

The VOICE

Nebraska Education Association • May 2024



NEVER TELL ME THE ODDS

*NSEA President-Elect Tim Royers
takes on his next mission.*

Private School Voucher
Fight is **NOT** Over

**GET READY:
PETITIONS COMING.**
The Voters Strike Back.



Nebraska State Education Association
 605 S. 14th Street, Lincoln, NE 68508
 www.nsea.org
 402-475-7611 · 1-800-742-0047
Volume 77, No. 9
 ISSN Number: 1085-0783
 USPS Number: 000-369

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

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

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

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NSEA Board Certifies District Elections

Elections for vacancies in leadership positions in NSEA’s six governance districts and on the NSEA Board of Directors were held in late February and early March. The NSEA Board certified those elections in mid-March.

These electees begin their terms on September 1, 2024.



Capitol District

NSEA Board: Megan Simsic
Treasurer: No Candidates
Secretary: Shari Anderson
Exec. Committee: Deana Kumpf
Bylaws Amendment: Passed
NEA Representative Assembly Cluster Delegate: No candidates

Elkhorn District

NSEA Board: Vanessa Brand
Vice-President: Kristi Rastede
Exec. Committee: Michele Brand
Bylaws Amendment: Passed
NEA Representative Assembly Cluster Delegate: Lisa Hanson

Metro District

NSEA Board: Stacy Kester-Pearson
President: Marsha Edquist
Exec. Committee, Subdistrict 2: No candidates
Exec. Committee, Subdistrict 5: Grant Christiansen (write-in)
Exec. Committee, Subdistrict 8: Carla Bobier
Bylaws Amendment: Passed
NEA Representative Assembly Cluster Delegate: No candidates

Panhandle District

Vice-President: No Candidates
Exec. Committee, Area 1: No candidates

Exec. Committee, Area 3:

No candidates

Exec. Committee, Area 4:

No candidates

Exec. Committee, Area 5:

No candidates

NEA Representative Assembly Cluster Delegate: Renae Noble,

Dashiell Rohan

Sandhills District

NSEA Board: Dee Ann Roy
Vice President: Whitney Hake
Exec. Committee: Lynette Svenson
NEA Representative Assembly Cluster Delegate: No candidates

Tri-Valley District

NSEA Board: Bailey Smith
President: Ben Welsch
Exec. Committee, West: Robin Henrichs
Exec. Committee, East: Abby Brehm
NEA Representative Assembly Cluster Delegate: No candidates

R.A. At-Large Delegate

Delegate: Robert Miller

On the Cover: President-Elect Tim Royers will leave his post as Millard Education Association President to take over the leadership of NSEA on Sept 1. Learn more about his vision, page 4.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

JENNI BENSON



BELIEVE in the POWER of COLLECTIVE ACTION



Our 2024 NSEA Delegate Assembly was held in Lincoln a few weeks ago. I was honored to preside over what was my final DA – my term as your president concludes this August.

Our theme this year was Believe in the Power of Collective Action.

I grew up in Sutherland, Nebraska, in what I would call very meager surroundings. My father ran a grain elevator there for 46 years and, when I was in elementary school, I washed dishes in the cafeteria for free lunch. We had a lot of family around that supported us. It was that collective support and action helped me succeed.

Those of you who know me know that I collect bees. My classroom was decorated with bees, my office is decorated with bees, my kitchen and my bathroom are decorated with bees. The good thing is, I'm easy to buy for.

I started collecting bees when my mother gave me a bee that was crocheted. She told me that bumblebees are not aerodynamically designed to fly – but they don't know that, so they fly anyway. She wanted me to know that I could fly despite the challenges I faced.

I had lunch with a congressman a couple weeks ago and he asked me, "Have you always been an extrovert?" I said no. I was not always this outspoken. In fact, quite the opposite. As a child, I was very quiet. I suffered some pretty traumatic abuse as a child, and I found my voice only later in life.

My mother had serious mental

health issues her entire life. I found my voice at age 15 when I began to advocate for my mother the first of many times she was hospitalized in a psychiatric facility.

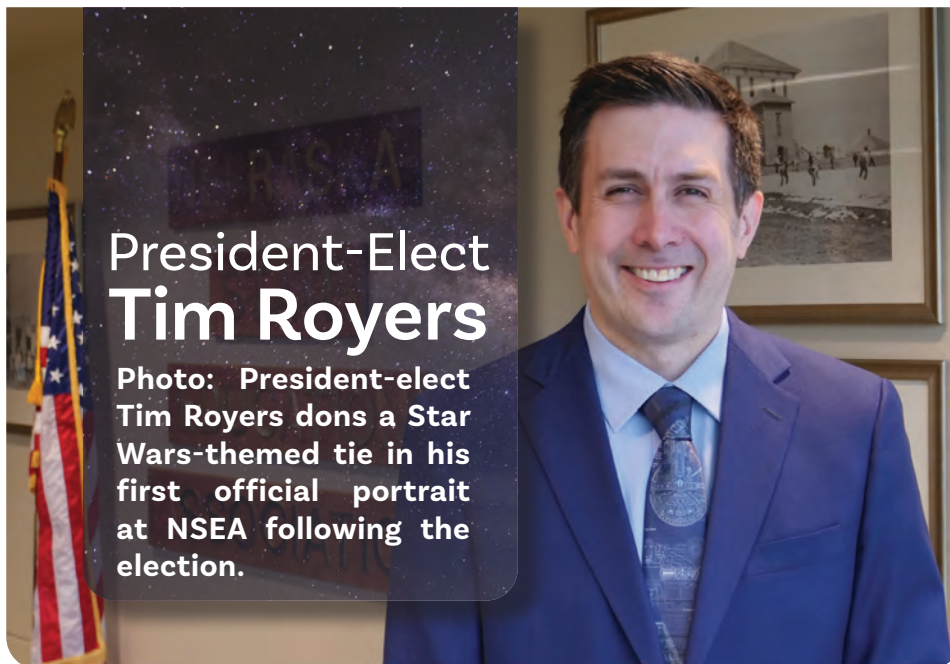
I believe bees can teach us a great deal. When I was honored with leadership opportunities, whether it be for the Lincoln Education Association, the Capitol District, NSEA or NEA boards, or as NSEA vice president and president, my theme and my focus has always been about believing in the power of collective action. My goal was to use my voice for good.

I'm proud to say that I've used that voice every day since I found it. I have grown as my voice grew. I used my voice caringly, lovingly and sometimes angrily. I learned how to use my voice assertively and quietly. I've learned and developed ways to use my voice, to control my voice.

For the past 37 years I've used my voice to advocate for ALL children, for the education profession and in our association work. I have lost friends who did not like the Association voice I used for advocacy and collective action. But I stand by the decisions I made as they were made for the good of the whole.

As I concluded my last Delegate Assembly as your president, I focused on the good that our Association has done and continues to do every day. I am proud to focus on our accomplishments. And, for the remaining four months as your NSEA president, I will continue to focus on using the power of our Association's collective action to advocate for children, educators and Nebraska public schools.





President-Elect Tim Royers

Photo: President-elect Tim Royers dons a Star Wars-themed tie in his first official portrait at NSEA following the election.

A NEW ERA: President-Elect Tim Royers is Ready to Lead

By **Tim Royers**

No words can properly express the gratitude I have for all the people that helped me become the next president of the NSEA. It's incredibly humbling to take on the challenge of assuming this role.

As your NSEA president, I will expand members' opportunities to get involved, just like I first did 16 years ago. I want to build up the support for our locals because they're the lifeblood of NSEA.

Thank You

One of the things NSEA President Jenni Benson has reiterated through her tenure is the power of collective action. I would be foolish to think that I was elected to this role purely because of me. Countless association members guided, mentored and supported me, not just in the recent weeks leading to my election but over the years of my career. I am incredibly indebted to all of them and to the association for the opportunities and experiences it has provided me..

It was refreshing to have an election where people feel strongly in a positive way about two choices. Delegates voted because they believed in somebody. I want to thank Renae Noble, who I have come to respect even more these past few weeks as we've campaigned.

Renae is a knowledgeable and dedicated association colleague and I look forward to continuing to work with her toward our mutual goal of ensuring the association is strong and effective for our members.

I can't say enough about how much I appreciate the support of both my family and my wife Ang's family. There is no doubt that this new role will take a significant amount of time, but they have been ever-present in our lives and in the lives of our kids, and I know that even when I'm out of town, Ang and the girls will have their support and help when I'm not there.

Which leads me to my wife. I'd need to write a novel to truly express how much I love her and how much I still can't believe she chose to be with me. Having Ang by my side and knowing she's willing to take on all the ways this new role will impact our family gives me so much confidence that I



can fully commit to what is needed to be done. She is my rock.

There are few outside of my family that I owe more to than NSEA Vice President Paul Schulte. During his 8 years as Millard Education Association (MEA) President, he consistently did what I believe is the most important work a leader can do: elevate and train others to carry on the mission of the association.

I want to thank Jenni Benson for her leadership. I know I cannot replace her; I can only succeed her. Jenni navigated a pandemic and the greatest threat for school privatization in more than 50 years during her tenure. I applaud her work and I know our members recognize Jenni for her incredible leadership through these challenging times.

A Calling to Lead

I first knew I wanted to be a part of the work of the association in my first year of teaching, when MEA and the district had a major calendar dispute in the fall. Many people were very upset, but said only, "Yes, this is wrong but what can we do about it?" And then the local association stepped in and lifted our voices and built us up through advocacy. Within a few short weeks we had transformed the "What can we do about it?" into, "Here's what we did." I knew that was the kind of work that I wanted to be a part of.

As Your Next NSEA President

I felt the call to be a teacher because I wanted to serve my students in the same way my teachers served me.

I felt the call to be a leader in the association because I want to make sure I do all that I can as your NSEA president, so all educators in Nebraska can serve their students to the best of their abilities.

I encourage all of you to reach out and to be involved in the association because we can only move forward together. As your association president, I promise to be tireless in my service to you.

It's **NOT** Over.



IT'S NOT OVER: Members, Allies Stand United Your help needed—20 signatures in 20 days

For the second year in a row, hundreds of educators, students and other public education supporters marched to the steps of the Nebraska State Capitol to oppose using public funds to pay for private schools.

Last year, the legislature passed LB753, a tax credit voucher scheme that diverts tax dollars to pay for private schools. The 2023 rally marked the beginning of the Support Our Schools Nebraska petition drive to repeal the voucher scheme. In just a few short weeks, passionate, hardworking volunteers gathered more than enough signatures from Nebraskans to ensure the right to put the issue before the voters in 2024.

“Last summer, more than 117,000 Nebraskans signed the petition to let voters decide whether the state should use public funds to pay for private schools,” said Jenni Benson, president of NSEA and a sponsor of Support Our Schools Nebraska. “Voters in every one of Nebraska’s 93 counties signed that petition.”

The issue is certified to appear on this November’s ballot, but on

the final day of the 2024 legislative session, legislators passed Sen. Lou Ann Linehan’s LB1402—which takes away Nebraskans’ right to vote on LB753 and imposes a costly new private school voucher scheme on Nebraska taxpayers. The passage of LB1402 signaled to voters that a majority of Nebraska lawmakers either don’t understand the will of the people or worse—they don’t care. Sen. Linehan admitted that LB1402 is intended to be, “an end-run” around the successful petition drive that put the issue of using public funds to pay for private schools on the ballot.

Following the vote on LB1402, public school supporters, once again, marched down Centennial Mall to the north steps of the State Capitol to send a clear message to the lawmakers: This fight is not over.

Rally Cry: Let Us Vote

Nearly 500 public school supporters gathered for the Saturday morning rally.

“Inscribed on the north face of the State Capitol building are the words ‘The Salvation of the State is

Watchfulness in the Citizen.’ We’ve been watching and we do not like what we’ve seen,” said Benson. “We will fight back against the cowardly and cynical attempt to deny Nebraskans their right to vote.”

The passage of LB1402 marks the first time in history that Nebraska lawmakers passed

a bill to deny citizens their right to vote on an issue that was put on the ballot through a successful referendum petition by the people.

“George Norris, the architect of the Unicameral Legislature, knew there

“We will fight back against the cowardly and cynical attempt to deny Nebraskans their right to vote.”

—Pres. Jenni Benson
Neb. Education Assoc.

would be times when state lawmakers would pass bad policy, which is why he believed the people of Nebraska should serve as the Second House,” said NSEA President-elect Tim Royers, a sponsor of SOSNE. “The public referendum process provides a check on elected officials.”

Protecting Voters and Public Schools

The unprecedented move by lawmakers is of concern to all Nebraska voters. If lawmakers are unwilling to respect the referendum process when it comes to using public dollars funding private schools, it begs the question: Are we really a representative government? If elected officials aren't interested in representing Nebraskans on this issue, how will we trust them to represent constituents on other matters?

“LB1402 must be challenged,” said Benson. “We are preparing for all options – from launching another petition effort to challenging the constitutionality of LB1402. As taxpayers and public school advocates, we are committed to continuing the fight to ensure voters’ wishes on this issue are heard and respected.”

Nebraskans are opposed to giving public dollars to private schools—they have voted to reject public funds for private schools at the ballot box on three separate occasions.

Public Dollars for Public Schools

Polling consistently shows a majority of Nebraskans oppose measures that divert public dollars to private schools. Before the passage of LB1402, polling showed that 55% of likely voters were in favor of repealing LB753 in Nebraska.

“There is substantial evidence from other states showing the harm these costly voucher programs cause public schools and taxpayers. Vouchers undermine strong public education and student opportunity. They take scarce funding from public schools—which serve 90 percent of students—and give it to private schools—institutions that are not accountable to taxpayers,” said Benson.

Under LB1402, the state cannot tell the school who it shall or shall

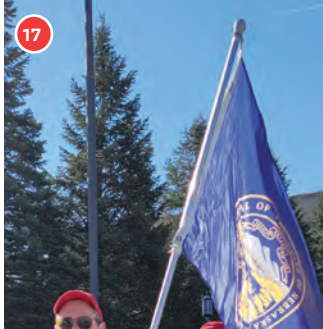


RALLY TO SUPPORT SCHOOLS: 1. Members of the SOSNE C4 Board stand on the steps of the Capitol. 2. Retired members (and siblings) Howard Gaffney and Mo Nickles. 3. LET US VOTE sign at the April rally. 4. Supporters await remarks from rally organizers. 5. Rev. Dr. Karla Cooper gives remarks at the rally. 6. A clear and concise message. 7. Former Nebraska State Senator Patty Pansing Brooks with a furry friend. 8. This pup in a 'kerchief is just happy to be included. 9. NSEA board members Gina Boltz and Nora Lenz hold their "I heart public schools" sign for all to see. 10. Sandhills District President Mary Gregoski holds a colorful sign that the rally.

not admit. Receiving a voucher does not mean that the private school will accept that student. The only “choice” ultimately lies with private schools. Unlike public schools, private schools can pick and choose the students they want to enroll, and these private schools can remove students at any time without

providing an alternative education option.

“Instead of sending public dollars to private schools, which are under no obligation to serve all children, state funds should be used to support the public schools that 9 out of 10 Nebraska students attend,” Benson said.



RALLY TO SUPPORT SCHOOLS: 1. A wide shot of the crowd gathers at the SOSNE rally at the Capitol. 12. All smiles from NESEA delegates loading buses to the morning rally. 13. The procession down Centennial Mall. 14. We love public schools and dogs. 15. A camera shy rally-goer. 16. "Public Funds for Public Schools" sign . 17. The Nebraska State Flag waves before the rally. 18. Guadalupe Esquivel holds an SOSNE sign out to traffic heading down K Street. 19. NESEA President Jenni Benson and Vice President Paul Schulte are all smiles on the bus back to Delegates Assembly after a successful Support Our Public Schools rally.

Lessons from Others

LB1402 and LB753 represent the erosion of public education funding and steps towards eliminating equal access to our Nebraska public education system.

In Iowa, and in other states where public funding for private school

programs have expanded, many private schools have responded with significant hikes in tuition. There are no provisions in LB1402 that would prevent private schools in Nebraska from increasing tuition costs to pocket even more public tax dollars while exacerbating discrimination for low-income families.

Inequitable voucher schemes in Florida and Arizona have ballooned in their costs and taxpayers are footing the bill. Arizona taxpayers have picked up the tab for Legos, ski trips, ninja training and lessons in how to drive a BMW. Florida taxpayers have paid for Disney tickets, video game consoles, and big screen TVs for voucher families.

Beyond just the cost, evidence that students “do better” when they receive the scholarships is mixed at best. Much of the research on the performance of school privatization programs is supported by the private school industry. Rigorous independent research of these programs, however, reveals examples where academic achievement has suffered.

In Louisiana, academic results in a statewide school privatization program were described as “catastrophic,” with test score drops larger than Hurricane Katrina’s impacts on academics in New Orleans. In 1990, Wisconsin enacted a school privatization scheme that, 30 years later, showed reading and math scores in private schools in Milwaukee were no better than the scores in Milwaukee’s public schools.

New Petition Coming

Few issues can rally Nebraska voters as strongly as support for public schools. It’s a unifying force that resonates across party lines and unites communities—a rare point of agreement in today’s divisive political landscape.

Nebraskans can demonstrate their collective commitment to their local public schools by signing the petition to keep costly voucher schemes out of our state.

Watch your mailbox for the new petition and ask family, friends and neighbors to sign to let Nebraskans vote and to keep public funds for public schools. Many hands make light work!

For more information visit, www.supportourschoolsnebraska.org

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UNITING GENERATIONS: Gerry Brooks brings the laughs to jam-packed Kearney conference

From NSEA-Retired members to Aspiring Educator members, the NSEA's Uniting Generations Conference in April brought more than 100 members to Kearney, Nebraska. The conference was headlined by none other than Gerry Brooks, a veteran educator who is well-known on his YouTube and TikTok channels for his insightful perspective on education. Brooks offered a morning breakout session for members who had registered early for the conference. Following President Jenni Benson's welcome address to attendees, two coveted spots in Brook's morning session were auctioned off to the tune of \$201 to benefit the NSEA Children's Fund. Brooks' presence added an extra layer of excitement and inspiration to the conference with his trademark humor and genuine passion for education.

Gerry Brooks

Brooks opened his keynote address over lunch by outlining two goals for members to take away from his presentation.

"My first goals for you—whether you're a classroom teacher or administrator, whether you're a coach or at the front office—is for you to hear one or two things that you might need to be able to take back to get you through the school year," Brook said. "My second goal is more important, it's for your team. I'm going to say something that your team needs to hear. I will need you to be a leader, to be able to take something back and relay it to your team."

Brooks encouraged educators to, "find someone that gets you."

"Nobody understands the day-to-day stress I go through better than another elementary school principal. So, do you know what I've done? I've developed professional relationships with other elementary school principals. Do you know why?

"How you respond to the mistakes of the people that you work with is exactly the way they're going to respond when you make a mistake."

— Gerry Brooks
Principal,
Educational Satirist

Because they're going through exactly what I'm going through. And so that's the person I'm talking about in your life," Brooks said. "Nobody understands teaching six weeks' worth of physics and having your whole class fail better than another physics teacher."

Second Goal

In a unique blend of wit and wisdom, Brooks took more time explaining his second goal for his audience and the need for attendees to take this lesson back to their respective schools.

"Have you ever worked with someone who is just not engaged with the rest of your team? They would never do anything on a Saturday. They hate the principal. They hate the job. They are miserable

Uniting Generations

and they make your life miserable,” Brooks began. “Or even worse—It’s someone who’s happy all the time. Skipping by your room, telling everyone, ‘Good mornin’, sunshine!’ Don’t you just want to the slap the coffee out of their hand?”

Brooks explained that other teachers and staff in the building are going to be different and it’s up to everyone to accept one another as they come.

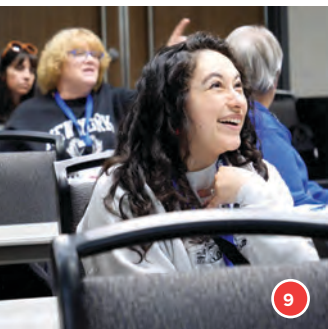
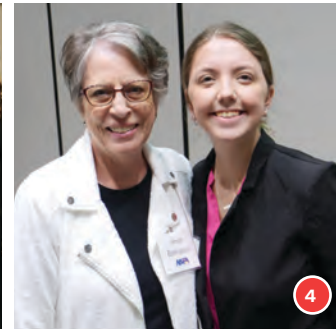
“You know why?” Brooks asked. “Because your kids are watching you. Let me tell you what’s in your building: People that don’t worship like you; people that don’t vote like you; people that don’t love like you. You can spend this entire school year trying to change everybody around you, but let me tell you what’s gonna make your life easier: change you.”

Brooks encouraged members to stop focusing on the differences of the people around them and to start focusing on what they have in common.

“Let me say to you because it’s important for you to hear and it’s important for you to take back to your team: grace and understanding,” he said. “How you respond to the mistakes of the people that you work with is exactly the way they’re going to respond when you make a mistake. And guess what you’re going to be making for the next three months? Mistakes. Do you know what I want when I make a mistake? Grace and understanding. And in order to get that, I have to give grace and understanding. Our kids are watching.”

United Generations

While Brooks was a big draw for members, the conference also offered nine breakout sessions including an intergenerational workshop that paired NSEA-Retired members with Aspiring Educators to discuss classroom management and problem solving. A panel discussion and facilitation table discussions after lunch gave attendees a chance to exchange ideas, share experiences, and glean valuable insights from one another. As attendees departed from the conference, they carried with them not only new ideas and strategies but also a renewed sense of purpose and camaraderie.



Uniting Generations: 1. Gerry Brooks poses for a selfie. **2.** NSEA members gather for a photo with Brooks. **3.** The NSEA Executive Officers with Brooks. **4.** Aspiring Educator Jillian Buzzard with NSEA-Retired member Janice Barnason. **5.** Member Elyssia Finch laughs during a presentation. **6.** NSEA President Jenni Benson welcomes members to Kearney. **7.** Aspiring Educator member Lisa Saxton with NSEA-Retired member Arlene Rea. **8.** Race and Conversation breakout session attendees pose for a group photo. **9.** Nicole Lopez-Bettendorf laughs during the Brooks breakout. **10.** Aspiring Educator Winona Mitchell with NSEA-Retired President John Heineman. **11.** Members laugh during the Brooks breakout session.

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2024 Spring Delegate Assembly

NSEA President Jenni Benson dropped the gavel to open the 2024 Delegate Assembly on Friday evening, April 19. In her remarks to delegates, Benson thanked members for their support throughout her presidency.

Benson's term as president ends Aug. 31, after seven years at the helm. She is tied for the longest presidential tenure alongside former NSEA President Duane Obermier.

Delegates saluted Benson with a standing ovation for her leadership. Following the business meeting, delegates celebrated with cake and heard remarks from friends, family, and leaders from across the country.

New Leadership

On Saturday, delegates elected Tim Royers as NSEA's new president, effective September 1. Royers currently serves as Millard Education Association President and was honored as Nebraska Teacher of the Year in 2016. Royers faced Nebraska NEA Director Renae Noble of Chadron in his bid for the Association presidency.

After the results were announced, Royers thanked members for placing their confidence in him. He also thanked Noble and Benson for their work on behalf of the Association.

Running unopposed and elected by acclamation to the NSEA Board of Directors are Kristi Restede, Higher Ed representative, and Nora Lenz, EMAC representative.

Keynote Speakers

Delegates heard from two invited guests during the Assembly, including Senior Director for the NEA Center for Advocacy Mary Kusler, and 2024 Nebraska Teacher of the year Scott Philips.

Kusler is an expert on issues relating to federal and state legislation and political advocacy. Kusler applauded the incredible work of members that led to the successful petition drive on LB753, and she encouraged delegates to continue the fight against vouchers.

"You should take what happened yesterday [LB1402 passage] as the highest form of compliment – they knew your voices were the voices of the citizens of Nebraska, and they got scared," she said, referring to Sen. Lou Ann Linehan and her out-of-state billionaire buddies who seek to impose a costly voucher scheme on Nebraska taxpayers that will hurt our public schools.

NSEA presented the 2024 Education Advocate Award to the 1,800+ volunteer circulators in appreciation for their work helping to collect 117,415 signatures on the referendum petition last summer. Six members were honored

for gathering the most signatures in their respective NSEA District. Mindy Diller, Lincoln Education Association, Capitol District; Tracia Blom, South Sioux City Education Association, Elkhorn District; Renae Noble, Chadron City Education Association, Panhandle District; Leah Kayl, Boyd County Education Association, Sandhills District; and Ben Welsch, Hastings Education Association, Tri-Valley District.

Dues, Bylaws & NBIs

Delegates voted to revise Article II Officers and Article III Board of Directors to add the new officer position of Secretary/Treasurer. Due to declining membership, NEA reduced Nebraska's two NEA Representative positions to a single position. The Board of Directors will appoint a Secretary/Treasurer to fill the position until the 2025 Delegate Assembly elects a member to serve the first full term of the new office. **Members interested in being considered for the one-year appointment as the NSEA Secretary/Treasurer should email jenni.benson@nsea.org for information.**

Delegates updated two existing resolutions and four new resolutions to strengthen journalism education, disabilities awareness, workplace accommodations for lactating employees, and to protect educators who face allegations of child abuse made in bad faith.

Delegates passed eight new business. Over the next 12 months, ad hoc committees will:

- Research the feasibility of creating a standing NBI Committee;
- Research a tiered dues structures;
- Continue working on NBI No. 4, passed during the 2023 Delegate Assembly, continuing research on the feasibility of a full-time release vice president;
- Research alternatives that could be made available to members accused of criminal offenses;
- Study ESP dues including how often ESPs are paid, and how much ESPs pay for dues;
- Continue the Unity Task Force, tasked with completing an implementation plan to facilitate and foster unity;
- Develop a member survey, seeking ways to increase educator compensation;
- Investigate funding options for Nebraska cluster delegates to attend the National Education Association Representative Assembly (RA).

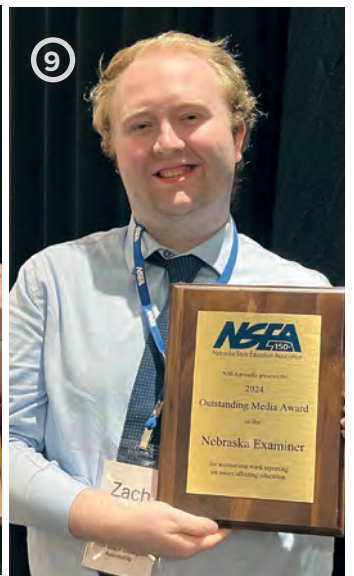
Delegates set dues for 2024-25 at \$437, a \$5 or 1.16% increase. A breakdown of dues can be found in the April edition of The Voice.

2024 Award Winners

The NSEA honored those who have served public education in outstanding ways over the past year.

1. **Shelbea Hinrichs**, Palmer Education Association, receives the 2024 Early Career Educator Award
2. **Tim Farley**, Principal for the Syracuse-Dunbar-Avoca Middle School receives NSEA's 2024 Administrator of Excellence Award
3. **Brenda Thompson**, Palmer Education Association, receives the 2024 NSEA award for Teaching Excellence
4. **Allie Schleifer**, Fort Calhoun Education Association, was presented with the 2024 NSEA Community Service Award.
5. **Waverly and Harvard Education Associations** were recognized for leading the way with their contributions to the Children's Fund over the last year. WEA President **Michael Cobelens** accepted on behalf of his association.
6. **Kim Sullivan**, Palmer Education Association, was presented with the 2024 NSEA Education Support Professional of the Year.
7. **KRVN Radio News Director Dave Schroeder** accepted an Outstanding Media award.
8. **Metro District President Marsha Edquist** accepted the 2024 Gallagher Award on behalf of Metro District.
9. **Nebraska Examiner reporter Zach Wendling** accepted an Outstanding Media award on behalf of the news organization

Not Pictured: Friend of Education Award recipient State Senator Lynne Walz and Great Plains Milestone recipient Dr. Rony Ortega, Superintendent of the South Sioux City Public Schools.



LEGISLATURE

LEGISLATIVE SESSION: NSEA Advocates for Public Education

Private School Vouchers

The Nebraska Legislature concluded its 60-day session on April 18. The final day was particularly contentious, as senators dealt with several key pieces of legislation. The governor's property tax proposal, LB388, was set aside, while the private school voucher bill, LB1402, overcame a filibuster by one vote and passed. NSEA and a coalition of public school supporters launched a full-court press, organizing voters to contact their senators through calls, emails and postcards encouraging lawmakers to respect Nebraskans' right to vote on the issue of using public funds to pay for private schools,

LB1402 garnered the 33 votes needed to invoke cloture, shutting off debate and advancing the bill to a final vote. The bill then passed by a vote of 32-15. The bill was signed by the governor on April 24. It requires the State Treasurer to establish a program to replace LB753's voucher scheme with a new plan to use public funds to pay for private

and religious schools. LB1402's initial cost to Nebraska taxpayers is \$10 million annually, however, in other states with vouchers, the price tag has grown exponentially – costing taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars annually. LB1402 also allows up to 7.5% (initially \$750,000) of these tax dollars to be used to pay for “administrative expenses.”

In a blatant slap to the face of Nebraskans who successfully petitioned to put this issue on the November ballot, LB1402 also repeals LB753 (2023), denying voters their right to decide whether they support using public funds to pay for private schools.

Voices for Public Education

During this session, senators introduced 597 new bills and 11 proposed constitutional amendments, many of which addressed crucial issues related to education and school finance. More than 370 bills were sent to the governor for his approval. The NSEA Government Relations team kept close tabs on more than 250 different legislative proposals pertinent to these topics, navigating the complex web of hearings and floor debate.

Some of the major education and school finance issues debated during the 2024 session include:

State Aid to Education

Lawmakers advanced and the governor approved the mid-biennium budget bill (LB1412). The budget calls for a spending increase of 3.1%, which is slightly higher than the 2% increase proposed by the governor. The adjustments include an increase in state aid to K-12 schools. The Appropriations Committee's budget proposed a modest spending increase while leaving a significant surplus in the state's reserve funds. In FY2024-25, \$65.3 million is attributed to an increase in state aid to schools (TEEOSA), and \$27.5 million is an increase in special education funding, to achieve the estimated 80% of total reimbursable costs for school districts as required by LB243 (2023). Total TEEOSA funding will be \$1.028 billion in FY2023-24,



Hundreds of Postcards: NSEA Director of Political Field Operations Brian Mikkelsen and NE Legislative Study Group co-founder Cindy Maxwell-Ostdiek helped to organize and deliver hundreds of postcards to senators.



and \$1.01 billion in FY2024-25, which is lower overall due to higher local valuations.

Recruitment and Retention

LB1284 adopted - Provide for and change teacher incentive programs, provide for a pilot program to distribute menstrual products in schools, a Dyslexia Research Grant Program, a professional learning system relating to instruction in reading, and a statewide computer science education expansion program, create and change authorized use of certain funds, and change provisions relating to school psychologists and certain scholarship programs. **The bill includes the following:**

Special Educators of Tomorrow Act provides eligibility for scholarships or loans to individuals with at least two years of direct support professional experience, enrolled or planning to enroll in an eligible institution for special education teaching. From the 2024-25 to the 2029-30 school years, eligible students can annually apply for scholarships of up to \$2,500 and loans not exceeding \$4,000 per year, with specific conditions for repayment outlined in a contract.

Special Education Teacher Forgivable Loan Program Act will assist individuals studying to become special education teachers by supporting forgivable loans to those individuals who commit to teaching in Nebraska following their certification as a teacher with a special education endorsement.

The Teach in Nebraska Today Program was established, aiming to attract individuals to the teaching profession through student loan repayment assistance or grants for classroom service. Prior to the act's effective date, the program offers student loan repayment assistance capped at \$5,000 annually to eligible Nebraska residents currently teaching full-time. After the effective date, grants up to \$5,000 per year for up to five years are available to Nebraska residents teaching full-time for five years or less with an income below \$55,000.

The Nebraska Reading Improvement Act is amended to require NDE to develop and implement a professional learning system to help provide sustained professional learning and training in high quality instruction in reading for teachers who instruct students in kindergarten through third grade at an approved or accredited school & teachers



Reading Improvement: Omaha Education Association member, reading interventionist & dyslexia therapist Teresa Franks advocated for evidence-based reading instruction for all students in Nebraska this session.

employed by an early childhood education program approved by the State Board of Education.

The Attracting Excellence to Teaching Program is amended to clarify student-teaching semesters and to allow an eligible student who is enrolling for a student-teaching semester to apply for an additional loan of up to \$3,000 for the student-teaching semester and receive up to a total of \$6,000 for the year.

Education System Omnibus Bill

LB1329 adopted - Change provisions relating to handguns and firearms in school environments, classification of school districts, excessive absenteeism and truancy, the enrollment option program, certain educational certificates, permits, and endorsements, certain tax levy and bonding authority of school districts, requirements for various school and education programs, and the Nebraska Career Scholarship Act, provide for grants relating to school mapping data, prohibit certain debt collection activities, and provide requirements for the use of certain maps for schools. **The bill includes the following:**

Creates the School Emergency Response Mapping Fund, which will be used to fund the school data mapping projects. Provides flexibility for local school boards in determining reasonable amounts of time for certain mandated training. Change requirements related to student

attendance and require plans for excessive absences.

Permits a school board to authorize the carrying of firearms by authorized security personnel in smaller communities. The State Board of Education shall develop a policy in consultation with the Nebraska State Patrol. The policy will relate to the authorization of the carrying of firearms by appropriate personnel.

Reclassify Class I, II, and III school districts. Class I would be any district with fewer than one thousand five hundred inhabitants. Class II would be any district between one thousand five hundred and five thousand inhabitants. Class III would be any district between five thousand and two hundred thousand inhabitants.

Changes provisions related to the issuance of and the eligibility for certificates and permits issued by NDE. Permits an individual with a certificate or permit to complete an approved program of equivalent professional education in a designated endorsement area provided by an accredited public school.

Changes provisions relating to certain tax levy and bonding authority of school districts. Currently, school boards in any school district can decide to impose an additional property tax levy for specific abatement projects that address environmental hazards, accessibility barriers, life safety code hazards, or mold within existing school buildings or their grounds.

Introduces a policy for mapping data in schools to enhance emergency response efficiency. School boards or governing authorities of approved schools may adopt a policy to provide mapping data (defined as information related to a school building) to local, county, or state public safety agencies.

Prohibits the use of Mercator projection maps in public schools and requires each to use Gallpeters or Authagraph projection maps. Schools may continue to use existing maps in their inventory. Each school district's board is responsible for adopting a policy relating to projection maps.

Prohibits school districts from taking certain actions relating to outstanding debts on a school lunch or breakfast account.

Makes changes to the current open enrollment policy: (1) allowed students to transfer schools at any time during the school year and as many times as they need; and (2) Ensured that parents are no longer charged for sending their child to a public school either in or outside of their residing district.

Parental Involvement Legislation

LB71 adopted - Change provisions relating to early childhood education, parental involvement in and access to learning materials in schools, and the Tax Equity and Educational Opportunities Support Act and provide a process for repeating a grade upon request. The bill includes the following:

Allows children to remain in public pre-school until the mandatory kindergarten entrance age. As a result, eligible five-and-six-year-olds would be able to access public pre-k schooling.

Would include educational decision maker as a parent or guardian. Juvenile courts can appoint guardian ad litem or other adult relatives as educational decision makers in

juvenile cases. Provides a process through the NDE for a parent or guardian to request that their child be able to repeat a grade.

Substitute Teacher Shortage

LB198 adopted - Change provisions relating to participation in and implementation of public retirement provisions. Clarify the definition of "termination" in the NPERS School Plan and the OSERS plan to allow more frequent substitute teaching if the employee does not take a distribution from the retirement plan.

Changes to Accreditation

LB1027 adopted - Change provisions relating to schools that elect not to meet accreditation and approval requirements. Requires home-schooled families to continue to annually file for home-school status for their students. Would include educational decision maker as a parent or guardian. Juvenile courts can appoint guardian ad litem or other adult relatives as educational decision-makers in juvenile cases.

Changes to Compulsory Attendance

LB1029 adopted - Change provisions relating to compulsory school attendance regarding illness and clarifies the definition of illness to include "mental and physical" illness as accepted excused school absences.

Professional Practices Commission

LB1306 adopted - Eliminate the Professional Practices Commission and provide, change, and eliminate provisions relating to standards for and conduct of teachers and administrators. The PPC will be eliminated and the State Treasurer will transfer any remaining money within the Professional Practices Commission Fund to the Certification Fund.

The maximum fee that can be collected for each teaching certificate or permit issued by the Commissioner and is valid for all Nebraska schools will be lowered from \$75 to \$65. NDE will now handle rules and regulations for the standards of ethics and competency for Nebraska public school educators, promoting understanding of the adherence to the standards, and providing an orderly method of resolving disputes arising over alleged failure of an educator to adhere to the standards.

Obscenity Bill Fails to Advance

LB441 failed to advance - Change provisions relating to obscenity. Repeals the exemption from prosecution for those in educational institutions providing obscenity to minors in grades K-12.

Bill Targeting Teacher Association Fails

LB1091 failed to advance - Provide requirements and restrictions for school boards relating to professional employees' organizations. Would require a school board or board of education that grants access by a professional employees' organization to a school employee's physical or electronic mailbox or a meeting to also grant that same access to any other organization that requests access; and to prohibit a school board or board of education from designating any day or break in the school calendar using the name of any professional employees' organization.

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Dr. Brian Maher, Nebraska Commissioner of Education

Dr. Brian Maher was selected as the Nebraska Commissioner of Education by the State Board of Education in March 2023, and took office on July 1, 2023. This April, Dr. Maher reflected the past months in office during an interview with NSEA:

How has your experience been as Commissioner in your first year?

I've been Nebraska Commissioner of Education just under a year—10 months. I still love coming to work every day. I think the work has tremendous meaning and true value to our state. I truly believe that every job I have had has led me to the role as commissioner. I never anticipated being in a position like this and never aspired to it. I didn't think that my career path was along these lines but when I think of the things that I've done, my most important role was as a classroom teacher.

The classroom is where the magic happens. It doesn't happen in my office, and it didn't happen in the superintendent's office when I was there, nor did it happen in the principal's office when I was there. Those are all critical roles in my journey to becoming commissioner—but being a teacher was fundamental in my preparation to becoming commissioner.

What do you want members to know about the state of public education in Nebraska?

On a recent broadcast I got the question, "What is the state of education in Nebraska?" I said there are so many positives to speak about and we rarely spend enough time talking about how well our schools in Nebraska are doing, how well our teachers in Nebraska are performing and how well our students are doing in terms of student outcomes.

I can go right down the list of NAEP but when I take those results and shake the slate clean—like an old Etch-A-Sketch, I again ask myself, are we satisfied with those outcomes?

My answer is not yet. I do want to figure out how can we get better, but let's not pretend that we're not doing a good job right now.

We take a lot of shots in education and some of them we deserve and some of them are misguided. I want to make sure



that folks know that there are a lot of good things happening in education in Nebraska. That's where I think the conversation must start. Certainly, there's room to improve, but we are in a good spot.

What is your top goal for Nebraska public education?

If I could pick one goal only to start with, I would want to improve our reading outcomes in the state of Nebraska. Even as a former math teacher, I think the most fundamental thing we can do for our kids is to make sure that they can read and make sure that they can read well.

I think we're at a great inflection point in Nebraska to be able to make an impact on those results. The Nebraska State Board of Education set a priority to improve 3rd grade English language arts proficiency to 75% by 2030. The legislature just allotted more than \$1 million for the improvement of reading instruction in the state and as a department, we have reappropriated more than \$3 million with this reading goal in mind. I think if we can read better, I think our math scores will improve. I think our science scores will improve. I think our social studies outcomes will improve. I also think it's quite possible that if we invest in students reading well and invest in teachers having the tools to teach that content well, we will likely decrease the need for special education. So, I'm really excited about that one priority above all.

Watch for more from Commissioner Dr. Maher in future editions of The Voice magazine.

Thanks for another year of inspiring Nebraska's future, and for letting us be part of *your story*.

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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.



National Teacher Appreciation Week



This Teacher Appreciation Week, we're saying **Thank You to Educators!**



#ThankATeacher

TEACHER APPRECIATION HOTLINE:



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Addressing Trauma, Nurturing Resilience

Poverty expert **Dr. Donna Beegle** will collaborate with NSEA to host virtual professional development on healing trauma, defying poverty, and igniting potential through education. Dr. Beegle will focus on poverty and the impact on students and how teachers can support them.

Dr. Beegle, who went from 28 years of homelessness to achieving a doctorate, has experience creating education systems that work for students living in the crisis of poverty. She offers an insider perspective on what works to improve outcomes for students living in poverty.

NSEA will offer four scheduled virtual sessions

with Dr. Beegle. NSEA members can register to attend one or all four of the virtual sessions by scanning the QR code provided below or online at www.nsea.org/resilience.



Beegle

Scan Code



Virtual Sessions:

- Thursday, May 9: 6:30 - 8:00 PM
- Saturday, August 10: 1:30 - 3:00 PM
- Tuesday, November 12: 6:30 - 8:00 PM
- Saturday, February 8, 2025 - 1:30 - 3:00 PM

Additionally, members can take Dr. Beegle's "Poverty Immersion" course on-demand and at no cost. Visit www.nsea.org/NSEAOnline to enroll.

Nominations Now Open for 2025 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 2025 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 2025 Nebraska Teacher of the Year are now available through your school administration or at www.education.ne.gov/toy. 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 2025 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.

Questions should be directed to NDE Office of Public Information and Communications Administrator David Jespersen at (402) 471-4537 or david.jespersen@nebraska.gov.





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TRISH GUINAN

Message from the Executive Director

“

I extend best wishes to my friend, in her future endeavors after these final four months as NSEA President. Jenni, enjoy the new adventures in the next phase of your life’s journey!

”



Reflection

As we approach the end of another remarkable school year, I couldn't be prouder of what we've accomplished at NSEA. The past twelve months have been nothing short of extraordinary, filled with challenges, growth, and countless achievements.

New Members

NSEA welcomed 1,956 new members this year which includes an impressive surge of 200 recruits during the Just1 Campaign. Our success in recruiting mid-year hires has garnered attention, leading other state affiliates to replicate our model. President Jenni Benson's weekly meetings with the staff MERIT committee have been instrumental in reviewing data and planning engagement and recruitment events.

Teacher Pay

NSEA provided bargaining assistance to local affiliates who secured an average base increase across the state of over \$1,000. Additionally, six more local affiliates became certified by the Commission of Industrial Relations (CIR) as the exclusive bargaining agent, ensuring that future locals have the ability to negotiate for equitable compensation for school staff.

Thank you, Jenni

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Jenni for her unwavering dedication and outstanding leadership during her tenure as president of our association.

Jenni is one of the longest-serving and most knowledgeable members of the Educators' Health Alliance (EHA) Board of Directors. As the current chairperson of the EHA, I am forever grateful to Jenni for the guidance she has provided, ensuring that our members receive exceptional care as the largest BCBS insurance pool in Nebraska.

I am also truly grateful for Jenni's guidance in helping me understand

the intricacies of NSEA's governance structure. Through her insights, I have gained a newfound appreciation for the importance of effective governance in driving our organization forward.

I extend best wishes to my friend, in her future endeavors after these final four months as NSEA President. Jenni, enjoy the new adventures in the next phase of your life's journey!

A New Chapter

I would also like to warmly welcome NSEA President-Elect Tim Royers. While he won't take office until September, I look forward to working together to further advance our association goals and serve our members with excellence.

The Fight Ahead

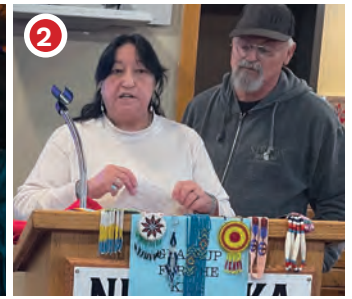
Lastly, NSEA members were instrumental in the incredibly successful petition effort to keep public dollars in public schools. Early in the campaign, NSEA sent a petition to every member of our Association. For weeks, our members engaged in meaningful conversations with their neighbors, families, friends—even complete strangers—about Nebraska public schools and the need to protect them against costly voucher programs. More than 117,000 Nebraskans signed the petition, far more than enough signatures to give voters a voice on vouchers. Voucher proponents can't win this issue at the ballot box, and they knew it. Neither LB1402, nor the 33 senators who voted to silence their constituents can compete with the passion and determination of Nebraska public school educators and our allies. This fight is far from over. Working together there is no challenge we can't overcome, and no goal we cannot achieve.

DELEGATE ASSEMBLY

19 NSEA-Retired Delegates
April 20, 2024



**Thank you,
NSEA-Retired Delegates**



Spring Conference: 1. Orange juice and coffee to kick off the NSEA-Retired Spring conference. 2. Lakota guests display cultural items. 3. Park Superintendent Michael Thownsend. 4. Dr. Sara Skretta gives an update on the teacher shortage. 5. Linda Nelson views items at the raffle table. 6. Attendees hear about the latest with NSEA Member Benefits.

Adventure-bound at Mahoney State Park

The NSEA-Retired Spring conference was held on April 18 at Mahoney State Park in Ashland. Nearly 100 NSEA-Retired members gathered for the annual conference.

Participants enjoyed a wide variety of speakers, activities, and networking. Speakers included keynote presenter Dr. Sarah Skretta from the University of Nebraska Lincoln who discussed the current teacher shortage in Nebraska and strategies that would help address the shortage.

Attendees also enjoyed breakout sessions including Jonathan Burleson from the Nebraska Department of Insurance, who provided information on Medicare, John Hunt, author of the book *Secrets of the Sandhills*; Rita Bennet presented a workshop on “The best things in life for free; Jeff Cole and “Beyond the Bells” discussion about after-school programming across the state; and Susan Estes with NEA Member Benefits.

A popular activity was the silent auction and scarf sale with the profits going to

the NSEA Children’s Fund. The auction raised \$900 for the Fund and members had authentic new treasure to take home.

One of the highlights was a surprise visit from Michael Thownsend, Mahoney State Park Superintendent, who shared great information about our Nebraska state parks and all they have to offer. We also enjoyed learning about Lakota culture from guests who joined us and shared stories about their lives.

A real highlight was NSEA President Jenni Benson, NSEA Vice President Paul Schulte, and NSEA staff member Brian Mikkelsen discussing the latest issues in the Nebraska Legislature. They shared the challenges ahead and called for all members to take an active role as advocates and to stop voucher legislation.

NSEA presidential candidates Tim Royers and Renae Noble addressed the group and gave their background and stories on why they want to be NSEA president. Attendees appreciated them coming and sharing at the conference.



How Secure is Your Retirement?

Less than one-third of American workers feel very confident in their ability to have enough money to live comfortably throughout their retirement. As educators near retirement, they may have questions that need answers. Long-time corporate supporter, Horace Mann, your retirement income planning partner, can equip educators with the knowledge to plan for a successful retirement.

Horace Mann is hosting several informational sessions in May that provide the education you need to plan for your dream retirement. See dates and times in the table provided.

Register to join one of these important discussions at www.bit.ly/HoraceMann-May-Webinar

Horace Mann Webinar Seminars (Central Time)	
Thursday, May 2, 5 P.M.	
Monday, May 6, 4 P.M.	
Thursday, May 9, 6 P.M.	
Wednesday, May 15, 7 P.M.	
Friday, May 17, 3 P.M.	
Tuesday, May 21, 5 P.M.	
Thursday, May 23, 6 P.M.	
Tuesday, May 28, 5 P.M.	
Thursday, May 30, 4 P.M.	



Turn to the NSEA Children's Fund

Every NSEA member knows of children in heartbreaking conditions. Whether the child is in need of season-appropriate clothing, new eyeglasses or a good meal, the Children's Fund is here to help. Educators often give of their own cash to help, knowing that they can't help every child. That's why NSEA created the Children's Fund in 1994. As an NSEA member, you can use the Children's Fund, and you'll find it quite simple: just call NSEA. No red tape, no forms needed.

Contributions are tax deductible — and it's important to note that every penny contributed goes to help children. NSEA picks up the administrative expenses.

The generosity of Children's Fund donors 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; and more.

Rain or shine, turn to the NSEA Children's Fund for help. A call to Karen Hunt at the NSEA (800-742-0047) is usually all that is needed. For more information, visit nsea.org/childrensfund.

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In Memory

We recognize these members whom we've lost recently.

William (Bill) F. Paul, 78, Gordon

Marilyn A. Shanks, 82, Bennington

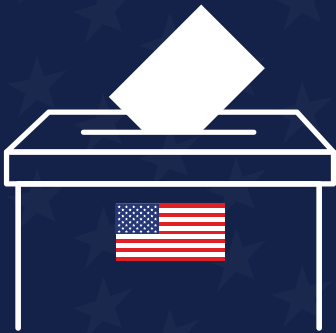
Jacqueline Davis, 69, Kenesaw

Lita June Tuch, 89, O'Neill

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

VOTE

TUES. MAY 14



The first election **requiring voter ID** will be the May 14, 2024, statewide primary election.

Acceptable forms of Photo ID:

- Nebraska Driver's License
- Nebraska State ID
- Nebraska College ID
- Military ID
- Tribal ID
- US Passport
- Nebraska Political Subdivision ID (state, county, city, public school, etc.)
- Hospital, assisted-living or nursing home record

U.S. Senate	Preston Love
Congressional Dist. 1	Carol Blood
State Board of Education: Dist. 1	Kristin Christensen
State Board of Education: Dist. 2	Maggie Douglas
State Board of Education: Dist. 3	<i>interviews in process</i>
State Board of Education: Dist. 4	Liz Renner

NEBRASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

Dist. 01	Glenda Willnerd	Dist. 23	<i>interviews in process</i>
Dist. 03	<i>interviews in process</i>	Dist. 25	Nicki Behmer Popp
Dist. 05	Flint Harkness Margo Juarez	Dist. 27	Jason Prokop
Dist. 07	Dunixi Guereca	Dist. 29	Sen. Eliot Bostar
Dist. 09	Sen. John Cavanaugh	Dist. 31	Mary Ann Folchert
	Tracy Hightower		Paul Hamelink
Dist. 13	Ashlei Spivey	Dist. 33	Dan Lonowski
	Nick Batter		Michelle Smith
Dist. 15	<i>interviews in process</i>	Dist. 35	Dan Quick
Dist. 17	Cindy Kai	Dist. 39	Allison Heimes
Dist. 19	Melissa Temple	Dist. 45	Sarah Centineo
Dist. 21	Seth Derner	Dist. 49	Sen. Jen Day

The candidates listed above earned the NSEA recommendation after completing a questionnaire and being interviewed by members—your colleagues—about issues affecting education. These candidates deserve your vote! This process is ongoing. For the most updated list visit www.nsea.org/2024Primary.