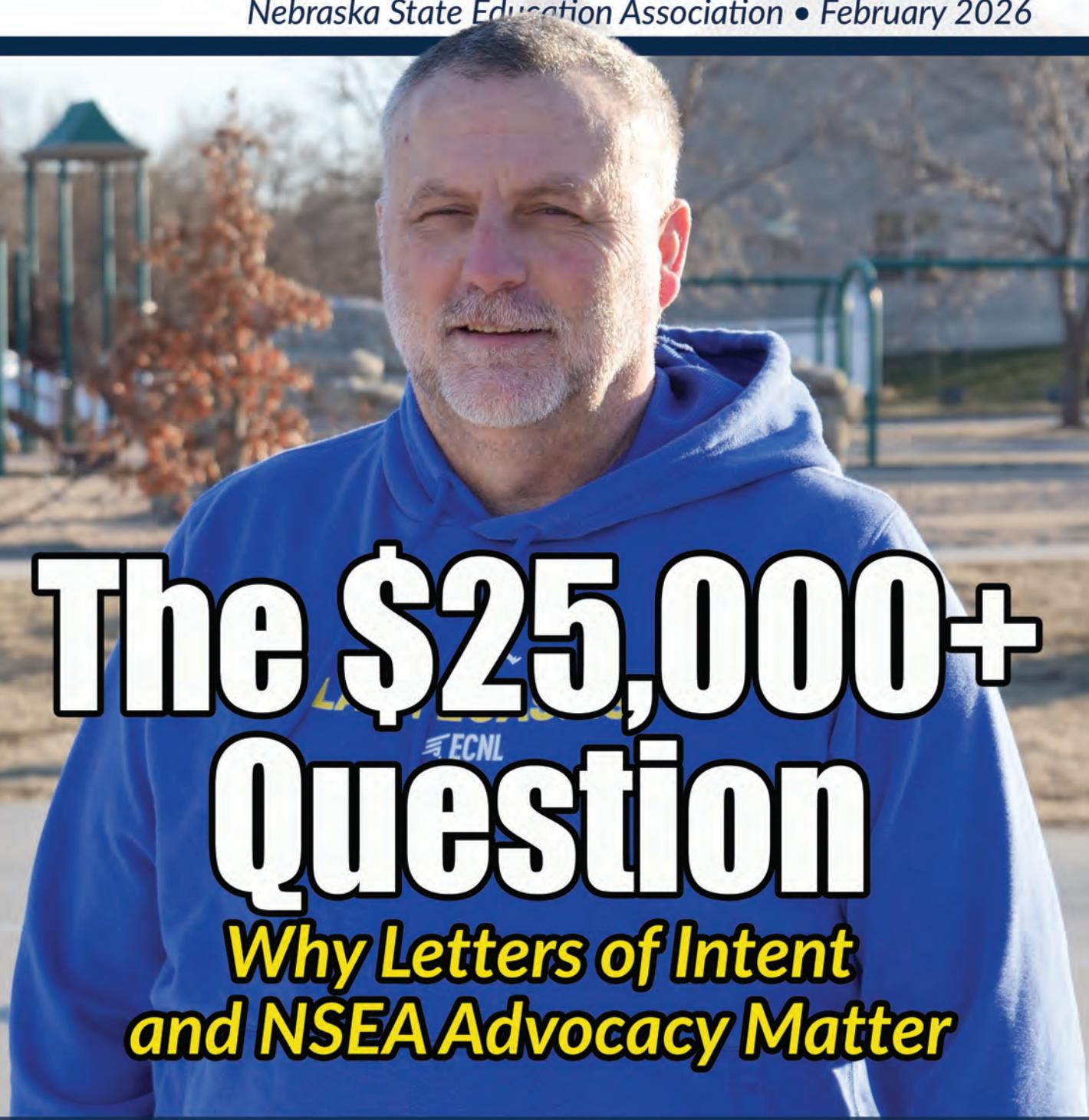


# The VOICE

Nebraska State Education Association • February 2026



## The \$25,000+ Question

**Why Letters of Intent  
and NSEA Advocacy Matter**

- Dates Set for School Retirement Seminars
- Great Ready for Public Schools Week
- Metes: Transparency and the First 100 Days



Nebraska State Education Association  
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## Get Ready for Public Schools Week February 23 - 27

This month, we celebrate the heart of our communities—our public schools. From classrooms and cafeterias to gyms and school buses, public schools are where students are supported, challenged and prepared for the future.

Public Schools Week will be celebrated Feb. 23–27, and communities across Nebraska and the nation are encouraged to take part in this annual advocacy week.

This is a time to uplift success stories, recognize the dedication of educators and education support professionals and highlight the vital role public schools play in providing equitable, inclusive and high-quality education for all students.

Public Schools Week is led by the Learning First Alliance and brings together partners from across the country representing more than 10 million educators, principals, parents, school board members and community leaders. Together, these organizations

showcase the strength, innovation and impact of America's public schools while advocating for policies that support student success.

Throughout the week, schools, districts, educators, families and community members are encouraged to participate by sharing stories of achievement, hosting events, engaging local leaders and amplifying positive messages on social media. These efforts reinforce the essential role public schools play in strengthening communities and preparing students for college, careers and civic life.

To help spread the word, visit the Public School Proud website at [www.publicschoolproud.org](http://www.publicschoolproud.org), where you can sign up for news and updates, access toolkits and resources and learn more about how to get involved. Help us build support and share what makes you Public School Proud during Public Schools Week 2026!

## Would You Like to Write for *The Voice*?

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

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

**On the Cover: A misunderstanding nearly cost a Papillion La Vista Education Association member \$25,000 in annual compensation. NSEA advocacy highlights why membership and documentation matter. See the full story and photos on pages 7-8.**



# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

TIM ROYERS

## A Culture of Success

Another legislative session is underway, and now that all bills have been introduced, we have a clearer sense of what could move out of the Unicameral by the end of this short, 60-day session.

### Bills, Bills, Bills

There are several bills we are excited about. Sen. Ashlei Spivey has introduced a new version of her bill that would provide six weeks of paid family and medical leave. Sen. John Cavanaugh has proposed legislation that would help some of our higher education locals gain access to the data they need to effectively bargain. Sens. George Dungan and Margo Juarez have introduced bills that would require judicial warrants for ICE activities in schools. Sen. Beau Ballard has introduced a bill to update how cost-of-living adjustments are handled for Omaha retirees—a result of a New Business Item adopted at last year's Delegate Assembly.

There are also proposals that raise serious concerns, including the governor's proposed cuts to special education funding and his plan to create a \$7 million voucher program housed within the Department of Labor.

The bills I want to focus on, however, are those that may be well-intended but could have serious consequences if implemented. One example is LB1050, which would require a student to repeat third grade if they fail to meet certain benchmarks on reading assessments. Few would disagree that improving elementary literacy is critical, but we know mandatory retention is not the solution. Research and classroom experience show that retaining students does not address the root causes of reading challenges and can create long-term academic and social consequences. Bills like this, while well-intended, are

where your voice can have the greatest impact.

### You are the Experts

Never forget that you are the experts in how we educate students. Your stories, experiences and professional judgment may be exactly what a state senator needs to hear to consider a better path forward. Whether you testify at a hearing, meet with a senator in the Rotunda, or send a quick email or phone call, your voice matters. Last year, a pro-educator bill was prioritized after a meaningful conversation between a state senator and one of our members.

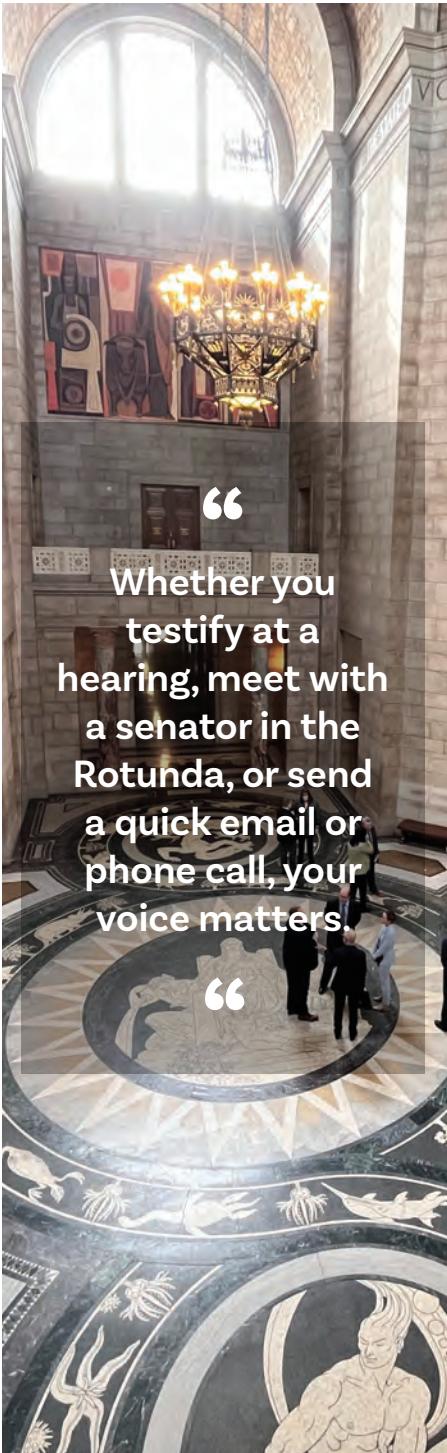
These types of bills are also why we invited every state senator to spend a day in a school last fall. In meetings since then, we are already seeing the impact of those visits. Experiencing a day in your shoes helped lawmakers better understand not only our needs, but our students' needs as well. When we ground good intentions in the real needs of our schools, that is when things begin to click.

We have already seen this on the Retirement Committee. Reforms enacted last year mean members participating in the NPERS retirement plan will see pay increases for two consecutive summers. This year, there is broad support to assist retirees in the OSERS plan. Next year, we hope to reverse the law requiring educators who began their careers in Nebraska after 2017 to wait an additional five years to retire.

Now, we are working to build that same culture of success across other committees. It will take all of us to make that happen. I am confident that when the session ends in April and we gather at Delegate Assembly, we will have important wins to celebrate. But it will take all of us, working together, to get there.

“  
Whether you testify at a hearing, meet with a senator in the Rotunda, or send a quick email or phone call, your voice matters.

”



# Dates Set for School Retirement Planning Seminars

If you are nearing retirement age, it may be time to start considering your retirement benefit options.

To learn about those options, staff from the Nebraska Public Employees Retirement Systems (NPERS) office will offer seminars throughout the spring and summer months. Educators can choose to attend an in-person seminar at one of nine locations across the state or join a virtual webinar.

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

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

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

the discretion of the administrator.

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

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



## In-Person

## Webinar

### Webinars

Feb. 17

Feb. 19

Feb. 23

Feb. 26

Mar. 27

Apr. 13

May 1

June 3

### In-Person Seminars (Location/Dates)

**BEATRICE:** April 29

**COLUMBUS:** March 12, April 9

**HASTINGS:** May 8

**KEARNEY:** March 18, May 5

**LA VISTA:** May 19

**LINCOLN:** March 3, March 4, March 24, April 2\*, April 16, May 14\*, May 21

**MCCOOK:** April 21

**NORFOLK:** March 11, April 8

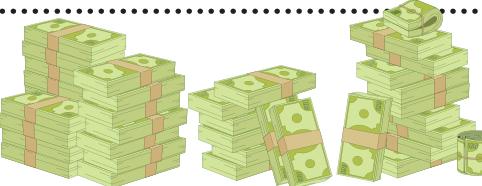
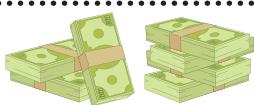
**GRAND ISLAND:** March 19

**NORTH PLATTE:** April 22

\* indicates the session is a half day.

# NPERS FACTS & FIGURES

## An Overview of Nebraska Public Employees Retirement Systems



**\$23.8 billion**

NPERS has more than \$23 billion in assets contributed by employees, employers, the state and investment earnings.



88% of retirement benefit distributions remain within the Nebraska economy.

**\$1.3 billion**

NPERS distributed \$1.3 billion in benefits with an average monthly benefit of \$2,319.



1 in 11 Nebraskans is a member of NPERS.

### Plan members by sector:



**School:** 104,330



**State:** 33,244



**OSERS:** 15,409



**County:** 14,485



**Patrol:** 961 | **DROP:** 32



**Judges:** 353

**175,840**

NPERS proudly serves 175,840 members and retirees.

SOURCE: NPERS 2025 Annual Report to the Legislative Retirement Committee

# Shine a Spotlight on an Exceptional Educator



**Meet Dina Lado**

Lincoln Education Association Member Dina Lado received the Great Plains Milestone Award at the 2025 Delegate Assembly.

Five yellow stars are displayed below the text.

## OUR JOY, OUR VOICE

Every day in Nebraska's schools, many moments remind us why we do this work. These small victories, big breakthroughs, shared smiles and quiet wins that often go unseen.

Our Joy, Our Voice is a new feature coming to NSEA's magazine, *The Voice*, created to celebrate those moments.

We'll highlight joyful moments from your association, classrooms, students and school communities. Whether it's a personal milestone, a classroom success or a moment that made you smile, we want to celebrate it with you.

Share your moments and help us celebrate joy with educators. Submit your moment at [www.nsea.org/OurJoy](http://www.nsea.org/OurJoy).

Now is the time to discuss who you or your local association might nominate for one of the honors awarded at Delegate Assembly in April. Any NSEA member may nominate a member teacher, Education Support Professional (ESP) or deserving group. The assembly will be held April 24-25 at Lincoln's Cornhusker Marriott Hotel. Members are eligible for:

- **Early Career Educator Award:** Honors a teacher who has excelled in their first five years of teaching.
- **Award for Teaching Excellence:** Honors a teacher who has excelled in the classroom over a period of time.
- **Education Support Professional of the Year Award:** Honors an ESP who has excelled in their job. Finalists will be notified in March, with winners announced at the assembly. Recipients receive a \$250 cash award.
- **Community Service Award:** Honors NSEA members or local associations involved in volunteer work outside of classroom hours.
- **The Tom Black Local Public Relations Award:** Honors local associations for outstanding internal communication.

Members can also nominate individuals or groups for these awards:

- **The Great Plains Milestone Award:** Honors an individual or group for promoting human and civil rights.
- **Administrator of Excellence Award:** Honors a public school administrator who strives every day to help students and staff be successful.
- **Friend of Education Award:** NSEA's highest honor is presented in recognition of an individual or organization that has made a statewide contribution to education or to Nebraska educators.
- **Outstanding Media Award:** Honors a newspaper, television or radio station for coverage of education issues and promotion of public education.

Nominations may be submitted online at [www.nsea.org/DA](http://www.nsea.org/DA) or mailed to NSEA Awards, 605 S. 14 St., Lincoln, NE 68508-2742. All nomination materials must be received at the NSEA office no later than 5 p.m. on Feb. 6.

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A misunderstanding nearly cost a Papillion La Vista Education Association member \$25,000 in annual compensation. NSEA advocacy highlights why membership and documentation matter.

# A \$25,000+ MISUNDERSTANDING: Why Letters of Intent and NSEA Advocacy Matter

Papillion LaVista Education Association (PLEA) member Johnnie Anderson was plainspoken and realistic about his limits when a medical condition made it unsafe for him to continue teaching high school wood shop in early 2025. Rather than push past what his health would allow, he worked with his district to find a path forward.

"The dust and environment just weren't compatible with my health," Anderson said. "My doctor made it clear that continuing as a shop teacher wasn't a risk worth taking."

Anderson, a former union electrician and second-career educator, is no stranger to career changes. Certified in physical education, Anderson contacted his district to pursue a PE role. He followed up with an email and a formal closing meeting, believing the situation was clear.

In March, Anderson received the district's standard letter of intent to return.

"Within five seconds of getting my intent to return letter, I signed it and sent it back to them electronically. As far as I was concerned, getting an intent to return letter meant the district wanted me, and me signing it meant that I was telling the district that I wanted to be in the district," Anderson said.

Near the end of the school year, an elementary PE position opened, and Anderson interviewed after encouragement from district leadership. Despite positive feedback, he did not receive the position.

### Critical Cut in Pay

As the 2025–26 school year approached, Anderson was

offered a floating substitute position. It was not his ideal role, but it would keep him in the district. He immediately noticed a problem—the position would pay around \$25,000 less annually, a drastic cut from his certified salary.

Given his years with the district, the salary placement did not align with his position on the salary schedule. At the same time, the district pressed for a quick response, citing an upcoming school board meeting that would require approval of his rehiring for the role. The situation did not make sense to Anderson.

"That's when I said, 'No way. It's time to call my union,'" Anderson said.

### Help from PLEA and NSEA

He contacted his Papillion La Vista Education Association representative, who escalated the issue to NSEA Organizational Specialist David Nielsen. Together, Nielsen and Anderson requested a meeting with the district.

"I found minutes from a previous meeting showing the board had accepted Johnnie's resignation—but Johnnie had never resigned," said Nielsen.

During the meeting, district representatives cited an email Anderson had sent thanking his principal as evidence of his intent to resign. Nielsen pushed back, noting the message contained no language ending Anderson's employment or indicating a resignation.

"I was so thankful for David in that meeting because I was so frustrated I couldn't think logically," Anderson said. "There was back and forth, but eventually David explained

to them that the reason I didn't look anywhere else was because I had signed my letter of intent."

### Letter of Intent

A letter of intent signals a certificated employee's plan to return to a school district for the following year. Under state law, districts may require those letters on or after March 15, and once signed and submitted, they are binding. Failing to return a letter of intent by a lawful deadline can jeopardize an educator's employment status.

For educators, letters of intent provide clarity and protection, documenting their commitment to a district and preserving salary placement, benefits and tenure. When questions arise, the record created by a signed letter can be critical.

After Nielsen raised the letter of intent, the room went silent. He and Anderson paused while district representatives searched their system for the digital record.

"She looked right at me and said, 'You did sign your letter of intent, and we do need to find you a job,'" Anderson said.

### A \$25,000 Meeting

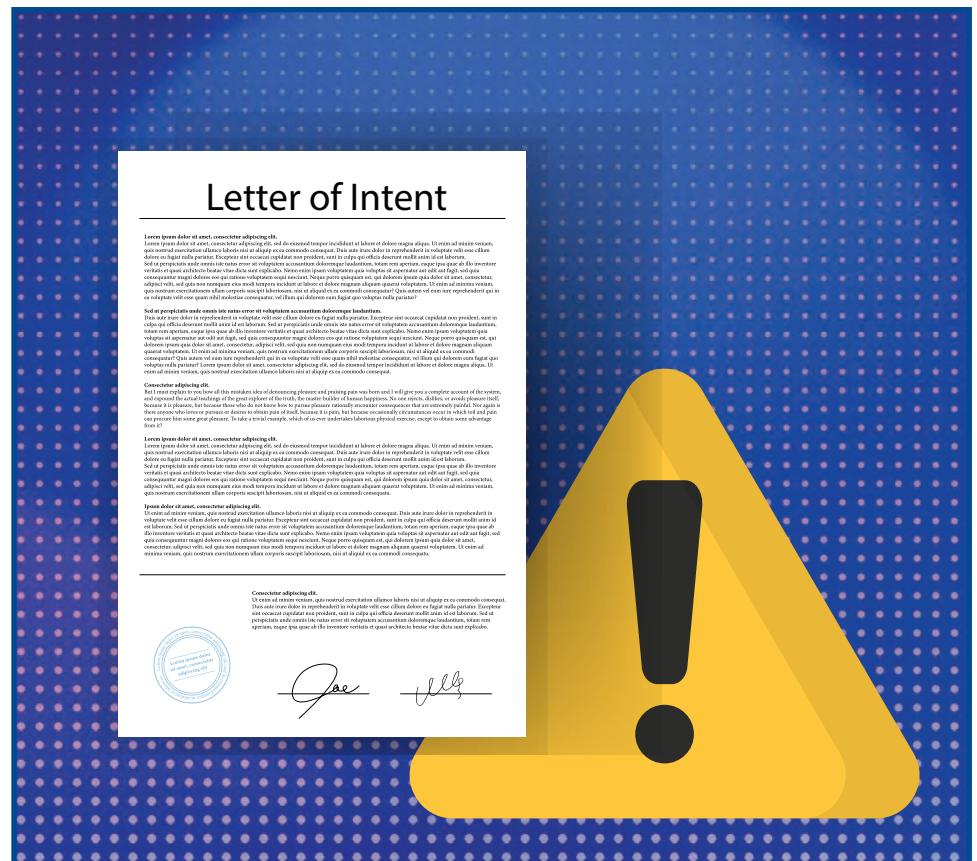
The district reversed course. Anderson retained his certified pay, benefits, tenure and placement on the salary scale. Instead of a cut in pay with the floating substitute position, he was given a position in one building for the 2025-26 school year and compensated appropriately at the rate of a full-time certified staff member.

"That one meeting was a \$25,000 meeting," Nielsen said. "Without that letter of intent and without advocacy, Johnnie would have lost compensation and protections he had earned."

During the 2025-26 school year, Anderson worked as a paraeducator while awaiting placement. This December, he was notified he would begin a full-time elementary PE position for the 2026-27 school year.

For Anderson, the experience reinforced the importance of both documentation and membership.

"There is no doubt in my mind that the letter of intent is the most important document I've ever signed," he said. "And the second most important thing was having someone like David, my local association and NSEA behind me."



## Letter of Intent Date: March 15

### Know your rights if asked to sign letter early

Signing and returning a letter of intent to your district employer is important, but don't let the pressure get to you, especially if you're asked to do so too early.

A letter of intent (and/or accompanying contract) signifies your plan to return to teaching in your district next year. State law allows school districts, on or after March 15 each year, to require certificated employees—teachers, counselors, speech pathologists, psychologists and others—to sign binding letters of intent and/or individual contracts.

Yet some administrators distribute letters, and ask for them back, even before the winter holidays. Often in an effort to get a handle on next year's staffing situation, superintendents might suggest letters be returned by Feb. 1 or March 1.

Knowing your rights is important. Members should not rush to sign, but rather be deliberate and use the time allotted by law. Making a decision months in advance may cause problems down the road if your

personal situation changes.

**State statute is clear:** A school district cannot require teachers to make a commitment before March 15.

However, failure to sign and return the letter by stated deadlines that fall **on or after** March 15 is a threat to a teacher's employment.

If administrators distribute such a letter or contract prior to March 15 and ask for its return prior to March 15, a local association representative should fax a copy to their assigned NSEA organizational specialist at 1-402-475-2630.

In the meantime, an appropriate response to the letter is "I don't know yet" or "I'm not sure."

Letters that ask for a signature and return **on** March 15 or on a specified date **after** March 15 are appropriate. In such cases, it is vital to sign and return it by the due date.

Have questions? Call NSEA at 1-800-742-0047 to speak with your region's organizational specialist.



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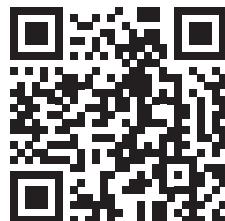
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# LEGISLATURE

## Protecting Public Education in Nebraska

Member voices are key to advocate for the future of education

The Nebraska Legislature convened on Jan. 7 for its 60-day session. Senators have introduced a total of 545 legislative bills and 12 proposed constitutional amendments. Each bill encompasses a broad range of issues and potential changes to state law, including education, healthcare, infrastructure, taxation and more. The NSEA government relations team closely monitors legislative activity and advocates on behalf of our members, students and public education.

### New \$7 Million Voucher Scheme

On Jan. 15, during his State of the State address, Governor Jim Pillen presented his mid-biennium budget adjustments, primarily carried in LB1071 and LB1072. He outlined several priorities for the 2026 agenda, including a new effort to divert public dollars away from Nebraska's public schools through a \$7 million private school voucher program—this time embedded in the Nebraska



**Committee Hearings:** In January, NSEA President Tim Royers testified before the Legislature's Education Committee in opposition to LB748, which could accelerate the projected insolvency of the Education Future Fund at a time when Nebraska is already facing budget shortfalls.

Department of Labor's budget.

The proposal comes as Nebraska faces a projected \$471 million budget shortfall, placing lawmakers under intense pressure to determine where cuts must be made to balance the state budget. Against this backdrop, the governor's plan represents a troubling misuse of taxpayer funds and a direct challenge to the will of Nebraska voters.

"Despite sending a very clear message at the ballot box in the last election, the governor has decided yet again to ignore the will of the people of this great state," said NSEA President Tim Royers. "Allocating millions of our tax dollars to private schools, at a time when he is slashing critical state services, is deeply concerning. We will use every remedy possible to make sure this proposal does not become a reality."

The proposal is included in the mainline budget bill introduced by Speaker John Arch on behalf of the governor. On page 7, the bill directs that:

*The Department of Labor shall establish an Education Savings Account scholarship program to provide scholarships to the parents of students in grades K-12 in the State of Nebraska. The Department of Labor shall establish criteria for the awarding of scholarships which may include: income eligibility, limitations on awards, and limitations on expenditures for awardees.*

This language creates a new Education Savings Account (ESA) voucher program using state funds—channeled through an agency with no expertise in K-12 education—allowing taxpayer dollars to subsidize private and parochial school tuition.

The governor's proposal is especially alarming given what it would mean for Nebraska's public school students—particularly those in rural districts and those who require special education services. While seeking \$7 million for private school vouchers, the governor is simultaneously proposing \$18 million in cuts to special education funding. Because special education costs are shared across all public school districts—both equalized and non-equalized—



through TEEOSA, these cuts would likely result in significant property tax increases for communities across the state.

**CALL TO ACTION:** The NSEA urges all members to take immediate action by contacting the governor's office at [www.nsea.org/RespectVoters](http://www.nsea.org/RespectVoters) and your state senators and tell them to reject the \$7 million voucher proposal in LB1071 and stand up for Nebraska's public schools.

### Sen. McKeon Resigns

One of the session's first notable events involved a change in representation for LD41. Last week, the Legislature's Executive Board unanimously advanced LR282, a resolution to expel Sen. Dan McKeon following an investigation into alleged violations of workplace policies, including reports of harassment and inappropriate conduct toward legislative staff. Rather than face a full floor debate on expulsion, McKeon resigned from his seat on Jan. 13 just before the discussion was scheduled to begin.

Gov. Jim Pillen appointed former State Senator Fred Meyer of St. Paul to fill the vacancy. Meyer previously served briefly in LD41 in 2024 after Sen. Tom Briese was appointed state treasurer. A special election will be held later this year to fill the remainder of the term.

### School Funding Proposals

The 10-day bill introduction period concluded on Jan. 21. Among the bills introduced was LB1038, sponsored by Sen. Jana Hughes of Seward. This measure proposes a major restructuring of Nebraska's school finance system under the Tax Equity and Educational Opportunities Support Act (TEEOSA). Senator Hughes argues it would lower visible local property tax levies for residents without increasing overall education spending. The bill would significantly revise the current funding formula, potentially

redirecting hundreds of millions (possibly billions) in property tax credits and state aid flows. While any effort to provide property tax relief is noteworthy, NSEA will carefully evaluate how these changes might affect overall school funding stability, equity across districts and resources available for students and educators.

### What Members Want

This fall, NSEA's all-member survey generated more than 8,000 comments from educators across Nebraska, offering a clear snapshot of the realities facing the profession. Educators shared candid feedback on working conditions, compensation, long-term career sustainability and whether they see themselves remaining in education without meaningful change. That input did more than identify challenges—it helped clarify priorities and reinforced the importance of advocacy grounded in lived experience.

The survey was distributed to nearly 16,000 educators statewide, and their concerns are reflected throughout the adopted 2026 policy agenda. Results pointed to a growing disconnect between classroom realities and policymaking. Member input remains central to this work, ensuring the association's advocacy reflects both the challenges educators face and the solutions they believe are necessary to move the profession forward. See the adopted 2026 policy agenda, page 12.

### Paid Family and Medical Leave

A flagship priority remains advancing LB440, the Education Leave and Support Act, which would provide paid family and medical leave for teachers. Although the bill did not pass in 2025, its adoption could significantly improve recruitment, retention and equity—particularly for early-career educators navigating life events such as maternity or medical leave. The 2026 amendment to

LB440 provides up to 30 service days (six weeks) of paid Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) leave for certificated K-12 public school employees, including teachers and school administrators. This proposal builds on last year's discussions while directly addressing concerns raised by school districts and senators during the 2025 legislative session. Under the

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amendment, paid FMLA is locally funded, locally designed and locally administered while ensuring educators are not forced to choose between their health, family and a paycheck. The 2026 amendment takes a different, more flexible approach:

- No payroll tax or mandatory fee on teachers or districts.
- No state-level fund that redistributes money between districts.
- Local control: districts may meet the requirement through existing or newly created mechanisms such as:
  - Sick leave banks
  - Local leave pools
  - Contractual benefits negotiated locally
  - Other district-designed solutions
- Certainty for employees: 30 days of paid FMLA is guaranteed by statute.

This approach ensures funds stay in the district where the leave occurs, addressing concerns that payroll contributions would primarily benefit other districts rather than covering local substitute costs.

## Stay Informed

As the session accelerates, the government relations team will continue providing updates, action alerts and opportunities for member involvement—especially through public hearings and testimony.

Committee hearings are a crucial component of the legislative process, offering lawmakers an avenue to directly engage with educators regarding the potential consequences of proposed legislation.

Public hearings on the bills began on Jan. 20 and will run through Feb. 27, providing an opportunity for members to participate in the legislative process.

Any member interested in sharing their story can contact their NSEA Organizational Specialist or call NSEA at 402-475-7611 or toll-free at 800-742-0047. Members can also send questions and information through the 'Contact Us' feature of the NSEA website at [www.nsea.org/contact-us](http://www.nsea.org/contact-us).

# 2026 State Policy Agenda

- 1. Provide Paid Family Medical Leave:** Establish a program that provides every Nebraska educator with six weeks of paid FMLA leave.
- 2. Improve Working Conditions:** Ensure teachers have the resources, planning time, and administrative support so students can learn and thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. Address burnout by reducing non-teaching duties and expanding support services.
- 3. Revise State Aid to Education Formula (TEEOSA):** Use School Finance Review Commission findings to propose changes that establish equitable and sustainable funding for public education across Nebraska. Guarantee budget deficit remedies don't negatively impact public education funding.
- 4. Increase Educator Salaries and Retention Support:** Advocate for retention grants for veteran educators and education support professionals. Simplify access to existing retention and recruitment grants for early-career educators by making them automatic, requiring no additional paperwork, to attract and retain top talent.
- 5. Expand Classroom Behavior Support:** Advocate for increased state funding and additional programs and policies that prioritize student and educator safety in the classroom.
- 6. Enhance Special Education Services:** Secure additional special education funding, hire paraprofessionals, provide training, and acquire assistive technology to provide critical services, while creating inclusive and equitable spaces for all children.
- 7. Strengthen Early Childhood Education:** Expand access to early learning programs to ensure all children, regardless of background, are prepared for school.
- 8. Support Postsecondary Educators:** Address issues of low pay, job insecurity, and limited professional development opportunities to maintain high-quality instruction in colleges and universities.
- 9. Protect the Diversity of Educators and Students:** Promote efforts to strengthen existing diversity, equity, and inclusion programs by supporting equitable hiring, cultural competency, and inclusive policies that create conditions for all educators and students to close achievement and opportunity gaps.
- 10. Strengthen Certification Pathways:** Guarantee all student teachers in Nebraska receive compensation for their time. Develop alternative pathways for gaining initial certification through district programs and training.



# Take a closer look

**Our *insurance and retirement solutions help educators protect what they have today and prepare for a successful tomorrow.***

**We think you'll like what you see.**

**Learn more**



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## DELEGATE ASSEMBLY: Together We Move Forward

Together We Move Forward, Together We Make Change—that's the theme guiding the 2026 NSEA Delegate Assembly, set for April 24–25 at the Cornhusker Marriott Hotel in Lincoln. In just a few months, member-elected delegates from across Nebraska will come together for the Association's 166th Delegate Assembly, led by NSEA President Tim Royers, to set priorities and shape the future of public education in the state.

The Delegate Assembly is NSEA's annual business meeting, bringing together educators elected by their local associations to represent both large and small districts, as well as urban and rural communities. These delegates speak on behalf of more than 23,000 NSEA members, managing the business of the Association, setting policy direction and helping chart the path forward for NSEA's advocacy and leadership.

During the assembly, delegates will engage in keynote presentations, discussions on pressing education issues and consideration of proposed updates to NSEA bylaws and resolutions. These decisions guide the Association's work throughout the year and directly influence its legislative and professional priorities. Members can watch for additional details and updates in upcoming editions of *The Voice*.

The Delegate Assembly also serves as a time to celebrate excellence in education. Awards presented during the event recognize outstanding professionals from across the state, including the Early Career Educator of the Year, Educational Support Professional of the Year, the Teaching Excellence Award recipient, NSEA's 2026 Friend of Education and other honorees. Full award details, including eligibility requirements and submission deadlines, are

included on page 5.

To attend as a delegate, members must be elected by their local association. Those interested in serving should contact their local association president, building or faculty representative, or NSEA organizational specialist. Serving as a delegate provides a meaningful opportunity to advocate for colleagues, help guide Association priorities and take part in decisions that impact educators and students statewide.

As Nebraska's oldest professional education association, NSEA has convened Delegate Assemblies nearly every year since its founding to ensure members have a strong voice in governance and policy. The 2026 Delegate Assembly continues that long-standing tradition, bringing educators together to reflect, collaborate and move forward—*together*.

# LOOKING AHEAD

## 2026 Delegate Assembly

April 24-25

Lincoln's Cornhusker Marriott Hotel

## 2027 Delegate Assembly

April 23-24

Lincoln's Cornhusker Marriott Hotel

## How do I...

### Propose a Bylaws Amendment?

- The Bylaws are the fundamental rules which govern basic organizational questions, such as the definition of membership and election of officers. The Bylaws can never be suspended and can only be changed by a two-thirds majority in a secret ballot at the annual Delegate Assembly — and then only after delegates have received prior notice of the proposed change.
- Article XII—Amendments—Section 1. Amendments to these Bylaws may be adopted by a two-thirds vote of the Delegate Assembly. Amendments shall be proposed in writing at least 45 days prior to the Assembly and referred to the Bylaws Committee for study and report.

Visit [www.nsea.org/proposed-bylaws-amendment](http://www.nsea.org/proposed-bylaws-amendment) for the deadline information and to submit an amendment.

### Propose a Resolution?

- A Resolution is a statement of belief or a position adopted by the Annual Delegate Assembly that establishes a continuing NSEA policy until changed by the Annual Delegate Assembly.
- The Resolutions Committee shall be composed of the general officers of the NSEA, members of the NSEA Board of Directors, the Nebraska representatives on the NEA Resolutions Committee who will serve as committee co-chairs, the alternates of the NEA Resolutions Committee who will serve as committee vice-chair, and any at-large NEA Resolutions Committee member who is a NSEA member.
- Proposed resolutions and amendments to Continuing Resolutions may be prepared by the NSEA Standing and Ad Hoc committees, the NSEA Board of Directors, NSEA District Boards or Caucuses, or individual members of the NSEA and submitted to the Resolutions Committee via the NSEA website. The maker may include a rationale concerning the purpose for the motion. Proposed resolutions and amendments shall be added to the report of the Resolutions Committee.
- The Resolutions Committee shall have the authority to edit for clarification any resolution or amendment. Proposed resolutions and amendments submitted to the Resolutions Committee shall be published through EdCommunities and in the Delegate workbook. Any Resolution submitted prior to the submission deadline may be amended from the Delegate floor.

Visit [www.nsea.org/proposed-resolution](http://www.nsea.org/proposed-resolution) for the deadline information and to submit a resolution.

### Introduce a New Business Item?

- A New Business Item is a statement that establishes, alters, or abolishes substantive policies or programs of the Association. Such a proposal shall not be in direct conflict with an existing Association Bylaw and/or Resolution. Each New Business Item shall be in force for one year, or for another length of time specified by the Annual Delegate Assembly, and may be renewed at the discretion of the Annual Delegate Assembly.
- New Business Items must be submitted to the NSEA President via the NSEA website. The maker may include a rationale concerning the purpose for the motion.
- New Business Items directly or indirectly involving an expenditure of funds shall be accompanied by a cost estimate provided by NSEA management.
- The NBI Committee reviews all NBIs prior to final printing, and holds conversations with makers, if necessary, to revise where needed.
- Any New Business Item submitted prior to the submission deadline may be amended from the Delegate floor.

Visit [www.nsea.org/proposed-new-business-item](http://www.nsea.org/proposed-new-business-item) for the deadline information and to submit a new business item.



# Don't Delay! Apply Early for Your Certificate Renewal

Educators who need to renew their certificate in 2026 may want to complete their application early to avoid processing delays with the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE).

Each year, the NDE sends certificate renewal reminders to thousands of Nebraska educators. The teaching certificate is valid for teaching in all Nebraska school systems and must be renewed every five years. Certificates expire on Aug. 31 each year. Backlogs at the department in recent years have sent members to NSEA for help to get answers about the process. In 2024, the department hired additional staff to help manage certificate renewals. This year, the department is encouraging certificated teachers

who will need to renew in 2026 to apply between the months of January and March.

"This will help with the processing time for their certificates and not put them in a bind if they wait until it gets closer to August when our office has many new grads that are working through the system," said NDE Director of Educator Certification Katelyn Larson.

Teachers who are unsure if their certificate expires this year can log in to the Nebraska TEACH portal and check the expiration date: [teach.education.ne.gov/#/verifylicense](https://teach.education.ne.gov/#/verifylicense).

To renew, log on to: [teach.education.ne.gov](https://teach.education.ne.gov) and start an application. The application can be found at the top of the account portal.



## Have a student teacher? Give the Gift of Aspiring Educators Membership!

A semester of student teaching is a unique time for an educator, and it's the perfect time to surround oneself with support from other new and seasoned educators.

If you have a student teacher in your classroom this year, encourage them to become a member of the NSEA-Aspiring Educators. You may even set aside some time to walk them through the process and help them understand the myriad of benefits they'll receive as a member of the Association.

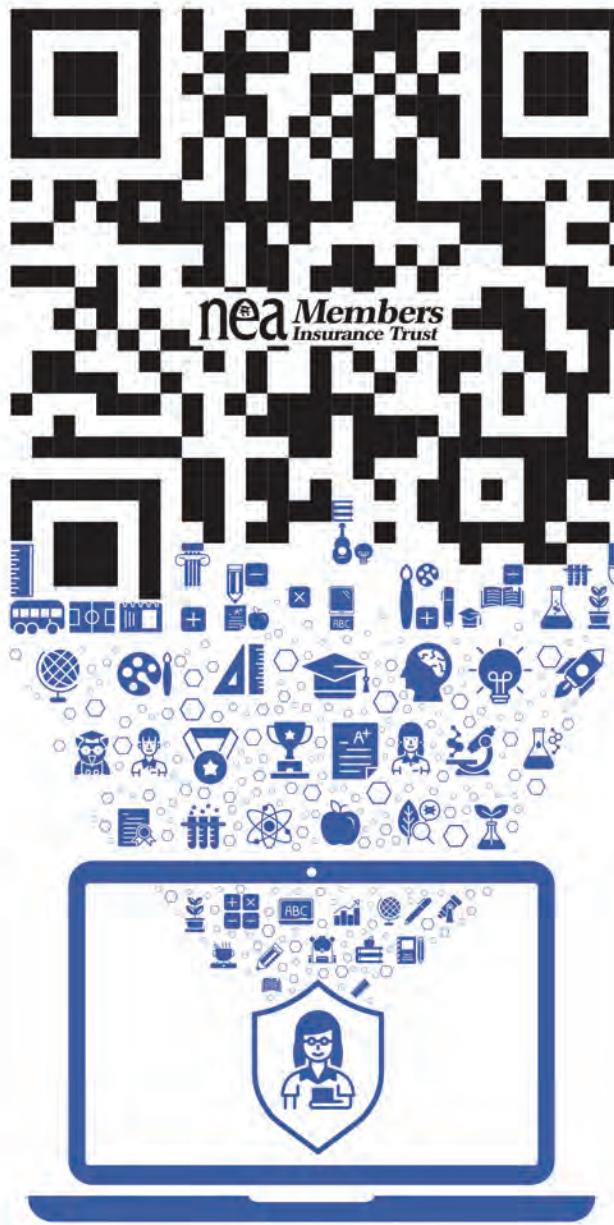
Feeling especially generous? Pay their Aspiring Educators dues—just \$40 for the year!

Benefits of membership for Aspiring Educators include student loan forgiveness workshops, access to year-round professional development opportunities, big savings through the NEA Discount Marketplace, the \$1 million Educators Employment Liability insurance policy and much more.

First-year educators will also benefit from involvement in NewGEN, NSEA's New Generation of Educators in Nebraska. The organization is comprised of early career educators in their first seven years of teaching who network and support each other through the challenges of a new teaching career.

For more information or to help a new member register, go to [www.nsea.org/JoinNow](https://www.nsea.org/JoinNow), or contact the NSEA Membership Department by calling 1-800-742-0047 or emailing [membership@nsea.org](mailto:membership@nsea.org).

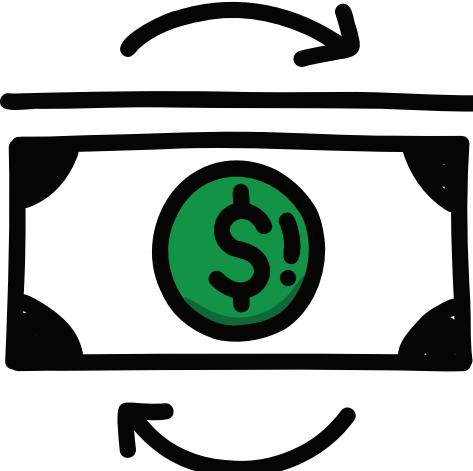
**Over 900K members** have completed registration for this **no-cost-to-you** benefit. **Scan this code** to join them.



If something were to happen to you,  
**would your family be protected?**

Scan the QR code above to register or go to [neamb.com/mycomplife](http://neamb.com/mycomplife)

**nea** *Members*  
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## IMPORTANT REMINDER

Request PAC Refund by  
**February 15**

NSEA's Political Action Committee is supported by voluntary donations collected with NSEA dues. Support for the election of recommended candidates is provided by an annual contribution of \$15 from each NSEA member.

Any member may request a refund of those contributions for the current membership year. Alternatively, members may direct the \$15 contribution to be used for bond elections and school ballot issues only.

Refund requests must be in writing to NSEA President Tim Royers. Each letter must be individually composed and contain an original signature of the member. Photocopied, computer-generated letters or email messages are not accepted. Each letter must indicate whether all or part of the contribution is to be refunded or designated for ballot issues.

Requests must be postmarked no later than Feb. 15. In order to efficiently use dues dollars, requests for refunds received by the due date will be processed and mailed in a single batch after that date.

Send requests to NSEA President Tim Royers at 605 S. 14th St., Lincoln, NE 68508. For questions, email [tim.royers@nsea.org](mailto:tim.royers@nsea.org) or call NSEA at 1-800-742-0047.

# LAST CHANCE TO APPLY! Belz, Lynch, Krause Grants

Good teachers are always looking to improve their skill set, and the NSEA makes learning easier with an award from the Belz, Lynch, Krause Educational Grant Fund. The 2026 application deadline is Sunday, March 1.

Grants are awarded for projects related to improving a local association, development of instructional materials or for staff development for individuals of a local association. Eligible recipients are any NSEA member, group of NSEA members or any NSEA local association.

The application must include an abstract of the project (not to exceed four typed pages) including the following information:

- need;
- how the project will address that need and relate to professional growth goals;
- project description;
- timeline;
- a budget statement; and
- methods of evaluating success.

Applications must be submitted



Belz



Lynch



Krause

online by 11:59 p.m. CST on March 1. Recipients will be notified in March.

A letter describing and evaluating the project must be submitted by the recipients to NSEA's Scholarship and Grants Committee within three months of project completion.

The grants are named for John Lynch, NSEA's executive director from 1959 to 1974; Paul Belz, executive director from 1974 to 1984; and Helen Krause, NSEA president in 1966 and the first Nebraskan to serve on NEA's Executive Committee.

Further details and the application form can be found at [www.nsea.org/BLK](http://www.nsea.org/BLK). For questions, contact Chris Garcia at 1-800-742-0047 or email [Chris.Garcia@nsea.org](mailto:Chris.Garcia@nsea.org).

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BlueCross BlueShield Nebraska



# Enter the NEA Member Benefits Annual Giveaway

## All-Inclusive Adventure



### Enter by March 30 to Win the NEA Member Benefits Sweepstakes

The NEA Member Benefits program has launched its annual travel giveaway, offering three National Education Association members the chance to win a five-night, all-inclusive resort stay at select beach destinations, officials announced.

The prizes include accommodations at resorts in Puerto Plata, Cancún, Los Cabos, Mazatlán, Puerto Morelos or Cozumel. Each winner will also receive \$150 in cash, according to NEA Member Benefits.

The giveaway is open to eligible NEA members, and entries will be accepted through March. Winners are scheduled to be selected and announced March 30.

NEA Member Benefits, which provides discounts and programs to NEA's membership, said the promotion is intended to highlight travel opportunities available to educators and education support professionals.

No purchase is required to enter. Additional eligibility requirements and official rules apply.

Members can enter the giveaway and find more information at [www.nea.org/mb.com/pages/sweepstakes](http://www.nea.org/mb.com/pages/sweepstakes).

SCAN ME TO  
ENTER TO WIN ➤➤➤➤➤



## Turn to the NSEA Children's Fund This Winter



Nebraska winters can make even the most warmly dressed children shiver. Imagine walking to school in the biting cold of the early morning without a coat or warm mittens, or with shoes that are falling apart. Unfortunately, this is a reality for many children in Nebraska. Teachers frequently spend their own hard-earned dollars to help these children. But a teacher can't assist every child encountered during the school day, much less during the school year. That is why NSEA created the Children's Fund. Since 1994, donations to the Children's Fund have provided hundreds of thousands of dollars to help children in need.

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; purchase a bus ticket for a child with no other means to get to school; and more.

There is never any red tape or lengthy delay for members wanting to use the fund to help a student. A call to Karen Hunt at the NSEA (800-742-0047) is usually all that is needed. For more information, visit [nsea.org/childrensfund](http://nsea.org/childrensfund).



# Make the most of your new **MEMBERSHIP!**

Find out how NEA Member Benefits can help you:

- Reduce student debt
- Save on travel and everyday items
- Get insurance that fits your schedule
- Sign up for free life insurance
- Plan ahead for retirement

And so much more!

Scan below  
to learn more



**nea** *Member  
Benefits*



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“

**Progress will be shared openly, and input will be invited often. Listening does not end once goals are set—it is an ongoing commitment.**

”

# Message from the Executive Director

## Transparency & the First 100 Days

In my first several weeks as Executive Director, I'm holding tight to something I learned early in my teaching career: before you can lead, you have to listen. For me, this transition has not been about arriving with all the answers. It's been about understanding the organization I now have the honor to serve, the people who power it every day and the members whose voices must guide our work. The strength of this association has always come from its people, and my responsibility is to ensure that strength is reflected in how we move forward together.

### Phase 1: Listening

The first phase of my work has focused on listening internally. I have met, or am scheduled to meet, with every NSEA program director to better understand upcoming projects, workload demands and opportunities to align our work more strategically. I've met with the staff union to hear directly about issues and expectations. I've also established regular standing meetings with the staff union president, with NSEA President Tim Royers and Associate Executive Director Shauna Benjamin-Brice, and with our NSEA business office to ensure communication, planning and accountability remain consistent and transparent.

Alongside this internal listening, I've begun reaching outward. I've met with EHA advisers and am scheduling conversations with executive leaders from EHA partner organizations. These conversations are essential to strengthen collaboration across organizations that share our mission.

Phase one has also included a careful audit of internal operations and a review of our legal and financial obligations. That work may not always

be visible, but it is foundational. Strong advocacy and bold vision grow out of care, intention and clear systems. Through this lens, I've begun developing a framework for strategic goal setting.

### Phase 2: Strategic Goals

As I move into the second phase of the first 100 days, my focus will shift from listening to shaping direction, together. Strategic goals and vision refinement will take place in partnership with NEA and across all fronts: members, governance leaders and staff. This work will center on defining clear goals, aligning staff work and prioritizing projects that move us closer to our shared objectives.

Maintaining a strong feedback loop will remain essential. Progress will be shared openly, and input will be invited often. Listening does not end once goals are set—it is an ongoing commitment.

### Phase 3: Deliver

The final phase of the first 100 days is about action and accountability. We will roll out mission-driven initiatives that reflect our shared priorities and values.

This work is ambitious, but it is grounded in a simple belief: when we listen first and act together, we are stronger. Educators are navigating increasing demands, shifting policies and growing expectations. Our association must meet those realities with unity and purpose.

During these first 100 days, I invite you to stay engaged, ask questions and share your perspective. Your voice matters—not just in this moment, but in shaping the future of our organization and the profession we serve.



# 2026 ELECTIONS

## YOUR VOICE, YOUR VOTE, OUR FUTURE

### Filing Deadline is Feb. 5

Members are encouraged to consider stepping into a leadership role within NSEA-Retired by running for a position in the upcoming elections. Serving in a leadership capacity is a meaningful way to continue advocating for retired educators, strengthening our organization and ensuring that the voices of retired members remain influential at the local, state and national levels.

Candidate filing for all open positions is now available online at [www.nsea.org/retired](http://www.nsea.org/retired). Interested members should complete the filing process by the deadline of Sunday, Feb. 5. All candidates are encouraged to submit a brief 50-word statement with their application to share their background, interests and reasons for seeking office with fellow members.

Several leadership positions on the NSEA-Retired Board of Directors are open for election. Each position carries a three-year term and provides

an opportunity to help guide the direction and priorities of NSEA-Retired. Open positions include:

- President
- Vice President
- Capitol-1 District Director
- Elkhorn District Director
- Sandhills District Director

All positions take office Aug. 15.

Numbers for NSEA Delegate Assembly will be four delegates from Capitol District, five from Metro, three from Tri-Valley, two from Elkhorn, one from Panhandle, one from Sandhills and two at-large. NEA Representative Assembly delegates will include one from the Capitol and Metro districts combined, one from the remaining four districts and out-of-state members combined and three at-large delegates. NSEA-Retired President John Heineman serves as a delegate at both DA and RA by virtue of office.

**NSEA-RETIRE**

### Governance/Lobby Day

Mark your calendars for Feb. 17, as NSEA-Retired gears up for Lobby Day.

The day will kick off with an orientation session, designed to prepare participants for their roles in advocating for education-related issues. Attendees will learn about current legislative priorities and effective lobbying techniques to ensure their voices are heard.

Following orientation, participants will have the opportunity to engage directly with state senators. This is a chance to discuss pertinent issues impacting education issues highlighted in NSEA's 2026 State Policy Agenda and to share personal experiences.

NSEA-Retired members will hear from state senators during a luncheon.

Additionally, Lobby Day will provide attendees the opportunity to attend legislative hearings and, for some, the chance to testify on key educational matters. This is a remarkable way to contribute to the legislative process and make a real difference in education policy.

Don't miss this chance to stand up for Nebraska's educators and students.

Join NSEA-Retired on Feb. 17 to be part of this important advocacy effort. Register online at [www.nsea.org/retiredlobby](http://www.nsea.org/retiredlobby).



**Elect  
Susan Kalina**  
NSEA-Retired  
Vice President



Have an article idea for the *NSEA-Retired Advocate* or the *NSEA Voice* magazine?  
Send your idea to John Heineman:  
[RingoJohn@aol.com](mailto:RingoJohn@aol.com)

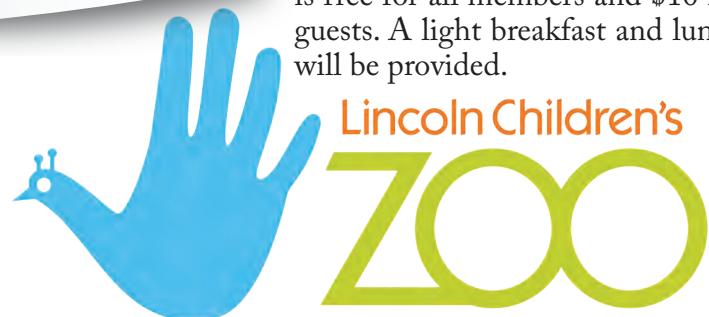
# Save the Date

## NSEA-RETIRED SPRING CONFERENCE



APRIL

23



## LEA-Retired Visits Great Plains Black History Museum

Lincoln Education Association-Retired members recently gained insight into Nebraska's Black history through a presentation by Eric Ewing, executive director of the Great Plains Black History Museum.

During a monthly meeting, Ewing shared the mission and work of the Omaha-based museum, highlighting its role in preserving and sharing the stories, contributions and experiences of Black communities in the Great Plains region. The presentation was well received and sparked strong interest among members.

Following the presentation, more than 20 members traveled to Omaha to visit the Great Plains Black History Museum in person. The group began the day with lunch at Big Mama's Kitchen, a longtime Omaha restaurant known for its cultural and community significance, before touring the museum.

The visit provided members with an opportunity to further engage with the history discussed during the presentation and to experience the exhibits firsthand, deepening their understanding of the region's Black heritage.

The presentation and subsequent museum visit reflected members' interest in educational programming and meaningful opportunities for learning beyond regular meetings.



# BLACK HISTORY MONTH

## February is Black History Month

Feb. 1 marks the start of Black History Month, bringing opportunities for critical reflection and honest conversation with our students about our history.

Check out and share this curated list of Black History Month classroom resources that includes a podcast with NEA member and social studies teacher Kevin Adams on teaching Black history more meaningfully. Visit [www.bit.ly/BlackHistory-NEA-List](http://www.bit.ly/BlackHistory-NEA-List).

Your  
"Family of  
Teachers"  
photo here

# Family of Teachers

Teaching isn't just a profession—it's a legacy. Whether it's a family of educators spanning generations or a new tradition in the making, "Family of Teachers" celebrates those who dedicate their lives to shaping young minds.

If teaching runs in your family, we want to hear your story! Submit a photo of you and your fellow educators—parents, siblings, grandparents or even aunts and uncles—who share this incredible calling. Let's honor the passion, dedication and impact of families who make a difference in the classroom every day.

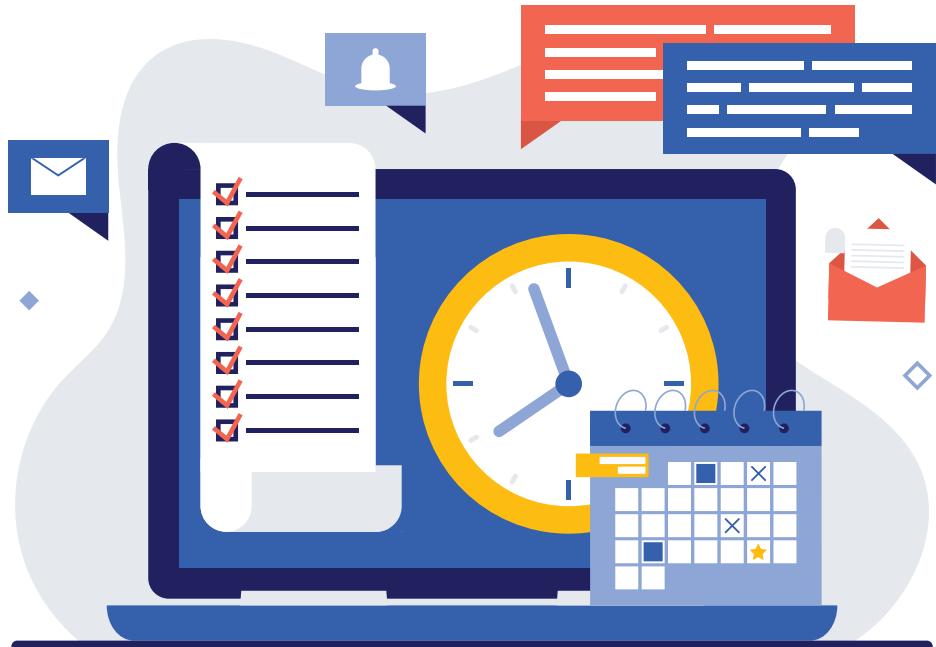
Submit your photos today and be featured in "Family of Teachers" at [www.nsea.org/Family](http://www.nsea.org/Family).

Family  
of Teachers



Scan Me

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605 S. 14th St., Lincoln, NE 68508-2742



## FILE FOR OFFICE AND GET READY TO VOTE

Is it time to step forward and consider a leadership role in your association?

Starting Friday, Feb. 6, NSEA members will vote for candidates to fill dozens of district leadership posts, as well as openings on the NSEA's Board of Directors. Electees will assume roles in determining the Association's future.

The position of NSEA Vice President will be up for election for a three-year term at the April 2026 Delegate Assembly. Candidates for this office must declare their candidacy by Sunday, Feb. 15, in writing to NSEA Executive Director

Isau Metes at [isau.metes@nsea.org](mailto:isau.metes@nsea.org).

The window for filing for NSEA District offices opened Jan. 1 and closed Sunday, Jan. 25. All NSEA members are eligible to vote for district officers and Representative Assembly At-Large delegates. Voting will be available online from Friday, Feb. 6 to Sunday, March 1. All members are eligible to vote for their local association delegates to the NSEA Delegate Assembly.

Clustered locals will vote March 8-17. Locals with more than 26 members, talk with your local president for your local election timeline. Call NSEA for more information at 1-800-742-0047.