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## **Nebraska Loves Public Schools Honored as NSEA 2015 Friend of Education**

*Annual meeting of NSEA members also calls for legislative study and action on class size*

Lincoln – The Nebraska State Education Association has named Nebraska Loves Public Schools as its 2015 Friend of Education. The award is the Association’s highest honor and was presented at the NSEA’s 154th Delegate Assembly on Saturday.

The nearly 300 teachers and education support professionals attending the assembly applauded the Nebraska Loves Public Schools organization for its work to tell the good stories about what goes on in Nebraska public schools.

Nebraska Loves Public Schools has dedicated itself to a campaign that presents the issues facing students and public schools in Nebraska and around the country. Through videos, it shares these stories and, to date, has created thousands of hours of footage, nearly three dozen short films and nearly a dozen television shows. The films have been recognized by the Webby Awards and nominated as an official selection for the PovertyCure International Short Film Festival.

“Thank you so much for this honor. This is our Academy Award,” said Sally Nelson Barrett, Director of Loves Public Schools, as she accepted the award on behalf of the organization.

The videos and other work of Nebraska Loves Public Schools can be seen at <http://nelovesps.org/>

### **Teaching Excellence, Rookie, and Educational Support Professional Also Honored**

Also honored at the assembly were Lewiston Public Schools special education teacher Devin Garcia, who was named the Association’s 2015 Rookie of the Year. Lincoln Public Schools kindergarten teacher Linda Freye, was chosen as the 2015 Teaching Excellence Award winner. South Sioux City’s Jeri Bowman was named Educational Support Professional of the Year, and the Office of Multicultural Affairs at the University of Nebraska-Kearney received the Great Plains Milestone Award.

### **Larger Class Sizes a Concern**

Delegates attending the assembly voted overwhelmingly to ask state lawmakers to study the issue of class size and consider financial incentives for school districts to keep class size at the appropriate student/teacher ratios as recommended by research.

The Legislature repealed incentives in state aid for smaller elementary class size four years ago under the assumption that school districts had already addressed the issue and included funding for lower pupil



teacher ratios in their annual budgets. Tighter budgets in a number of districts have led to higher student-teacher ratios in recent years.

Grand Island teacher Michelle Carter spoke in favor of the call for a study and legislation.

“There are 27 desks crowded into a room that was built for 20,” said Carter, a 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher. “The ‘book nook’ for my students had to go – there is just no room. Other engaging, inspiring educational elements of my classroom had to go. We need to focus on giving our students the individual attention they need to be successful. I cannot do my best for my students with 27 students in my classroom.

“Common sense tells us—and research confirms—that the number of students in a class can make a real difference for students and teachers alike. The proven long-term benefits of reducing class sizes achievement gains and higher graduation rates—should make this a priority for policymakers.”

### **Rookie and Teaching Excellence Winners Named**

NSEA’s 2015 Rookie of the Year, Devin Garcia, teaches science, is Quiz Bowl sponsor, junior class sponsor, head golf coach, assistant football coach and assistant girls’ basketball coach at Lewiston.

Garcia attends workshops and science cadres to better his skills, and he serves on his school district’s technology committee, said colleagues.

NSEA’s 2015 Teaching Excellence honoree, Linda Freye, has taught at Columbus, worked and taught at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, worked for the Nebraska Department of Education developing curriculum and, for the past 17 years, has taught kindergarten at Maxey Elementary School in Lincoln.

Freye is described as “eager and willing to take on leadership roles.” Colleagues say she is a “continual learner and an advocate for the profession and public education. She is the quintessential professional.”

“She understands that the role of a teacher goes far beyond the classroom. She is an excellent advocate for teachers and effective classroom instruction.”

### **Educational Support Professional**

NSEA’s 2015 Educational Support Professional, Jeri Bowman, “brightens the mood of everyone” in South Sioux City’s middle school, said colleagues. The receptionist’s demeanor forces everyone to lighten up, mellow out and realize that “this too shall pass.”

“From assigning student lockers, helping parents and students at school events for the school Facebook page and school newsletter – which she edits – Jeri is a bundle of energy,” said colleagues.

### **Great Plains Milestone Award**

The Great Plains Milestone Award celebrates the development, advancement and protection of human and civil rights.



Nebraska State Education Association  
Nancy Fulton, *President* · Craig R. Christiansen, *Executive Director*

*A member-directed union representing 28,000 public school teachers, faculty and education support professionals across Nebraska.*

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NSEA saluted the Office of Multicultural Affairs at the University of Nebraska-Kearney for its work with UNK students in designing activities, workshops, speakers and other events to promote cultural tolerance and education.

The office invites community members and stakeholders to participate and promote human and civil rights understandings by celebrating the minority cultures of the United States and the challenges they have overcome.

The office has also recruited, guided and even provided scholarships to more than 20 current minority teachers in Nebraska – fulfilling a need that NSEA members certainly understand.

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