

NEW TEACHER HANDBOOK



A resource and survival guide for members of the



Welcome to the Profession



Dear New Teacher,

Welcome to the teaching profession, and to membership in your professional education association.

The word 'profession' is important in the relationship between you and your association. Just as your administration expects you to serve your students in a professional manner each and every day, NSEA is here to serve you, the professional educator, in every way possible.

Your membership includes many benefits – from providing professional support, protecting your income and benefits, to offering discounts at merchants around the state and nation. NSEA does the job, and does it well.

NSEA's 18 UniServ directors meet daily with teachers across the state to provide them with answers and direction in their professional lives. They are here to serve you and help you succeed.

A \$1 million liability policy, which protects you if a civil suit is brought against you as a result of your teaching duties, is also a membership benefit.

Regular use of your NSEA membership discount card can save you more than the cost of membership each year. The NEA Member Benefits program can save you even more, with financial services, credit card offers, investment and insurance programs.

Importantly, NSEA represents you in the political arena, which affects everything you do, everything you learn and everything you earn in the classroom.

You'll get great benefit from joining your professional organization. Thanks for your membership, and have a great year!

Sincerely,

Nancy Fulton, President

Code of Ethics: Preamble

Adopted by the 1975 NEA Representative Assembly

The educator, believing in the worth and dignity of each human being, recognizes the supreme importance of the pursuit of truth, devotion to excellence, and the nurture of democratic principles. Essential to these goals is the protection of freedom to learn and to teach, and the guarantee of equal educational opportunity for all. The educator accepts the responsibility to adhere to the highest ethical standards.

The educator recognizes the magnitude of the responsibility inherent in the teaching process. The desire for the respect and confidence of one's colleagues, of students, of parents, and of members of the community provides the incentive to attain and maintain the highest possible degree of ethical conduct. The Code of Ethics of the Education Profession indicates the aspiration of all educators, and provides standards by which to judge conduct.

The remedies specified by the NEA and/or its affiliates for the violation of any provision of this Code shall be exclusive, and no such provision shall be enforceable in any form other than one specifically designated by the NEA or its affiliates.

Vision Statement

We, the members of the Nebraska State Education Association, believe the purpose of public education is to promote a democratic society. Therefore the following principles guide our union's work.

Our Vision

Our vision is a great public education for every student.

Our Mission

The mission of the Nebraska State Education Association is to advocate for all education professionals, empowering them to provide an excellent public education for every student.

Our Core Values

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 in a democratic society that protects human and civil rights.

We value being accurately-informed activists contributing to the ever-changing system of public education.

We value partnerships that foster excellence, nurture a desire for life-long learning, and create responsible, productive citizens.

We value the expertise of education professionals, and recognize that fair compensation and respect are vital for a quality public education.



Important Contacts

NSEA

Toll Free 800.742.0047
Lincoln 402.475.7611
Fax 402.475.2630
Omaha 402.731.0800
LEA 402.489.7500
MEA 402.731.0400
OEA 402.346.0400

National Education Association

Switchbd. 202.833.4000
Member Benefits 800.637.4636

Teacher Retirement

Toll Free 800.245.5712
In Lincoln 402.471.2053

State Government

Gov. Office 402.471.2244
State Operator 402.471.2311

Nebraska Dept. of Education

Switchbd. 402.471.2295
Certif. 402.471.0739

Insurance Programs

BC/BS (claims) 800.642.6004
Blue Cross/Lincoln 800.562.6394

(Kent Trelford-Thompson; rep.)

Calif. Casualty/A+ 800.346.6840
Horace Mann 800.999.1030

First NE Credit Union 800.882.0244

EHA Advocate
Kurt Genrich
kurt@ehaplan.org 402.217.2042

Get A Good Start

A Tiny Bit of Planning Can Get Your Year Off to a Good Start

Getting your school year off to a great start is important for you and your students. With just a tiny bit of early planning, you can reap huge dividends in your first weeks in the classroom, as well as through the rest of the year.

Each school building is essentially a self-contained community. As such, each is different when it comes to rules, regulations and policies. These tips will help as you plan ahead:



Before School Starts

Introduce yourself: Meet other teachers in your building; they can be of real help. Get to know librarians, counselors, nurses, cafeteria workers and custodians. Get involved in school activities and functions.

Find a mentor: You need a friend, someone who knows the ropes. The best place to start is within your local Association. Be sure to attend the first Association meeting. Don't be afraid to ask for a "buddy."

Find out where: Learn about your building, specifically where to find exits, the principal's office, the gym, the nurse's office, the cafeteria, the supply room, the faculty lounge, media center and restrooms.

Know the rules: Review school policies and procedures, such as opening and closing hours, attendance requirements, fire drill regulations and cafeteria rules. If you plan to teach subject matter that borders on controversy, be sure you're within board policy.

Start a records file: Organize your personal papers. You never know when you'll have to produce a job-related document. Save receipts for items that could provide income tax deductions (see next page).

Get ready: Make sure you have all the materials you need to get school under way: paper, pencils, books and so forth.

Class up your classroom: Decorate your classroom in a manner that will catch the eyes of students while giving them something to think about.

Think about parents: How will you involve parents? Is there a special way to approach parent-teacher conferences? Are there special messages you want to send home to parents?

Develop resources: Start to build a file of information and resources. When help is needed, know where to go, including NSEA: 1-800-742-0047.

Plan well: Create detailed, written lesson plans for the first few days with at least twice as much as you think you'll cover. Know your instructional objectives. Set a detailed schedule with set times for each subject, restroom and lunch breaks.

Learn names: Review class rosters. Students appreciate correct pronunciation.

Prepare for special students: Determine whether you have students with special learning or physical challenges. Plan how to deal with them in the best interests of the student, yourself and the rest of the class. Do you know what to do if you have a student subject to seizures? What about administering medicine?

Be your best: Determine what factors are likely to keep you from doing your job well. Then figure out a way to work around them. For example: How will you deal with too many students in your class? With a wide range of student abilities? With disruptive students?

Support your Association: Join your local Education Association for the moral support of people who understand the complexities of your job.

On the First Day

Introduce yourself: Post a biographical sketch of yourself outside your door. A student may find something in common and be encouraged to strike up a relationship that could be a positive learning experience.

Greet students: Be in your room when students arrive. Have your name on the board. Greet students with a "Good Morning" or "Good Afternoon."

Set rules: For discipline to work, start by establishing class rules at the beginning. Keep the list short and simple. If students help set rules, they'll be more likely to follow them. Post the rules.

Set routines: Establish a system for collecting books and materials, sharpening pencils and entering and leaving the room.

Make a good impression: Give the class the impression from the start that you are well organized. Your students must get the feeling right off that you're prepared and know what you're doing.

Maintain control: Maintain maximum contact with and control over your students; be "ever-present," monitoring and

watching. Handle disruptions promptly.

Get to work: Make opening exercises brief and make the first day of school a real one. A good start yields big dividends later.

For the First Few Weeks

Start slowly: Go over material slowly the first grading period, so that most students can find some success while the material is not too difficult.

Brief your students: At the high school level particularly, let students know early exactly what you expect. Most students rise to the teacher's expectations.

Set a class goal: Develop enthusiasm with a class project such as a holiday project to help a needy family, or a class trip or party at the end of the year. Plan early.

Build class spirit: If you teach elementary youngsters, you might give your class a name such as the "Room Three Bumblebees."

Be realistic: Don't let your sincere concern for each child turn into a depressing experience through a fear of failure. Remember, you will be more successful with some students

than others.

Know your students: Study the records of students to learn their capabilities and problems. Keep a folder for every student and record plenty of observations and grades.

Communicate with parents: Let parents know that you are available to discuss issues and student progress. Tell them how to reach you. Introduce yourself. Include your homework policy.

Look for learning moments: Give yourself a lift by watching for something hopeful. It may be as simple as a student who gives you an indication he or she learned something in the first week of school.

Foster curiosity: Keep in mind that if you want your students to be curious, you have to set an atmosphere that encourages curiosity and doesn't stifle it.

Work to improve: Set your sights on improving your ability in at least one area during the coming year.

Be positive: Send a positive note home with every student. Catch the kids being good!

Three qualities: Keep three qualities of good teaching in mind: be flexible, be patient, and keep a good sense of humor.



Be prepared: File your professional papers

Those veteran teachers down the hall will tell you that the most important file you keep may be the file you keep on yourself!

Every educator should have quick and easy access to a professional papers file with every record, document and note relating to his or her employment.

In case of a problem affecting your position, salary, reputation or financial status, you may be required – on short notice – to produce such documents.

Begin to compile your file by placing your contract in the school employee file folder provided in your NSEA membership packet or in a plain, heavy-duty manila envelope. Then check off the other items listed below as you collect them to save:

- Your teaching certificate and licenses.
- College transcripts.
- Training, technical or vocational certificates.
- Your teaching contract and supple-

mental contracts.

- Letters of appointment/hire. Include a record of your appointment/hire as recorded in the school board minutes.
- Minutes of all board action affecting your contract duties and status.
- Your salary schedule and yearly salary notice as supplied by your employer.
- School-related insurance policies.
- Records relating to retirement benefits.
- Record of accumulated sick leave.
- Current and past teaching schedules and assignments.
- Correspondence from or to school administration.
- Letters of praise or reprimand.
- Resumes of conferences with supervisors.
- All professional evaluations.
- Records of awards, commendations or honors.
- Records of non-college seminars, workshops and conferences you've attended.
- Record of disciplinary techniques and methods used in handling stu-

dent problems (note the dates and witnesses involved).

- Records of assaults, violence or workplace thefts.
- School calendar.
- Brief accounts of parent conferences.
- NSEA's phone number: 1-800-742-0047.

You may also want to review your school's personnel policies, and collect and file any general school policies on discipline, corporal punishment, student suspension, access to school records, etc.

If you have questions about how or where to obtain some of these items, contact your NSEA UniServ director at 1-800-742-0047.



www.nsea.org

Find answers to many of your questions, as well as links and other resources you may find useful!



Build Your Name, Create a Professional Image

First-year teachers come into a school district with no name recognition, no reputation and little if any credibility. So how does a young teacher begin to build a professional reputation?

As with any profession, your behavior and interaction within your work community and your community at large will define your image and polish – or tarnish – your reputation. Your action will also affect the image of your profession and school as a whole.

These ideas are time-tested ways to build your image and reputation. Choose those that will work for you. Adapt them as needed.

One other idea: Get involved in any community projects your local association may initiate. Your visibility builds your recognition and reputation.

do and how much you enjoy it.

5 Each November, send home a list of good books for parents to consider for holiday giving. List a few academic books, but include mostly those that are interesting or entertaining, and at the same time of literary or academic merit as they relate to your teaching area. You might also divide your students' names into lists according to the month of their birthdays. Send home a book gift list the month before each student's birthday, making the distribution a first-of-the-month activity. In May, distribute book lists for those with birthdays in June through September.

6 Assign an essay or paragraph with the topic "The Best Thing About My School Is..." After using samples to discuss form and content, submit three or four of the best to the newspaper, expressing pride in these students' perception of their role as learners.

7 Send home requests for a parent or grandparent to jot (in a space provided on the request sheet) a note about a strong memory or an anecdote from their own lives in reference to a topic being studied in class.

8 Everywhere you go – bowling, shopping or community events – refer with pride to the fact that you teach. Mention frustrations, but temper those remarks: relate how you are trying to have something done about such problems as alcohol and drug use in school, or uncontrolled and excessive absences. Let people know that as a professional you are worried, but that you haven't given up reaching for solutions.

9 Display degrees and certificates. Most professionals have these documents framed on their office walls. It will have a positive effect on students and parents!

10 Let parents know of their child's successes. If parents only hear from you when there is a problem, they transfer those negative feelings to you.

11 Send letters of welcome to new students. When students transfer in, they and their parents often have questions. Put together a survival kit for new students with a Chamber map of the area; locations of favorite student hangouts; dress code (or at what's normal – perhaps a student could write this part); homework expectations; and a list of what has already been covered in each subject.

1 From the first day, let parents know you believe a working partnership with them is best for students.

2 Send messages home about what parents can do to support learning.

3 Give students practical writing experience. Teach students to write letters to community members, then send them. The letters may relate specifics of a class project that ties to a community activity or state an opinion about how young people might be persuaded to participate in community affairs. Students learn how to state a suggestion tactfully and gracefully; how to write with a positive tone; and how to make clear, concise points.

4 In a variation of the 'Grade Ins' made popular by teachers in recent months, carry your work in a folder or a briefcase wherever you go – to the laundromat, the barbershop, the doctor's office. Grade papers while waiting for the bus. You may need every available moment to get your work done, but also look at it as a chance to let patrons know what you



Setting the Rules

Classroom Discipline Starts and Ends With the Teacher

Since the beginning of organized education, the responsibility for good student discipline has primarily rested in the hands of the classroom teacher. Without a comfortable disciplinary situation, a teacher's job becomes frustrating and often unbearable, and as a result, little teaching or learning takes place.

It's important that you establish clearly and immediately the behavior pattern and expectations to be followed. Students welcome reasonable discipline and will respect teachers who follow a consistent policy.

Ask your support teacher for copies of discipline policies for your district and/or building. Your classroom policy should reflect district guidelines.

Veteran teachers who battled through and won the discipline wars offer the following ideas for classroom discipline:

- Get to know students: This will help you anticipate problems.
- It's all relative: Know the characteristics of the age group and what is regarded as 'normal' behavior. Don't judge students by adult standards.
- Be consistent: Be fair in application of discipline in your requirements and assignments.
- Be courteous: Show courtesy to all students. Display trust and confidence in all. Avoid showing dislike for any student.
- Viva la difference! Your class is composed of individuals. Don't require the same response of every pupil.
- Recognize signs: Some situations lead to discipline problems, including tardiness, disorder, disobedience or insolence.
- Hear both sides: Let students tell you their side. Be willing to consider mitigating circumstances.
- Mum's the word: Talk about the misdeeds of students only to those who have a right and need to know. Avoid openly comparing one student to another.
- Maintain poise: Discussions on class work are invaluable; arguments are not.
- You may be wrong: If you've made a mistake, admit it. Apologize if you've treated a student unjustly.
- Make the discipline fit: Make sure punishments are appropriate for the misbehavior. Explain to the student why he or she is being disciplined.

Good classroom discipline should not be thought of merely as being strict, but as a cause-and-effect relationship. The student should be made aware that certain types of behavior will cause unpleasant results, while others will elicit teacher recognition and praise. If you use this cause-and-effect approach, then most students will naturally develop good behavior attitudes and responses.

In summary, you can achieve good classroom control, acceptable student conduct and real student achievement if you are firm, fair, friendly, consistent and prepared.



If you are firm, fair and friendly, you can achieve classroom control and enhance student achievement.

Here are several common discipline concerns for teachers:

- What do you do when you have a confrontation with a student?
- What do you do when a student seems to be a constant distraction to the rest of the class?
- What do you do when students have tuned you out and aren't listening?
- What do you do when a student curses or uses an obscene gesture?
- What do you do when two students are fighting?

Learn what you should know before your deal with these issues, and learn how to deal with them:





Make Your Parent-Teacher Conferences a Success

This Vital Communication Link Will Enhance Student Learning

Communicating with the parents of your students is an important aspect of teaching. When teachers and parents work together, the learning experience is improved.

Your district will schedule certain days or evenings for parent conferences. Learn about those dates, and what is expected of you, and plan ahead. But don't limit yourself to these sessions. Most successful teacher-parent "teams" begin with a conference, usually one conducted before there's a real need to meet.

These tips will help make your parent conferences productive and successful:

- ◆ **Reach out:** You'll get the relationship with parents off to a good start by contacting them early, perhaps by sending home a memo or newsletter. Provide an outline of what their children will study. Let them know you'll be happy to meet with them. Tell them how to contact you to arrange a conference.
- ◆ **Invite both parents:** Encourage both parents to attend. Misunderstandings are less likely if both hear what you say, and you can gauge the support both parents give the child. Know, however, that both parents may not be available. Many children come from single-parent homes. You could hurt a child's feelings by always asking to meet the mother.
- ◆ **Plan ahead:** Have in mind a general — but flexible — outline of what you're going to say, including a record of student progress, a review of strengths and needs, and a plan of action.
- ◆ **Consider language:** Be prepared for non-English speaking parents. Do you need an interpreter?
- ◆ **Give it time:** If you're scheduling back-to-back conferences, allow time between them to make notes on the first conference and prepare for the next. On district conference days, you may have to run through up to 30 conferences in seven hours. Adjust expectations.
- ◆ **Get organized:** Assemble your grade book, test scores, student work samples and attendance records.
- ◆ **Have answers:** Be ready to answer specific questions from parents.
- ◆ **Avoid physical barriers:** Don't sit behind your desk, while forcing parents to squeeze into the student desks in the front row, or to perch on folding chairs. Sit facing the clock to avoid looking at your watch.
- ◆ **Know names:** Don't assume that Jane Peabody's mother is Mrs. Peabody. Jane's mother may have remarried; check your records ahead of time. Don't assume that the wrinkled, gray-haired gentleman with Johnny is his grandfather. It could be his father or an uncle. Politely ask.
- ◆ **Open on a high note:** Stand to greet and shake hands. Begin conferences on a warm, positive note to relax everyone. Start with a positive statement about the student's abilities, schoolwork or interests.
- ◆ **Stress collaboration:** Let parents know you want to work together in the best interests of their child. "You need to see me as soon as possible to discuss John's poor study habits" arouses hostility. Instead, try "I'd like to discuss with you how we might work together to improve John's study habits."
- ◆ **Listen:** Despite the fact that we spend nearly a third of our lives listening, many adults are poor listeners. You'll learn more if you listen carefully.
- ◆ **Use body language:** Nonverbal cues set the mood of the conference. Smile, nod, make eye contact. Lean forward slightly to let parents know you're interested.
- ◆ **No jargon:** Jargon like "criterion-referenced testing" and "perceptual skills" is double-talk to most parents.
- ◆ **Ask about the student:** Don't pry, but ask parents if there's anything they think you should know about the student (such as study habits, relationship with siblings, important events in his or her life) that may affect the student's work.
- ◆ **Seek opinions:** Hear parents out, even if comments are hostile or negative. Take notes, remain calm.
- ◆ **Focus on strengths:** It's easy for parents to feel defensive; many see their own faults in their children. You can help by reviewing the child's strengths and areas of need, rather than by dwelling on criticism or by stressing weaknesses.
- ◆ **Be specific:** Parents may flounder if you generalize. Instead of "She doesn't accept responsibility," pin down the problem: "Amanda had a week to finish her book report, but she wrote only two paragraphs."
- ◆ **Offer solutions:** Parents appreciate specific direction. If Jane is immature, it might be helpful to suggest parents give her a list of weekly chores or give her a notebook to write down assignments.
- ◆ **Summarize:** Before parting, review the discussion and the actions that you and the parents have agreed to take.
- ◆ **Close on a high note:** Try to save one encouraging comment or statement about the child for the conference conclusion.
- ◆ **Keep records:** You may have reason later to refer to a record of what was said and what suggestions for improvement were made. Make notes while details are fresh.



You want to show students that you care. You also demand respect and a focus on learning. A veteran teacher shares how to get the balance right.

This article first appeared on the website for the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Reprinted with permission.

By Cindi Rigsbee

I fondly remember the night just before my college graduation when my education professor invited our entire class over for dinner. We all reminisced about our university days while the professor's wife prepared spaghetti and garlic bread. That night I understood that one reason I had done so well in this class was because the professor nurtured positive relationships with his students. We all *wanted* to do well for him. And the culmination of that nurturing was happening right there in his home.

Fast forward a few months to my first year of teaching in a high school. I was struggling with classroom management, finding it hard to corral an active group of seniors, mainly because I was a 22-year-old who looked as though I could be one of them. I hadn't been able to pull off the "Don't smile until Christmas" rite of passage for a first-year teacher, a tip I had heard numerous times as I began my career. So I figured I'd try something that I had seen work in the past—I invited my students to my house for a spaghetti dinner.

I was surprised at how quickly the students tried to turn my home into a high school party, a scene right out of so many Hollywood versions of what high school students do when they have a room, furniture, and no parents around. It was a catastrophe. And once we returned to school, I noticed that my classroom management had not improved. Those students were

no more willing to listen to me than they had been before that dinner gone wrong.

As the years have passed, I have improved my classroom management practice through trial and error and by carefully watching my colleagues and their relationships with students. I've seen it all—from the teachers who are "friends" with adolescents who divulge all of their personal dramas to them—to disciplinarians who present the "my-way-or-the-highway" approach that usually includes yelling at students and humiliating them in front of their peers.

A case in point: Many years ago, I walked into my school library to hear a teacher call out to me across the room, "Hey, Mrs. Rigsbee! These kids are *stupid!*" Then she walked away from her students, shaking her head in disgust. I wasn't surprised later when I witnessed numerous disruptions in that teacher's classroom. Students can't learn in a place where they don't feel valued.

So what is the relationship balance in a classroom? Where is that exact point at which students feel cared for in an appropriate way but know that they must respect the teacher and that they are expected to learn? Does it include befriending students... or meting out stern reprimands... or both? What components of teacher/student relationships are conducive to optimal student learning and minimal teacher stress?

It Starts on Day One

I've often referred to the *aura* or *the air of a teacher* when describing how the relationship balance begins. I saw it for the first time when I was in college studying education; my class visited a nearby high school. There I saw Mrs. Brown walk into a room of teenagers, and I witnessed every student in the room sit up a little straighter.

Mrs. Brown was barely five feet tall, a wisp of a woman, but when she spoke, she conveyed a message of "I am the teacher. I care about you, and I'm in charge here." Her students hung on every word.

I have worked to emulate the presence that I saw that day, and I believe it starts on the first day of school. I begin by greeting every student at the door. (Harry Wong, in *The First Days of School* [Harry K. Wong, 1997], suggests that we shake every student's hand.) I make eye contact with each student, and without disrupting the flow as they walk in the room, I may touch one on the shoulder, pat another on the back, shake hands, or exchange a high five.

I don't spend a great deal of time that first day on rules and procedures. Instead, I share stories about myself and get to know the kids in a way that suggests, "We're a family in this room. I will do *whatever it takes* to ensure that when you leave here after 180 days, you will have had a successful school year and will have grown as a person."

I have the words “Whatever it takes” posted in front of my classroom. I tell my students that I’m determined to be a teacher who makes a difference in their lives. We laugh together and make promises to learn together beginning on that first day; the remainder of the year is built on those commitments.

Clear Expectations

The structure of the classroom is important as we teachers develop relationships with our students. When a teacher frantically searches for materials or is uncertain about the day’s lesson, students will surely find their own entertainment. But when students enter a classroom in which the teacher has prominently displayed the learning goals and agenda and begins class by discussing his or her expectations for the day, students are more likely to focus on learning instead of finding ways to entertain themselves, taking their classmates along for the ride.

It’s also important that students feel that their teachers want them to learn—not just so they can perform well on standardized tests, but for their overall growth and to ensure they will have bright futures. Yesterday I told one of my 8th graders, “I need you to do this work so you’ll be successful in middle school, ready for the high school you’ll be entering in four months, and then ready for college and your ‘happily ever after.’” He knew I sincerely care about his well-being, and he completed the work.

A Respectful Classroom

Several times during my career, colleagues have asked me how I manage to get along with troublesome students that others can’t reach. For years I answered, “I just *love* all my students.” But now, as a veteran educator, I realize that it’s not so much about *love* as it is about *respect* and *consideration*. Some students are just downright lovable; these students make it easy for teachers to establish a connection. But others are more difficult. I can reach them just by listening and paying attention to their concerns, griefs, and longings, even if they seem petty and unimportant.

Yesterday, a student stopped by my room during class change. I was juggling numerous tasks but resisted the urge to reprimand her for potentially being late to her next class. As it turned out, she just wanted to tell me about her pet rabbit, a bunny named Muffin, then off she went. That afternoon in the hallway, she wrapped herself around me before heading to her bus. I thought about how that scenario might have gone differently when she entered my classroom—yet another stressed-out teacher scurrying her along, too busy to care about a 6th grader. I gave her three minutes. ***Sometimes three minutes can make a world of difference.***

Shawn, whom I don’t teach, comes into my room every day. He’s usually asking for lunch money or snacks, and he’s always out of the class he belongs in. Some days, I just want to push him in the right direction, but instead I take a deep breath and give him a few minutes of attention. His last visit was purposeful; his friend had been killed in a gang fight.

What if every teacher, all day long, scurried Shawn away? Who would he eventually find to listen to him? Those same gang members who killed his friend?

Another component of an atmosphere of respect includes never humiliating a student. Humiliation is a tactic that can result in quiet classrooms filled with scared children. A principal walking by may confuse this for a well-managed classroom. ***However, students who are humiliated, especially in front of an audience, are rarely receptive to learning.***

I have an adage I share with beginning teachers: ***“If you make students the enemy, you will lose.”*** I usually follow up with, “There are more of them, and they have an audience.” You can’t reach a student who is resistant because of anger, fear, or humiliation. Students can only thrive in an atmosphere of respect.

A Passion for Teaching

I remember standing over the copy machine one day, thinking, “I just *love* teaching pronouns!” Some may think it odd that I enjoy teaching a part of speech so much, but most teachers have a passion for sharing their knowledge of a subject they love.

The relationship balance includes not only loving one’s subject matter but also advocating for one’s students. We must represent their needs to other adults in the building, carefully explain concerns to parents, and assure our students that we have their best interests at heart.

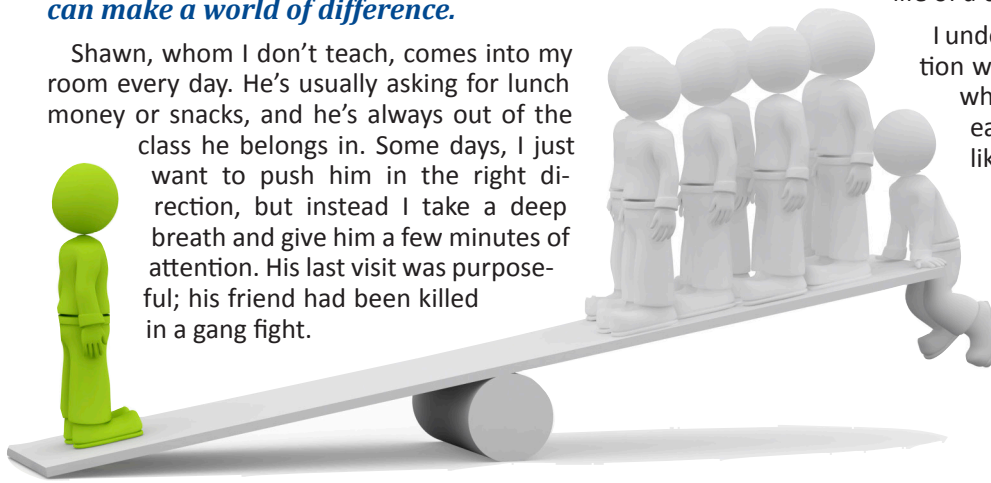
I know I’m passionate about teaching because when I stand outside my classroom door, I can’t wait to see those goofy faces coming toward me. I can’t wait for the high fives, the hugs, and the laughter. And I can’t wait to see whether my students will get as excited about the book we’re reading as I am. If they don’t, then it’s my mission to find ways to make it interesting or figure out what’s going on in their lives that’s interfering with their focus. That’s part of my job as a committed teacher.


I have spoken often of my 1st grade teacher, Mrs. Warnecke, who took a scrawny kid from the wrong side of town and developed her into a reader and a 1st grade poet. One teacher who had the perfect balance of respect for children and discipline in the classroom recognized a glimmer of self-esteem and developed it into a teacher-to-be. Fifteen years later, I’d be looking at my own students and working to find my way with them.

As I talk to teachers, I tell them that we all have the opportunity to be someone’s Mrs. Warnecke—not only the opportunity but also the honor, the responsibility, and, in fact, the *obligation* to be that teacher who makes a difference in the life of a child.

I understand that one reason I have such a connection with students is because I once had a teacher who gave me a chance. I was lucky to witness early on what the relationship balance looks like. And I work to pass it forward every day.

Cindi Rigsbee is the literacy coach at Gravelly Hill Middle School in Efland, North Carolina, and the beginning teacher mentor for Orange County Schools. She was North Carolina Teacher of the Year for 2008–09. She is the author of Finding Mrs. Warnecke (Jossey-Bass, 2010), which tells of her journey as a teacher; Cindi.Rigsbee@orange.k12.nc.us.





EVALUATIONS

WHAT EVERY TEACHER SHOULD KNOW

Procedures for teacher evaluation vary by district, yet one rule should be constant for every teacher: know your district's evaluation policy.

Early in their employment, every teacher should secure a copy of the district's evaluation policy as well as the forms used for evaluation. Review them, and structure your teaching strategies to meet their requirements.

At the first sign of difficulty with your teaching performance, or if you are in disagreement with your evaluation, contact your NSEA UniServ director immediately at 1-800-742-0047.

These guidelines are designed to take you step-by-step through the process. It's imperative to focus on the improvement of instruction, which is the primary purpose of evaluation.

Pre-Observation Conference

Preparing for the observation is as important as planning lessons. You must show the evaluator the learning atmosphere that prevails in your classroom. Prepare for the pre-observation conference by:

- Selecting the area(s) of your teaching performance to be observed.
- Selecting the day, time and subject.
- Clarifying criteria to be used.
- Making the appointment to confer with your evaluator.
- Preparing lesson plans for the class to be observed.

At the pre-observation conference, share the lesson purpose and format. Explain any special student needs, and give the evaluator a copy of your plan.

The Observation

The observation is, at best, a bit awkward. Students know it is a change in routine, are sensitive to your reactions and are quick to note differences in your approach. Sometimes this affects their ability to cooperate. If possible, plan a lesson that uses techniques familiar to students.

Try to lead the class as you usually do. Have the lesson so well prepared that you don't have to stop to read notes; doing so creates awkward pauses that students may fill with restlessness. Try to put them at ease and to make them forget an observer is present.

Post Observation Conference

This conference should occur shortly after the observation so that you and the evaluator have very clear memories of the events. Remember to:

- Let the evaluator do the talking. You take notes and respond to direct questions.
- Ask for clarification or elaboration of the observation material. Request specific examples, for instance: What did you see that makes you say that my discipline is good/bad?
- Bring your personal summary of the observation for reference. This is particularly helpful if your view of the facts differs from the evaluator's. If inaccuracies have occurred, be sure they are corrected and initialed by both of you.

- Accept all suggestions for improvement and request a demonstration of techniques in your classroom.
- Do not allow yourself to be put in the position of agreeing to an interpretation of poor performance. Agree only that you are open to concrete suggestions to improve your performance. Do not allow yourself to be drawn into a self-incriminating stance.
- Maintain the conference focus on the actions of the class period observed and the purpose stated to promote professional excellence and improve teaching.

When the conference is done, be sure you have received all written materials to which you are entitled and that your signature merely indicates that you have reviewed the written material — not that you agree to it.

Final Evaluation Conference

The purpose of the final conference is to summarize your year's performance, recognize your professional growth, direct you in the pursuit of educational excellence, and complete final evaluation forms. Normally, only you and your evaluator are present. If other administrators are present and the situation is threatening, you may request the presence of an Association representative. Points to remember:

- Come to the meeting with your summary of evaluations up to this point. Be prepared to participate in the activities. Maintain eye contact with your evaluator while taking notes.
- If you disagree with the evaluation content, remain polite and courteous. Contact the NSEA if there are statements in your evaluation with which you disagree.
- Ask for clarifications and specific examples, not generalizations.
- Request that commendations be noted with specific examples.
- Be sure that all constraints are noted, such as: lack of materials and equipment, class size, and individual student problems.
- Do not allow yourself to become involved in devices in which you evaluate yourself.
- Comment freely on the positive aspects of your performance, but let the administrator identify alleged deficiencies.

- Let your evaluator offer suggestions for improvement. Do not reject written suggestions or recommendations: these may be used as a focus for rebuttal statements or other action later.
- At the conclusion, be aware of what your signature means on the Evaluation Report. If it's not clearly stated in the document, consider adding this sentence: "My signature denotes receipt of this information, not agreement with its content."
- You may respond to your evaluation in writing. Use the expertise of the NSEA to assist you in that response: 1-800-742-0047.

Personal Records and Rules

At all points, teachers should keep a log summarizing the conference(s). The log should note: date, time, and length of the observation or conference; name and title of evaluator; copy of the lesson plan taught during the observation; your reaction to the lesson; your observation of the evaluator's behavior; comments from the evaluator; classroom condition; unusual student reactions.

It's crucial that the teacher keep a copy of the log, as well as other documents. When in doubt — file it!



40 Ways to Say 'Good Work!'

A little praise goes the distance in the classroom. But praise really needs to be more than just the same few phrases repeated over and over. Your students need more than the traditional "Good," "Very good," and "Fine," if encouragement is expected. Here are some other ideas:

1. That's really nice.
2. Wow! That's great.
3. I like the way you're working.
4. Keep up the good work.
5. That's quite an improvement.
6. Much better!
7. Keep it up.
8. What neat work.
9. You really outdid yourself today.
10. This kind of work pleases me.
11. That's right! Good for you.
12. I'm proud of you.
13. You've got it now.
14. You make it look easy.
15. You're coming along nicely.
16. Excellent work,
17. My goodness. How impressive!
18. You're on the right track now.
19. Terrific!
20. Very creative.
21. Now you've figured it out.
22. Superior work.
23. That's a good point.
24. I appreciate your effort.
25. Marvelous!
26. That's 'A' work!
27. You put a lot of work in this.
28. That's the right answer.
29. Nice going.
30. Very interesting.
31. That's clever.
32. Good thinking.
33. Exactly right.
34. Congratulations, good score.
35. Super!
36. You should be proud of this.
37. Bravo!
38. Superb!
39. Quality work!
40. You had your thinking cap on!



JOB SECURITY: THE NSEA IS HERE TO HELP

Yes, you can be fired from your teaching job. But with NSEA's help, your chance of surviving a job action against you is much greater!

It might be a grade you gave to a student with influential parents. Or a student discipline problem. Or a comment you made to an administrator or parent in the heat of discussion.

Because you're in a new school, you are a probationary teacher. It may take just one "incident" to provoke job threats.

Every teacher, at some time or an-

other, makes a decision that causes ill feelings. It is the unjust firing that a probationary teacher fears most.

Your chances for survival are much better as a member of your professional association — the NSEA, NEA and your local association. Each year, NSEA assists 40 to 50 probationary teachers in potential dismissal cases. Most do not result in a dismissal notice, but when they do, NSEA's win/loss record is good.

NSEA UniServ directors are available to help you respond to a bad evaluation, to help you overcome deficiencies, or to represent you in a RIF. As a member of the NSEA, your colleagues

will be there to give you the best shot you'll have at protecting your career.

Your Association's expertise can also be of financial help in other manners. The "incident" could be an injury or accident where staggering liability claims could wipe you out financially. In an era when lawsuits have become commonplace, the NSEA/NEA provides \$1 million professional liability coverage as part of your membership.

As a member, you are part of one of the largest and proudest professions in the country. Your personal support and the special leadership qualities you have can be a key to your professional association's success.



KNOW YOUR RIGHTS; PROTECT YOUR JOB

Each year, nearly 500 Nebraska teachers find themselves in a job-threatening situation. Those that are members quickly turn to NSEA for help.

Whether it's a disagreement with an administrator, a question of proper salary schedule placement, or a complaint filed by a parent, NSEA works to make certain that members are treated fairly; according to the law; and by school policy.

There can be outside threats to a teacher's job, too. Anyone may file a complaint against a teacher with the Nebraska Commissioner of Education. Without proper representation, such a complaint places a teacher's career at extreme risk.

As a member, you are entitled to NSEA staff or attorney assistance or litigation for any incident that results in a job sanction, a grievance, a criminal proceeding related to corporal punishment, or a complaint to the Commissioner of Education.

NSEA staff has responded to reprimands, poor evaluations and complaints from parents and patrons. Efforts to protect teacher rights can take the form of local complaints, grievance, complaints to state or federal agencies, and even litigation.

NSEA has also worked with teachers to improve their teaching skills, and on scores of other issues.

More Protection

NSEA's Legal Services Policy also gives members protection in the event they're facing criminal charges specifically related to the alleged use of corporal punishment.

The NSEA provides legal services for a criminal matter flowing from allegations of corporal punishment up to a limit of \$5,000. Any costs in excess of \$5,000 are the responsibility of the member.

If you face a complaint or grievance, it's best to contact an appropriate representative of your local association for assistance and referral to NSEA. If for any reason you need or prefer to contact the NSEA directly, do so. Contact your UniServ director at 1-800-742-0047.

In Jeopardy

Did you know that a member of the public could place your job at risk? Anyone can file a complaint against a teacher with the Nebraska Commissioner of Education. Such a complaint simply means that someone alleges a teacher has violated the teaching profession's Code of Ethics.

Without proper representation, such allegations can put a teacher's certificate and livelihood in jeopardy.

Upon receiving notification of such a complaint, your immediate first step should be to make a request for legal services to NSEA's Member Rights director. More importantly, do so before discussing the notification or allegations with anyone.

If your request for legal service is approved, NSEA and NEA will share all costs of your defense related to the investigation by the commissioner's office — both before the Professional Practices Commission and before the State Board of Education, should the matter go that far. For more information, contact the NSEA toll free at 1-800-742-0047.

Here are some other rights issues to be aware of:

Open personnel file

All teachers have the right to inspect their personnel file upon request. Teachers have the right to file a written statement responding to any material in the file that they believe is inaccurate or untrue. Teachers should inspect their personnel file occasionally.

Students and/or their parents have the same right to inspect the student's file. Teachers should be aware of this and be careful that whatever they place in a student file is accurate and can be documented.

Retirement deductions

First-year teachers should know that they are automatically members of the Nebraska Teachers Retirement System. As such, they contribute a portion of their total salary to the system to provide future benefits at retirement time. Teachers are also covered by Social Security, which is deducted from their salary checks.

YOUR LIABILITY POLICY IS ADDED PROTECTION

As a professional educator, you may be held responsible if someone is injured in a classroom or school-related incident.

You may be personally liable for damages if, in the performance of your duties, your actions or your failure to take action result in harm to pupils, other teachers or others. You face the possibility of lawsuits for negligence, slander, libel, malpractice or assault and battery (arising out of classroom disciplinary actions).

Remember that when you join the NSEA, you're automatically covered by a \$1 million liability insurance policy which protects you if a civil suit is brought against you as a result of teaching duties. These precautions can reduce your chances of being sued:

- Be familiar with school rules, procedures and board policies. Develop your own set of rules for classroom activities and make sure your students understand them.
- Check your classroom and work area for hazards. Notify your principal in writing if you find any. Keep your students away from problem areas until they are corrected.
- Never leave your class unsupervised.
- Use caution on field trips. Get permission slips from parents of all students participating. Make certain students know rules that will apply during the field trip. Make sure there is adequate supervision.
- Follow state law and school policies on student discipline.
- While details are still fresh, write a description of any incidents which you think may have the potential of creating liability problems later on.

Survive & Thrive:

How to Avoid Stress, Stay Healthy

Accept this fact now: Your life is going to change dramatically!

Within the first few weeks of school, there will be scores of “new” additions to your life: new texts, new techniques, new schedules, new students and a complete new way of life. It’s going to be an exciting and sometimes stressful time!

People who don’t deal well with stress can become ill – unless they’ve mastered coping techniques. Experienced teachers have found useful techniques and “preventative medicines” you can use to protect yourself against debilitating stress symptoms:

Leave your teaching at school

If you must lug home schoolwork, try to get it done early in the evening. Better yet, do it at school and leave it there. The late afternoon hours after students are dismissed are quiet, immediate and focused.

Know, accept your limits

Most of us set unreasonable and perfectionist goals for ourselves. While we can never be perfect (or even come close), we often have a sense of failure or inadequacy no matter how well we perform. Are your goals achievable? Or do they reflect an effort to reach perfection?

Exercise

After a day of teaching, you owe it to your body to shake out the “chalk dust.” Exercise helps to rid the body of chemicals that are discharged as a result of stress.

Eat well

Eat wholesome foods so that your body takes in a sufficient amount of calcium, potassium, iron, vitamin B, vitamin C and protein.

Be kind to yourself

What could do more for your self-esteem than to take yourself out to dinner or buy yourself a treat?

Always have something to look forward to

This will perk up your spirits.

Find some ‘free’ time

You live by a schedule all day long. Leave yourself some “open space.”

Get plenty of sleep

If you’re tired, go to bed early. Don’t lie awake worrying about how you should have handled Johnny in class.

Don’t procrastinate

Do what you have to do. Having something “hanging over you” will cause more tension than the project is worth.

Don’t try to do everything

You can’t. So why worry about it?

Find a friend

This probably is someone in your building, someone who can be a trusted listener. Talking a problem out won’t make it go away, but it can

relieve tension.

Keep a ‘To Do’ List

Review it daily and do at least one or two things. When you cross something off the list, you’ll get a sense of accomplishment.

Tolerate, forgive

Intolerance and judging others often leads to frustration and anger. Try to understand the other person’s concerns, fears and pressures. This will make you feel more accepting of them, even if you don’t agree with their behavior or opinion.

Learn to plan

Disorganization breeds stress. Too many projects at the same time can lead to confusion, forgetfulness and a sense of uncompleted tasks. Plan ahead. Develop your own personal style of getting things done in a calm, orderly way. When possible, take on projects one at a time and work on them until completed.

Be positive

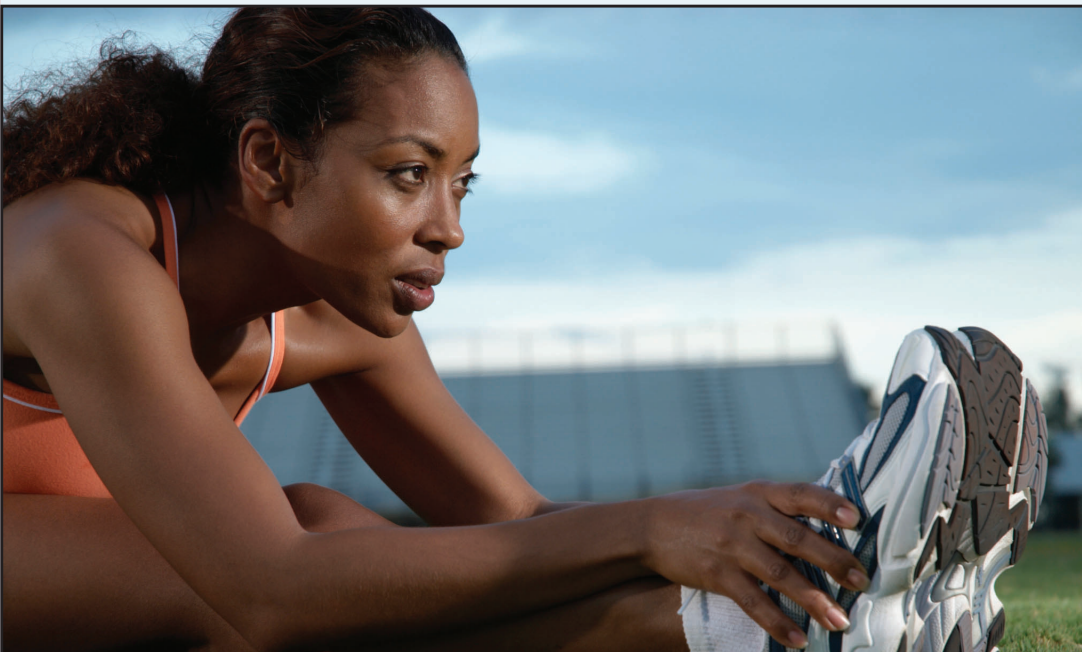
Avoid criticizing others. Learn to praise the things you like and the good qualities in others. Excessive criticism of others almost always reflects dissatisfaction with oneself.

Learn to play

Escape from the pressures of life and have fun. Find pastimes or hobbies that are absorbing and enjoyable.

Rid yourself of worry

A study has shown that 40 percent of the items people worry about never happen; 35 percent can be changed; 15 percent turn out better than expected; and 8 percent involve needless concern. Only 2 percent really deserve attention.





Money Management: Stretch Your Paycheck

Many a Nebraska teacher has set a target date of teaching for 30 or more years, and retiring comfortably at the age of 55 – all thanks to the Rule of 85 enacted into law with NSEA's guidance.

You can follow that route as well, but doing so requires early establishment of a thorough, thoughtful financial plan early in your teaching career.

The first step is to assess your compensation. Be certain you are placed properly on the salary schedule. Your gross pay, the amount the school district pays you based on the contract negotiated by your local education association, is the pre-tax retirement, pre-deduction amount.

Taken from your gross salary are the following deductions: federal and state income taxes; FICA (Social Security); state retirement contributions; and other deductions you select, such as tax-sheltered annuities, additional insurance and your Association dues. The result is your net pay. Review the deductions regularly to be certain they are accurate. With your net pay, you will face the challenges of your first few years of financial planning.

Here are some suggestions for meeting those challenges:

- **Determine expenses.** Rent or mortgage, groceries, utilities (heat, water, phone), home and auto insurance, automobile costs (loan, fuel, repairs), additional taxes, college loans, clothing, entertainment and savings.
- **Read.** Learn about financial planning and the time value of money as soon as possible.
- **Create a budget; stick to it.** If you spend more than you earn, trouble is ahead.
- **Pay yourself.** By making savings a regular part of your budget, you'll be on the road to your financial goals.
- **Use one credit card.** People who max out on one credit card after another are on the road to ruin. Find a single card with a low, fixed interest rate. By paying high interest rates on balances, you're tossing money away. Make payments on time: Late fees may be \$30 or more.
- **Research purchases.** Sometimes, spending a bit more on a product is better in the long run than buying a cheap product over and over.
- **Drive a used car.** Used cars are the best investment, because someone else has already paid for the depreciation. Buy quality used cars: models that are rated well.
- **Explore financial options.** Shop for the bank that charges you the least for services on checking and savings accounts, and the one that pays interest on all accounts.
- **Be a wary buyer.** You'll get calls and visits soliciting your business for insurance, retirement and financial plans. Assess whether you really need what's being sold. If yes, shop around. Talk with colleagues for advice. Read the fine print before you sign.
- **Comparison shop.** Look for good auto and homeowners insurance with good terms and competitive rates. NEA Member Benefits offers quality companies with nationwide expertise, high-quality insurance policies and low rates. You'll often get better rates when buying car and homeowner insurance as a package.
- **Know your fringes.** Understand your fringe benefits. Those are benefits you don't need to purchase on your own.
- **Trim expenses.** Bus, walk or car pool to work; pack your lunch; look for bargains when shopping; cultivate your creativity by refinishing used furniture for your home, or by making gifts; enjoy inexpensive or free entertainment; and remember that NEA Member Services can provide significant savings on many of your needs.
- **Seek advice.** A family member, co-worker or trusted advisor is recommended. The key: Find someone with good financial sense but no "sales pitch."

Get Your Rebates Here!

Are you a first-year teacher who belonged to your Student Education Association during your college years? If so, you're eligible for rebates on your student dues from both NEA and NSEA!

NSEA will rebate to you \$10 for every year (up to four years) of student membership. In addition, NEA will rebate to you \$20 for every year of student membership, up to four years. That's up to \$120 in cold, hard cash you could receive in dues money returned!

To qualify, you must be an Association member paying active dues and the application for rebate must be made in your first year of educational employment in Nebraska.

To learn more, and to download the rebate forms, go to NSEA's website and click on 'Members' in the tool bar, and then click on the "Local Treasurer's Info" link. There you'll find both rebate forms. NSEA's website can be found at: www.nsea.org



The Benefits of Membership

Dividends: that's what you expect from your investments. And that's just what you receive with an investment in NSEA membership. NSEA, along with its national and local association affiliates, gives you proactive and aggressive backing whenever and wherever you need it. Your investment is rewarded with unmatched value and service. Consider these issues:

Personal Assistance

NSEA's 18 UniServ directors work directly with you and your local association on all job-related matters and issues. They are assigned to specific regions across Nebraska.

Liability Insurance and Legal Services

Your NSEA membership comes with a \$1 million liability insurance policy that protects you in job-related incidents, including civil and criminal actions, as well as property damage. If your employment rights are threatened, NSEA is quick to provide you with assistance.

Bargaining

Each year, your local association works to improve your salary, fringe

benefits and working conditions. Providing support for that effort from behind the scenes is the NSEA, giving negotiators support and guidance in research, budget analysis and negotiations training.

Professional Development

Professional development is crucial to good teaching. It is also critical to your development as an Association leader. You have opportunities to attend many workshops and conferences as an Association member. Such events, along with services like the NEA Professional Library and the National Foundation for the Improvement of Education, support you in those roles.

Lobbying and Organizing

Every decision about your classroom

is political. From standards to length of school year to the textbooks you use, a political body has weighed in. Your interests are well-represented in the Legislature and Congress through Association-wide lobbying efforts that propose and support pro-education bills. NSEA works to defeat measures that are harmful to public schools, students and educators. NSEA members also recommend and help elect education-friendly candidates.

Public Relations

You stay up-to-date on education issues through local association newsletters; NSEA's magazine, *The Voice*; NSEA's website, www.nsea.org; the NEA magazine, *NEA Today*; NEA's Web site at www.nea.org; and other special publications.

Belonging to NSEA Can Save You Cash!

Arriving in your mailbox soon: a little plastic card that can give you hundreds of dollars in savings each year!

The NSEA membership card serves as a discount card at thousands of merchant locations in Nebraska and across the country. The card is so valuable that you can save far more than the cost of membership each year. With discounts of up to 50 percent at more than 200,000 merchants nationwide, the card enables you to save on hotels, dining, clothing and more!

Your new NSEA membership card will arrive at your home on or about Dec. 1 each year and is valid through the end of the following year. All NSEA members can access the same savings by using their 10-digit Association identification number, which appears above their name on Association mailings.

To begin saving, members must activate their card once it arrives. It's easy to do; just follow these steps:

- **Log on to the NSEA website at www.nsea.org.**
- **Click on the membership card link at the top right of the home page.**
- **Enter your member ID number (on the front of the card or on the mailing label above your name). Log in.**

You can also activate your account by calling the toll-free number listed on the back of each card! Some merchants require that you present your card at the

time of purchase, while others ask that you print a coupon from the site. Be certain to check the individual merchant page on the website for specific instructions.

For those without Internet access, a printed directory of merchant locations is available quarterly for a nominal charge. Just call the number on the back of the card.



Top 10 Reasons to Join

1

Your paycheck, your benefits: Economic security is vital to every NSEA member. Salary and benefits are important to your professional satisfaction. NSEA has always made it a top priority to enhance and protect your compensation, benefits and retirement.

2

Your rights: Educators deserve fairness in their work environment. As a public school employee, you have certain rights, and NSEA is there to defend them. If you're sued in the course of your employment, NSEA and NEA are there to represent you.

3

Your profession: Education is a proud profession, as rich in learning for the educators as for the students. Like many professions, it relies on skill, a body of knowledge, tradition and responsibility. NSEA is attuned to the professional lives of members, and is committed to improving the state of the profession.

4

Your students: NSEA's Mission Statement has a clear vision – a great public education for every student, from preschool to high school and on to college. The conditions that improve learning and the conditions that improve teaching dovetail. Educational equity, opportunity and excellence are prized organizational goals.

5

Our schools: Education is everyone's birthright. NSEA is committed to the principles of access to a high quality, universal free public education. Nearly 300,000 Nebraska students from preschool to high school depend on NSEA and its allies to keep that commitment strong.

6

Our voice: The voice of public education is your voice and the voice of tens of thousands of education employees across Nebraska. NSEA makes your voice heard on issues that matter most for your students, your school, your work and your profession.

7

Your organization: NSEA is your organization. Its strength comes from more than 250 local associations statewide and from its national affiliation with NEA. But most of all, it gets its strength from you — and nearly 28,000 of your Nebraska colleagues. Your decision to become an active member strengthens public education.

8

Your pocketbook: NSEA/NEA membership saves you cash. Our many member benefits can save you your entire dues — and more! — by simply taking advantage of one or more of these programs. If you need insurance, buying, travel or financial services, your NSEA/NEA membership card is the ticket!

9

Your future: The future poses many questions. Who will lead public education — the politicians? The privateers? Or you? NSEA is committed to securing the future of public education, a process that begins with involved members at all levels.

10

Your retirement: Retirement savings is a serious concern. Whether you're a beginner or veteran, retirement issues are an important part of your career concerns. NSEA is actively involved in assisting members to plan well in advance of retirement and in working to continually improve your retirement benefits.