exploration Educators Conference (SEEC) at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas, thanks to grant money provided by both the Lincoln Education Association (LEA) and the National Education Association (NEA). The pair received the Barbara Buckingham Patrons scholarship worth \$2,000 last May through the LEA Foundation.

The Space Exploration Educators Conference offers educators of all disciplines a three-day learning experience based in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

"We're trying to bring back the latest and newest advancements in space science back into the classroom for students," Katie explained. "If we don't stay on top of the science to be able to educate our students, we're doing them a disservice when they leave our classroom. We want them to see where the science is now and show them where it's going because they'll be the next generation leading advancements in STEM careers."

Grant money provided through their membership with LEA will give

McKenna and Katie a leg-up on the evolving science. Their use of NASA-backed professional development has enabled them to create their own educational approach to inspire their students.

"I do see the wide eyes in my classroom when they're engaged with our projects. I'm still very early in my career but I hope I'm making an impact on my students," McKenna explained.

With nine years in the classroom, Katie can already see the impact she's had on her students.

"I recently had a parent of a former student of mine tell me that after taking my class she opted into engineering classes in high school and one of the things she's figuring out now is if aerospace engineering might be something she wants to pursue in college," Katie said.

## INSPIRED EDUCATORS

Pam Petersen was in high school when she first envisioned that she could have a successful career in science. Pam, a Blair Education Association member and 20-year veteran teacher in Nebraska, was able to do research



Lincoln Education Association members McKenna Rogers (left) and Katie Hammond (right) tour Apollo Mission Control in Houston, Texas.



Blair Education Assoc. member Pam Petersen tries on a NASA astronaut suit.

at UNMC as a Nebraska high school student. She also had the opportunity to work as an educational intern at NASA's Kennedy Space Center for two summers. Pam has been a NASA Nebraska Space Ambassador for the last 10 years and is a NASA Fellowship coach. The fellowship is a pilot program for college freshmen and sophomores trying to build the STEM pipeline for industry.

Pam's work goes beyond just her own classroom, she was part of the inaugural class of the Nebraska Department of Education's STEM fellows and most recently testified on behalf of NSEA in support of LB787.

### STEM Vs. STEEM

LB787 would adopt the STEEM Development Act for Nebraska. STEEM is the acronym for Science, Technology, Engineering, Entrepreneurship and Mathematics.

"Nebraska must address the issues with availability," Pam told the Education Committee in February. "In my experience, STEEM is not available to all our students. Typically, STEEM programs are expensive--requiring resources, costly supplies, and, of course, qualified teachers."

As Nebraska grapples with teacher shortages, Pam encouraged lawmakers to act now to address

issues of availability in public schools so all students have access to STEEM curriculum.

"Another trend I see is that some programs are only for high-ability students as a way to challenge students," she said. "These students aren't always the ones with the best problem-solving abilities. How can we provide opportunities for students in a real-world, meaningful way so students feel confident to pursue careers in these areas?"

### GAME-BASED LEARNING

NSEA supports LB787's goal of putting STEEM into the hands of all Nebraska middle and high school students.

Provisions in the bill provide a way to introduce the materials by immersing students in STEEM using gamification.

The game-based learning platform outlined in LB787 has many benefits, and Pam believes it could engage students more effectively than traditional coursework.

**"STEEM is not available to all students. Programs are expensive requiring resources, costly supplies and, of course, qualified teachers."**

— Pam Petersen, Blair Education Assoc.

"This engagement leads to higher retention in learning as well as instant feedback and reinforcement," Pam said.

Katie and McKenna use a similar feedback-reinforcement approach in their own classrooms.

"We give them a problem and we have them work through how they will solve

it. We're not frontloading vocabulary. We're not giving them the answers. We're asking our students to think critically about how to solve it," said Katie.

The ultimate goal for NSEA members—especially those teaching STEM—is to provide opportunities to empower students to be creators, thinkers, problem solvers, doers, innovators and to become passionate about learning.

"Even if it's one student we've been able to inspire to spark a passion for science that's huge as an educator," McKenna said.



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# NSEA TEAM MEETS CONGRESSMEN



Leaders on Capitol Hill: (left to right) NSEA Board member Robin Ankrom, NEA Director Linda Freye, U.S. Congressman Mike Flood, NSEA President Jenni Benson and NEA Director Edward Ventura.

## NSEA governance meet with elected officials in Washington, D.C.

NSEA leaders met with Nebraska's congressional delegation in Washington, D.C. in February to lobby for federal legislation that supports public education, educators and creates opportunity for all students.

NSEA President Jenni Benson, NEA Directors Edward Ventura and Linda Freye and NSEA Board member Robin Ankrom met with U.S. Congressman Mike Flood and Representative Don Bacon while lobbying on Capitol Hill.

The NSEA leaders discussed challenges facing students, educators, and communities—including the nationwide staff shortages in public schools.

Rep. Flood represents Nebraska's First Congressional District, which is comprised of ten counties and two split counties in east central Nebraska, and includes Norfolk, Lincoln, Fremont and Bellevue.

Rep. Bacon is in his fourth term serving the Second Omaha-based Congressional District.



Leaders on Capitol Hill: (left to right) NEA Directors Edward Ventura and Linda Freye with U.S. Congressman Don Bacon and NSEA Board member Robin Ankrom.

## OVER 45? GET SCREENED

Colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer among Nebraskans. Early detection saves lives, so doctors recently lowered the recommended screening age from 50 to 45.

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Health benefits for EHA are provided by Blue Cross and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska, an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.



# LEGISLATURE

## VOICES IN EDUCATION: NSEA members testify before lawmakers

### THE TAX SCHEME LOOPHOLE

LB753, a school privatization bill introduced by Sen. Lou Ann Linehan was advanced from committee last week and is expected to be debated by the full Legislature sometime in the next few weeks. The NSEA strongly opposes this tax scheme that would divert public dollars to pay for private school tuition and circumvent the state constitution prohibition against such funding.

The proposed tax scheme is an attempt to create a loophole around the Nebraska State Constitution. The Constitution prohibits the direct funding of private K-12 schools with state public dollars. LB753 allows corporations and taxpayers to take 50% of their state tax liability and divert it to a “scholarship granting organization (SGO)” which would then use those tax dollars to pay K-12 private school tuition.

For example, under LB753, a taxpayer owing the state \$3,000, could pay \$1,500 to an SGO and \$1,500 to the Department of Revenue to cover their tax liability. The taxpayer has still paid \$3,000 with or without the tax scheme. There is no economic incentive to make a charitable donation as would be the case with a regular tax deduction or tax credit, which would incentivize a taxpayer



**Tax Scheme Would Fail Kids:** Testifying for NSEA in opposition to LB753 in February, Tim Royers, 2016 Nebraska Teacher of the Year and president of the Millard Education Association, presented research showing that every time a state adopts a large-scale privatization program, it fails to deliver for kids.



**LB753 Would Siphon Funds from Public Schools:** Former LEA President and current NSEA-Retired member Rita Bennett testified against LB753. The growth provisions in LB 753 mean it would progressively eat larger and larger chunks of the state’s revenue, taking needed funding away from Nebraska’s public schools.

to donate such giving to a student’s 529 Plan to save money for college.

Proponents claim that the \$1,500 tax liability paid to the SGO instead of the state are not public funds because the actual dollars never reach the state treasury for deposit into the General Fund. So, the tax scheme is constructed to divert the money away from the state before it can “technically” become a public dollar. The Nebraska Constitution Art. VII, Sec. 11 is clear that public funds shall not be used to fund private schools:

*"Notwithstanding any other provision in the Constitution, appropriation of public funds shall not be made to any school or institution of learning not owned or exclusively controlled by the state or a political subdivision thereof; Provided, that the Legislature may provide that the state or any political subdivision thereof may contract with institutions not wholly owned or controlled by the state or any political subdivision to provide for educational or other services for the benefit of children under the age of twenty-one years who are handicapped, as that term is from time to time defined by the Legislature, if such services are nonsectarian in nature..."*



**Voices in Education:** NSEA Ethnic/Minority Affairs (EMAC) Committee Vice Chair and Millard Education Association member Christina Running Hawk Ellison testified in support of Sections 6 and 7 of LB277. These specific sections authorize the wearing of tribal regalia by certain students.

This bill is not about scholarships or helping children out of poverty. It is about circumventing the Nebraska State Constitution and defunding public schools. If this loophole is created, it would set a precedent for the creation of other such loopholes to get around “inconvenient” provisions of our state constitution.

### **WHY ARE VOUCHER TAX SCHEMES HARMFUL?**

They funnel tax dollars away from our already-underfunded public schools and children and give those public funds to private schools. Research shows that school vouchers do not improve students' academic performance and they fail to accommodate and support disabled and special-needs students.

LB753 is expensive. The first-year limit on the total amount of vouchers is \$25 million, and the cost to Nebraska's general fund is likely to grow exponentially, as it has in other states, to nearly \$250 million a year in just ten years. These tax credits benefit corporations and the wealthy while shifting the burden of funding critical programs and services to less affluent taxpayers. Although proponents of school privatization promise the state will see a savings, such savings have not been realized in other states. Studies that claim to have found savings are based on assumptions—not on actual data—about how many students left public schools. Many—if not most—students who would receive scholarships would attend private

schools without such state funding, and the number of those who transfer is too nominal to have any impact on public schools' expenses.

### **KEEP PUBLIC DOLLARS FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS FOR ALL KIDS**

**The Bottom Line:** LB753 would hurt Nebraska's public schools and the students who attend them.

The tax dollars siphoned off to pay for this scheme would otherwise be available to fund our public schools and other state priorities like public health and safety, and other essential public services. Nebraska already consistently ranks nearly last in the nation for state support of K-12 education and, as a result, has some of the highest property taxes in the country. Legislators who care about kids must prioritize fully staffing and funding the K-12 schools that serve nine out of ten kids in Nebraska by investing more state funding in public education - not diverting millions of dollars to a system we've never funded before.

### **PROHIBIT DISCRIMINATION IF PUBLIC FUNDS RECEIVED**

**LB487**, introduced by Senator Megan Hunt of Omaha, would prohibit any school in Nebraska which receives public funds from discriminating based on race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, citizen status, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, or special education status.

All students in Nebraska have the right to an education



**Funding for Public Education:** NSEA Collective Bargaining Specialist Jen Dubas and NSEA member Ben Welsch testified in opposition to the "lids on kids" in LB589, the School District Property Tax Limitation Act.



**LB294:** Lincoln Education Association member Matt Erb testified in support of LB294, which would adopt the Child Tax Credit Act. Erb also testified in support LB295, which would expand the Earned Income Tax Credit.

and each student should be able to choose which school is the right fit for them and their families regardless of their race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, citizen status, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, or special education status. Schools receiving public dollars should not choose which students get to be educated in their buildings and which students do not.

The NSEA supports LB487 because it will not allow any school in Nebraska, public or private, to receive public funds if they discriminate. They cannot discriminate based upon the prohibited categories on who may attend their school; cannot discriminate on the education a student receives; and cannot discriminate on how a student is treated.

NSEA's vision is a great public education for every student. We value equal access to a quality education that is adequately and equitably funded. We value diversity as being vital to the education process and integral in preparing students to function as productive, responsible citizens in society.



**LB641:** NSEA-Retired President De Tonack testified in support of LB641, which would phase out state taxation on Social Security benefits. Tonack said that health care cost increases will claim a significant slice of retirees' Social Security cost-of-living adjustment. She urged senators to vote to advance the bill with the borrowed tagline "Git-R-Done."

## BILLS INTRODUCED ON NSEA'S BEHALF

**LB198** – Introduced by Sen. McDonnell, this bill would provide for a return to work and authorize contributions under the School Employees Retirement Act and the Class V School Employees Retirement Act.

**LB519** – Introduced by Fremont Sen. Lynn Walz, LB519 would eliminate certification fees for teaching certificates, change provisions of the Excellence in Teaching Act, and adopt the Student Teaching Assistance Act.

**LB585** – Introduced by Sen. Jana Hughes, LB585 would address school safety, changing duties of the state school security director and would require behavioral mental health training for certain personnel.

**LB724** – Introduced by Sen. Tony Vargas, this bill would eliminate certain basic skill and content test requirements for eligibility for teaching certificates.

## VOICES FOR EDUCATION

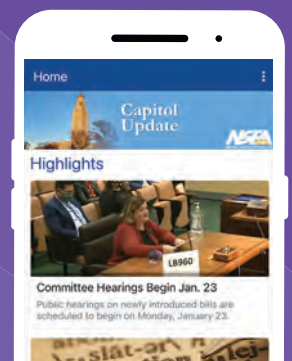
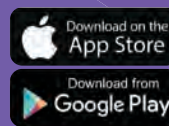
Members and staff will meet with senators to share the stories of our educators and testify on proposed legislation with the goal of supporting Nebraska's public schools. If you or someone you know is interested in testifying, contact NSEA Government Relations Associate Cathy Schapmann at [cathy.schapmann@nsea.org](mailto:cathy.schapmann@nsea.org) or by calling (402) 475-7611.



**Voices for Education:** Kate Regler, Lincoln, testified in support of LB762, the Nebraska Teacher Apprenticeship Program introduced by Sen. Wendy DeBoer.

## Download the NSEA Capitol Update App!

- Receive alerts and calls-to-action during the legislative session.
- Stay up-to-date on events and education news from the Nebraska Legislature.



Search NSEA Capitol Update



**Voices for Education:** Lincoln Education Association President Deb Rasmussen testified in support of LB585, which would require behavioral and mental health training. LB585 expands the curriculum of the mandated one-hour training to include not just suicide prevention, but also adds identification of early warning signs and symptoms of behavioral and mental health issues in students.



**Voices in Education:** Tim Royers, Millard, and Nora Lenz, Lincoln, testified in opposition to LB374, a so-called "Parents Bill of Rights/ Transparency Act" introduced by Sen. Dave Murman. Royers also testified in support of LB71, which modifies provisions relating to parental involvement in and access to learning materials in schools, introduced by Sen. Rita Sanders.



**Voices in Education:** Stephanie Howell, Lincoln, testified in support of LB520, which would change provisions relating to high school graduation requirements and academic content standards and the Computer Science and Technology Education Act.



**Voices in Education:** Jared Wagenknecht, Omaha, testified in support of LB507, which would change provisions relating to truancy. The bill would help keep youth out of the criminal justice system and address the daunting crisis of student absenteeism.

## What's going on in the legislature?

Nebraska's 108th Legislature convened on January 4, 2023. The 90-day session will include consideration of a wide range of bills that would affect Nebraska public schools, students and staff.

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 legislative action.

The NSEA's Government Relations team monitors legislative activities and advocates for the best interests of our members, students and public education. Legislative bills change quickly throughout the session, and NSEA works to keep you in the loop about how your job as an educator or education support professional may be affected.

Stay up-to-date with legislative decisions that affect public education. Receive 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](http://www.nsea.org/subscriber).

# Greater Nebraska Mini-Conference

NSEA members gather for a half-day conference

More than fifty NSEA local association leaders, members, staff and governance met in Kearney in February for a mini conference.

NSEA members from 20 area local associations participated in a retirement planning seminar and heard from NEA Member Benefits Specialist Susan Estes. NSEA President Jenni Benson provided the keynote address and encouraged members to share their stories of the great work they are doing in their districts. NSEA Executive Committee members also attended the event.

The half-day conference was a preview of the July 17-19, 2023, NSEA U, which will also be held in Kearney at the Younes Conference Center.

Watch *The Voice* and [NSEA.org](https://www.nsea.org) for more information in the coming weeks.



Greater Nebraska Mini-conference: NSEA Executive Committee members, seen here, joined NSEA staff and members from 20 area locals for the half-day conference held in Kearney this February.

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**Join us for**  
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**July 17-19, 2023**  
**at the**  
**Younes Conference**  
**Center in Kearney**



**Higher Education Sessions Planned for NSEA U 2023**

NSEA members will have an opportunity to hear remarks from special guest Scott J. Norby at NSEA U this summer. The three-day conference will be held in Kearney at the Younes Conference Center, July 17-19, 2023.

**Norby to Present**

Norby is set to present during the morning general session on Tuesday morning, July 18. As legal counsel to the NSEA, Norby has represented the Association, its members and affiliates in member rights, professional negotiations, and legislative and organizational matters for more than 40 years.

He has appeared on behalf of the Association, its members, and affiliates in all of Nebraska's counties in a wide variety of legal matters. Norby has been recognized by his peers in "Best Lawyers" for more than 12 years, and his law firm, Norby & Welding LLP, is recognized in "Best Law Firms" in education law.



**Scott Norby**

**Keynote Announced**

NSEA members will hear remarks from special guest Dr. Donna Beegle. She is set to present the lunchtime keynote address on Wednesday, July 19. Dr. Beegle will share her journey from growing up in generational poverty to eventually earning her doctorate in Educational Leadership.

Dr. Beegle will give an insider perspective on what works to improve outcomes for students living the crisis of poverty.

**Topics to look for at NSEA U**

Surveys conducted by NSEA show that finding ways to help students living in poverty is a top concern for many educators. Topics at NSEA U are expected to cover issues such as poverty, social justice, leadership, educator wellness, advocacy and more. Sessions will be held during the mornings and afternoons of July 17 and 18, and in the morning on July 19.

This summer's NSEA U will feature special sessions specifically designed for Higher Education members.

Informational sessions have been planned to keep higher education members up to date on everything happening in the state, region, and nation. Among the topics to be discussed will be:

- Bargaining Strategies: Table Strategy and Beyond
- Grassroots Organizing in Your Local
- Local Leaders Share: Overcoming Barriers
- Year-round Organizing in Higher Education
- Academic Freedom in Higher Education

If you have a proposal for a professional development session that would be useful to your association colleagues, please complete the RFP form at [www.nsea.org/NSEAU](http://www.nsea.org/NSEAU).

**Looking for more information? Visit [NSEA.org/NSEAU](http://NSEA.org/NSEAU)**

# School Retirement Planning Seminars Dates Set

If you are nearing retirement age, it makes good sense to start considering your retirement benefit options.

To learn about those options, staff from the Nebraska Public Employees Retirement Systems office will offer seminars throughout the spring.

Educators can choose to attend an in-person seminar at one of nine locations across the state or join a virtual webinar.

The seminars are for school plan members and their spouses, age 50 and over. Each eligible employee is entitled to receive leave with pay to attend up to two retirement planning programs (one per fiscal year).

NPERS officials indicate that according to state law "...leave with pay shall mean a day off paid by the employer and shall not mean vacation, sick, personal or compensatory time."

School retirement plan members may choose to attend a retirement seminar more than twice, but such leave beyond the second seminar will be at the employee's expense and at the

discretion of the administrator.

The seminars are scheduled at locations across the state. Members must enroll in advance to attend at [npers.ne.gov](http://npers.ne.gov).

If you have questions on seminar scheduling, contact NPERS Education Services department at [npers.seminars@nebraska.gov](mailto:npers.seminars@nebraska.gov) or call 402-471-9671.



In-Person Seminars (Location/Dates)	1/2 Day Webinars
<b>LA VISTA:</b> March 22, April 12, April 13, May 23, May 24	March 1
<b>LINCOLN:</b> March 14, March 15, March 16, May 17, May 18	March 23
<b>GERING:</b> March 7	April 4
<b>NORTH PLATTE:</b> March 8	April 5
<b>MCCOOK:</b> March 28	April 25
<b>KEARNEY:</b> March 29, March 30	April 26
<b>O'NEILL:</b> April 18	May 25
<b>NORFOLK:</b> April 19	June 6
<b>GRAND ISLAND:</b> May 9	June 7



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# Save with Exclusive Member Offers in March



The NEA Discount Marketplace, powered by Rakuten, enables members to earn cash back when they shop and save on brand-name merchandise from more than 3,500 top retailers and online stores. Check out the following member-exclusive deals in March and search more retailers at [neamb.com/marketplace](https://neamb.com/marketplace):

### H&R Block

With H&R Block's DIY tax software, you can complete your taxes at your own pace. Pick the plan that meets your needs and get started today. Plus, members earn extra cash back!

### Shiseido Skincare

Feel your best with Shiseido! Members receive extra cash back, plus freebies and special deals.

### JCPenney

Explore great deals on the essentials for your home at JCPenney. Check out the latest sales plus earn extra cash back as a member.

### PetSmart

Pamper your pet with food, treats, toys, and accessories from PetSmart! Members earn extra cash back.

### TurboTax

Get your taxes done right and your maximum refund guaranteed with TurboTax. Get free live help from tax experts, including a final review before you file. Members earn extra cash back!

## Live for Today and Prepare for Tomorrow

### Consider this...

Women in the U.S. currently control about one-third of total household financial assets. Women also face unique challenges that can put them at a greater level of financial risk than men.

On average, women outlive men by 12.5 years, exposing them to the effects of greater retirement needs, rising health care costs and inflation. Here are four things women can do now to make their money work for them.

### 1. Manage Your Money

Think about how you spend your money today and create a budget. Start by determining your net income. Then calculate your monthly expenses, including money you want to save, and create a financial plan for your future.

### 2. Establish Good Credit

Gone are the days when people carried lots of cash to pay for

purchases. Instead, we reach for the convenience of credit cards, which can help establish a good credit history and credit score when managed properly.

Credit scores affect whether you can get credit, the amount of credit a lender will give you and the interest they will charge you. You can get your free credit report once every 12 months at [annualcreditreport.com](https://annualcreditreport.com). This is the only website authorized to fill orders for the free annual credit report you are entitled to by law.

### 3. Protect What You Have

Even if you don't have a partner or children, if someone depends on you financially, you may want to consider some type of life insurance, and employer-provided coverage may not be enough. You buy life insurance based on your age and your health, so buying it when you're young and healthy typically makes it less expensive than when you're older.

### 4. Put Extra Money Away

How much money do you need for retirement? Experts say you will need around 80% of your pre-retirement income. This percentage is based on being able to eliminate certain expenses in retirement.

Here are some key elements to understanding where you are in reaching your retirement goals:

- Know how your state teachers' retirement system works.
- Consider a supplemental retirement savings vehicle to make up the difference between what your pension will cover and where you want to be.
- Review you and your partner's retirement plans regularly.

To review your current retirement strategy, life insurance needs or any other questions you may have, contact your Horace Mann representative. Find your representative at [horacemann.com/locator](https://horacemann.com/locator).



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TRISH GUINAN

# Message from the Executive Director

## Offering Help

During my time as a math teacher, I would always make myself available to help students before and after school. I'm an early riser, so I was always in my classroom before the first bell rang. I was also a coach, so I would be there long after the last bell rang. I encouraged my students to stop by my classroom to ask questions. I wanted them to understand that it was OK to ask for help. But knowing help is available and asking for help are very different concepts. Sometimes it's easy to forget that asking for help can feel awkward. It can trigger anxiety in students and adults. Sometimes this anxiety can create barriers to receiving help.

## Asking for Help Can Be Difficult

I recently received an email from a local leader praising the work of NSEA Children's Fund Coordinator Karen Hunt. This district leader explained that a member who had recently used the NSEA Children's Fund for the first time was so elated by the ease of utilizing the fund—and receiving help for a student who needed it—it had triggered a chain reaction of joy in the district. As it was detailed in the email, "we have a teacher that has had a very challenging year get a well-needed energy bump and a grandmother who is 'over the moon' grateful and a positive story regarding NSEA that will resonate throughout our buildings for days to come." Apparently, this member had been hesitant to call NSEA to ask for help in assisting their student, but after speaking with Karen they were overjoyed.

## NSEA Children's Fund

Educators are some of the most giving individuals. It's well-known that teachers will reach into their own pockets to cover the cost of school supplies or to help students and their families. But a teacher can't assist every child they encounter during the school day, much less during the school year.

It's why NSEA created the Children's Fund in 1994. Donations to the Children's Fund have provided hundreds of thousands of dollars to help children in need. It has helped to pay for glasses, warm clothing, medical and dental needs of children; provide assistance to a family whose home and belongings were destroyed by fire; purchase a bus ticket for a child with no other means to get to school; and more.

## Help is Here—Just Ask

Since September, the NSEA Children's Fund has completed 150 requests from members. All requests remain anonymous and there is never red tape or a lengthy delay for members wanting to use the fund. Help through the NSEA Children's Fund is available to your students, you just need to ask. A call to Karen Hunt at NSEA (800-742-0047) is usually all that is needed. We encourage you to call with any questions you may have about accessing the fund because as the local leader put in their email, "the magic of helping through the NSEA Children's Fund has consequences far beyond serving the child."

## Your Contributions

The Children's Fund relies purely on donations from members, from local associations and from outside donors who understand the need and see the Children's Fund as a just cause. 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 brainstorm fundraising ideas; to challenge other local associations; to collect change; host a jeans day fundraiser; or consider other ways to contribute toward the fund. To make donations easier, the Children's Fund can accept donations through PayPal. Find the PayPal link and more information about the NSEA Children's Fund at: [www.nsea.org/childrensfund](http://www.nsea.org/childrensfund)

“

**Sometimes it's easy to forget that asking for help can feel awkward. It can trigger anxiety in students and adults. Sometimes this anxiety can create barriers to receiving help.**

”



# NSEA-Retired Spring Conference

APRIL

27

The NSEA-Retired spring conference will be at the Lauritzen Gardens in Omaha, on Thursday, April 27. The program will include a presentation by James Locklear titled, "More Than Just a Pretty Place: The Conservation Vision of Lauritzen Gardens." Following Locklear's presentation, participants will be taken on a full tour of the gardens and conservatory. After lunch, attendees will hear from Karen Gettert Shoemaker, author of the novel "The Meaning of Names." She is the recipient of a Nebraska Center for the Book Award for Fiction, two Independent Artist Fellowships from the Nebraska Arts Council, and a Nebraska Press Award for Feature Writing. Shoemaker will talk about the stories emanating from the pandemic challenges. NEA-Retired Director Todd Crenshaw will also speak to attendees on grant opportunities. The event is free for all members and \$10 for guests. Registration and refreshments will begin at 8:30 a.m. To register, go to [nsea.org/retired](https://nsea.org/retired) and select Calendars, Events & Registrations.

Deadline for registrations is April 17.



Meet Danielle Schneider!  
Special Education Teacher

Schneider is one of 19 new teachers who applied for and received a \$200 dues grant provided by NSEA-Retired!



## Weather Cancels NSEA-Retired Meeting



Kim Clabaugh views exhibits at the Nebraska High School Sports Hall of Fame.

Lincoln Education Association-Retired missed their regular January meeting due to weather but several gathered later in the month for lunch followed by a visit to the Nebraska High School Sports Hall of Fame in Lincoln, hosted by Mike Rasmussen. More information can be found at [nebhhalloffame.org](https://nebhhalloffame.org).

Have an article idea for the NSEA-Retired Advocate or the NSEA Voice magazine? Send your idea to Dr. De Tonack at [dtonack@neb.rr.com](mailto:dtonack@neb.rr.com)



VOTE

John Heineman

- ✓ NSEA-Retired President
- ✓ NSEA-Retired RA Delegate

# Finding My Voice

by Lisa Fricke

I remember when I first felt the power of our united voice. I was at a Nebraska State Education Association (NSEA) government relations training in 1976. I was a fairly new teacher and union member, and the words of a trainer have stuck in my mind to this day.

Teachers often say they “aren’t political,” he noted, but they need to understand that every education decision that politicians make affects their classrooms.

I took this message to heart. And through trainings like these, I’ve learned that educators need to collaborate on political issues in order to improve public education.

I held several positions over the years where I could influence political activity, including chair of the NSEA Government Relations Committee. I also met with political leaders and testified on critical education issues. This experience launched me into a new role in 1992, when a personal issue became political.

I was frustrated by the penalties my husband and I incurred when we borrowed from our IRA to help pay for our son’s college expenses. I felt others likely faced a similar problem. And for some young people, this law could dash their dreams of going to college.

I discussed the issue with NSEA leaders, and they encouraged me to run for election as an at-large delegate to the NEA Representative Assembly. I went for it—and I won! And, in front of about 5,000 delegates, I presented my resolution, which would make it a priority for NEA to advocate for changing this harmful law.

I was scared to death, but with the confidence I had gained from my union work, I apparently made a persuasive argument. The delegation approved the resolution, and with



Lisa Fricke is an NSEA-Retired member who taught in Nebraska public schools for 36 years. She was elected to the Nebraska State Board of Education in 2016, where she continues to advocate for educators and students.

NEA’s lobbying efforts in Washington, in partnership with others, Congress eventually voted to change the law.

I now serve on the Nebraska State Board of Education, working on equity and inclusion, early childhood education, and state standards, among other issues. My understanding of politics has given me the self-assurance to testify at legislative hearings and speak to constituents and legislators. It has allowed me to have a voice where it really matters.



**VOTE**



**Patsy Koch Johns**

-  NSEA-Retired Capitol District Director
-  NSEA-Retired DA Delegate
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## Speaking of Education

"The world seldom notices who the teachers are, but civilizations depend on what they do and what they say."

— Anonymous/Unknown

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

## Getting Down to Business

At the mic: NSEA President Jenni Benson addresses members during the April 2022 Delegate Assembly.



The 2023 April Delegate Assembly will be held as an in-person gathering April 28-29 at Lincoln's Marriott Cornhusker Hotel. The Delegate Assembly is NSEA's annual business meeting. Any member in good standing can seek election to attend and participate. Friday night will include the Call to Order, a keynote address, a message from NSEA President Jenni Benson and Executive Director Trish Guinan, and reports from committees.

On Saturday, delegates will consider proposed changes to Association Bylaws and Resolutions and approve dues for the 2023-24 Association year. They will also elect an NEA Director. Two candidates, Nora Lenz of Lincoln and Renae Noble of Chadron, filed to run for NEA Director by the deadline. One candidate, Paul Schulte, has filed to serve as the NSEA Vice

President. NSEA bylaws state that, "if the number of candidates equals the number of positions they are elected." Schulte will be declared officially elected at Delegate Assembly. Awards honoring members and friends of public education also will be given on Saturday.

Any candidate wishing to have campaign material included in the DA materials must submit that request to Executive Director Trish Guinan by 11:59 p.m. on March 15. Send to [trish.guinan@nsea.org](mailto:trish.guinan@nsea.org).

Proposed Bylaw changes also must be submitted by March 15 and will be published online 30 days prior to DA, as well as in the April Voice. Proposed Resolutions and New Business Items are due by April 14. These may be submitted online at [www.nsea.org/da](http://www.nsea.org/da).

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Important Delegate Assembly Dates to Remember!



MARCH

12-21

Voting for Cluster Delegates

MARCH

15

Proposed Bylaws submission deadline

MARCH

15

Campaign material request deadline

April

14

Proposed Resolutions and New Business Items are due

April

28-29

2023 April Delegate Assembly