

THE

VOICE

The Nebraska State Education Association ❖ January 2017



WORTH A SECOND ACT MASTER TEACHER PROGRAM A KEEPER

DELEGATES WILL FILL EXEC TEAM VACANCIES

FENNELL WILL LEAD NSEA



A Once-in-a-Lifetime Event

NSEA's 150th Worthy of Your Time

Why should you attend NSEA's Delegate Assembly?

For starters, delegates and dignitaries will be the lone invitees to NSEA's 150th anniversary celebration on Friday night.

Consider that the following day, delegates will select a trio of leaders who will have important roles in guiding the Association for the next three years. The roles of president, vice president and one of two NSEA members on the NEA Board of Directors will be up for election. Those officers represent three of the four members of NSEA's Executive Committee.

Add the effects of a likely less-than-friendly Legislative session; a report on two years of work by the Governance Review Task Force; and delivery of a Strategic Plan for delegate consideration; and the Saturday business will keep delegates moving.

Indeed, the Nebraska Legislature may tinker with teacher retirement, collective bargaining, state aid to K-12 and post-

secondary education, school vouchers and charter schools. That raises the possibility of needed action by delegates when Delegate Assembly opens for business.

Held annually since the Association was founded in 1867 — and sometimes twice each year — Delegate Assembly is where the Association's path for the coming year is set. Delegates discuss, debate and vote on issues, consider the Association's guiding documents and Bylaws, and set dues.

Two Days, Two Sites

The 2017 event will be held over two days and at two locations.

On Friday, April 21, delegates will gather at the historic Lincoln Station in the Haymarket area of Lincoln. It is there that the Association's Sesquicentennial Gala will be noted and celebrated. Along with a handful of dignitaries, only delegates and key Association sponsors will enjoy the evening, which will include a brief look at the Association's history and accomplishments.

On Saturday, April 22, delegates will discuss and debate Association business. That will include proposed new business,

amendments to Bylaws and Resolutions, and discussion on the Governance Review Task Force, which has been charged with advising delegates on how the Association's governance structure might be updated.

Delegates will also elect new officers. The terms of office for President Nancy Fulton, Vice President Jenni Benson and NEA Director John Heineman expire in 2017. Fulton and Heineman are term limited.

Seeking Election

Any NSEA member in good standing is eligible to file. To have a candidate's name placed on the ballot, the candidate must be nominated from the floor during the Assembly's opening session on Friday evening, April 21. For more, see the story on Page 7.

Any member who wishes to attend as a delegate should talk to his or her local association president, or contact their NSEA organizational specialist. Reach your organizational specialist at 1-800-742-0047.

Is It Time You Nominated a Colleague?

The deadline to nominate a deserving co-worker for one of NSEA's awards is moving closer.

Any NSEA member may nominate a member teacher, ESP or deserving group. Mailed nominations must be postmarked by Friday, Feb. 17, 2017, and should be sent to NSEA Awards, 605 S. 14th St., Lincoln, NE 68508. Nominations may also be submitted online, with required supporting material mailed to NSEA. Online forms are found under the 'Call for Nominations' link at:

www.nsea.org

The 2017 Delegate Assembly will be at Lincoln's Cornhusker Marriott Hotel April

21-22. NSEA members are eligible for:

■ **NSEA Rookie of the Year:** To honor a first-year teacher who excelled in the 2015-16 school year.

■ **Award for Teaching Excellence:** Honors a teacher who has excelled in the classroom over a period of time.

■ **Education Support Professional of the Year:** Honors an ESP who has excelled in his or her job.

Finalists will be notified in March, with winners revealed at Delegate Assembly. Recipients receive a \$250 cash award.

NSEA members are also eligible for:

■ **The Great Plains Milestone Award:**

Honors an individual/group for promoting human and civil rights.

■ **Community Service:** Honors NSEA members and/or local associations involved in volunteer work outside classroom hours.

■ **Local Public Relations:** Honors local associations for outstanding communication within the association.

Also to be presented:

■ **Friend of Education:** Honors an individual or organization that has made a statewide contribution to education.

■ **Media:** Recognizes a newspaper, television or radio station for coverage/promotion of public education issues.

Cover: The Master Teacher Act passed the Nebraska Legislature in 2000, but was not funded until 2015. Now Nila Jacobson and NSEA want that funding preserved. Learn more on

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Great Public Schools For Every Child

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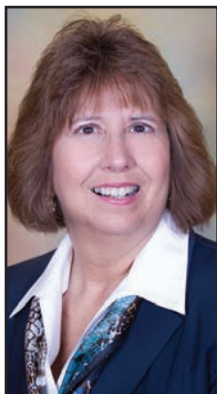
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Cited for excellence each year by the State Education Editors, including these past awards: Best Magazine, Best News Story, Best Feature Story, Best Photography and Best Editorial Design.



Good Reasons for Excitement



**NSEA President
Nancy Fulton**

“

The outlook is good and fresh when the calendar rolls over, and it seems even better when the current outlook is so positive for public schools in Nebraska.

”

I don't believe any teacher worth his or her certificate would shy away from a good challenge. But this past year was more than a challenge: it tested our patience, rubbed us the wrong way, had us running extra laps and kept us after school.

Yes, 2016 was a challenge. We are at a defining moment in our history as a union. But our Association has been strong for 150 years, and we will continue to be strong well into the future. That's why I'm so pleased to be starting another calendar year. The outlook is good and fresh when the calendar rolls over, and it seems even better when the current outlook is so positive for public schools in Nebraska.

The good news is that Nebraska citizens are supportive of public schools and their teachers. And our schools are bursting at the seams – there are more public schools in Nebraska than ever before. Here's a true reason to be excited: Nebraska kids exceed the average and proficiency scores of the nation in every test: math, reading, science and writing, according to the Nation's Report Card.

Two other positives: Nebraska ranks second among all U.S. states in terms of high school graduation rates, and our students rank very high on the statewide average of ACT scores.

The Tortoise Approach

There are many other positives to cheer as the New Year gets rolling. Nebraska Commissioner of Education Dr. Matt Blomstedt recently announced that while minority students in Nebraska still lag behind white students in terms of achievement, that achievement gap is slowly shrinking.

Blomstedt said that in the four years ending with 2015-16, the reading test proficiency gap between white and black students narrowed by 7 percentage points. The gap narrowed by 4 points on math tests and by 16 points – 16 points! – on science tests! The gaps on those tests between white and Hispanic students narrowed by 7, 3 and 4 points, with similar numbers for other minority groups, including Native Americans. Some of those numbers are better than others, but in every case the gap is narrowing.

The pace of that narrowing will only accelerate, if Blomstedt has anything to say about it. He told the Lincoln Journal Star that Nebraska schools – I read that as “teachers in Nebraska schools” – have done the bulk of the work to close those gaps. That those gaps are narrowing

means we are steadily moving in the right direction. While the pace of that effort may not appeal to some, I would rather take the “tortoise approach” and make progress through a well-thought and measured plan, than use the “rabbit approach” of a speedy new teaching fad that may or may not prove to work.

Wonderful Films

While most Nebraska citizens do not have daily contact with public schools – they don't have children attending – they can learn much about the changes and state of public schools through the wonderful film works of the Nebraska Loves Public Schools organization. This fine organization accurately bills itself as “the place to see what's happening in our public schools.” Scores of stories touting the success of Nebraska schools reside on the organization's website at:

nelovesps.org

Speaking of films, the Nebraska Association of School Boards has released a wonderful film entitled We Are Public Education in Nebraska. It features great kids, teachers and a few celebrities, and the inspiring message is well worth the 8 or so minutes you will invest in watching. Find it at:

nasonline.org

Words and Their Meanings

Lastly, our mission and value statements are clear. NSEA is in the business of promoting a great public education by placing students at the center of everything we do, while advocating for and empowering those in the education profession.

Our core values are centered on equal access to a quality education that is adequately and equitably funded; valuing diversity as a vital part of the education process; being informed activists contributing to the ever-changing system of public education; valuing the expertise of education professionals; recognizing that fair compensation and respect are vital; and valuing partnerships that foster excellence. These words and their meanings are what centers and drives us to continue leading our profession into this New Year and beyond.

We have much work and new challenges ahead. New issues and new forces will certainly crop up in 2017, some in an attempt to derail our good work. But together, we can continue to be the robust member-driven association dedicated to achieving our mission. That's good reason to be positive!

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Fennell Tapped for NSEA Exec Post

Association's 14th Executive Director is Former Teacher of the Year

The NSEA will have a new executive director in the new year, according to NSEA President Nancy Fulton.

The NSEA Board of Directors has chosen National Board Certified Teacher and former NSEA Board of Directors member Maddie Fennell as the Association's 14th executive director. Fennell will begin work in mid-January with current Executive Director Dr. Craig R. Christiansen. In August Christiansen announced plans to resign effective at the end of February. He plans to return to his first love of research and teaching at the university level.

"I am very pleased that Maddie and Craig will work together in January and February to ensure a smooth transition," Fulton said. "Their combined years of service to our Association and to the education profession is remarkable."

"Maddie brings an impressive resume and a clear dedication to public education and the Association's vision of a great public education for every student," said Fulton. "She is committed to our mission to advocate for education professionals, empowering them to provide a great public education for every student."

Fennell currently works as a Teacher Fellow in the Center for



Fennell

Great Public Schools with the National Education Association. She was Nebraska's 2007 Teacher of the Year and was an educator with the Omaha Public Schools for 26 years. Through the years she taught 1st, 4th and 5th grades, and served as a literacy coach, working at Conestoga, Druid Hill, Skinner, Franklin and Miller Park elementary schools.

As a Teacher Leader in Residence in the Office of the Secretary at the U.S. Department of Education from September 2015 to September 2016, Fennell worked in the areas of teacher quality and teacher leadership. She served as a U.S. Department of Education Classroom Teacher Ambassador Fellow from July 2013 to September 2015. She has served as president of the Omaha Education Association, and is a past national chair of the NEA Student Program.

"I am honored to have the opportunity to serve the students and educators of Nebraska in this new role," said Fennell.

"I am grateful to Craig for his faithful stewardship of the NSEA over the past 25 years and to the Board for its faith in my leadership. Working together with members, staff and a broad coalition of partners, we will continue to build on Nebraska's history of a strong public education system."

Fennell will be the 14th executive director in the NSEA's 150-year history.

Letters of Intent: The Date is March 15

Certificated Employees Cannot be Asked to Declare Intentions Before March 15

Letters of intent distributed by school districts around the first of the year are a serious matter and PK-12 educators must be aware of their rights, says NSEA Director of Advocacy Trish Guinan.

On or after March 15 each year, Nebraska school districts are allowed to require certificated employees – teachers, counselors, speech pathologists, psychologists and others – to sign binding letters of intent and/or individual contracts. Those letters effectively signify whether the teacher intends to return for employment with that district for the following school year.

In recent years, teachers have been asked to declare their intentions much earlier, said Guinan. Some school administrators have distributed the letters as early as mid-January, but some letters have been sent out before Jan. 1, sometimes with a request for response within 10 days.

Guinan, however, said state statute is clear: "A school district cannot require teachers to make a commitment before March 15."

On the other hand, failure to sign and return the letter by stated deadlines that fall on March 15 or later is a serious threat to a teacher's employment.

Nebraska State Statute 79-829, which addresses permanent certificated employees and contracts, says, in part, "the certificated employee shall not be required to signify such acceptance prior to March 15 of each year."

Guinan offers this advice:

If administrators distribute such a letter/contract prior to March 15, and ask for its return prior to that date, a local association representative should fax a copy to Guinan or their assigned Organizational Specialist at the NSEA (1-402-475-2630). In the meantime, an appropriate response to the letter by teachers is "I don't know yet" or "I'm not sure."

If the letter is distributed on or after March 15, or asks for a return after that date, it's important to sign the letter and turn it in by the due date.

Questions, call your Organizational Specialist, or Guinan, at 1-800-742-0047.

School Revenue Issues Unchanged Over 55 Years

For 72 years, the National Education Association has compiled education statistics from across the country.

The latest release of those statistics, NEA's annual Rankings and Estimates report, shows little has changed for Nebraska over the years. The issue of low state aid and overreliance on local taxes to fund schools persist.

A story on the Rankings and Estimates that appeared in the Feb. 17, 1961, edition of *Nebraska Education News*, predecessor to *The Voice*, reported that "the state of Nebraska spent \$22.17 per capita for all public education in 1959, ranking 49th among the other states."

The 2014-15 edition of Rankings and Estimates finds that Nebraska still ranks near the bottom in terms of state aid to public schools. The 2014-15 school year found that state aid to Nebraska public schools made up just 36.5 percent of K-12 public school budgets. That placed Nebraska 42nd among states in terms of state aid.

The 1961 report also indicates a much heavier reliance on local government resources — property taxes.

In 1961, Nebraska K-12 schools derived 91.4 percent of revenues from local sources — a rate that ranked Nebraska first in the nation in that category. In 2014-15, Nebraska public schools collected 55.8 percent of revenue from local sources — much lower than 55 years earlier, but still the eighth highest rate in the country.

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Delegate Assembly Attendees Will Fill Exec Team Vacancies

NSEA President, Vice President, NEA Director to be Selected

At NSEA's Delegate Assembly in Lincoln on April 21-22, delegates will elect members to fill three open slots on the Association's Executive Committee. Each elected candidate will serve a three-year term.

Open for election are the positions of president, vice president and one of NSEA's two seats on the National Education Association Board of Directors. Current President Nancy Fulton and NEA Director John Heineman are term limited and cannot seek re-election to those posts.

Any NSEA member in good standing is eligible to file for election to these positions. However, candidates and potential candidates should be aware that the 2017 Delegate Assembly will not be business as usual.

Events on Friday night, April 21, will be dedicated solely to a gala celebration of NSEA's 150th anniversary at Lincoln Station, in the city's Haymarket District. The semi-formal event will include delegates and invited dignitaries from around the state. No formal Delegate Assembly business will be conducted, and the usual practice of nominating candidates during the Friday evening business will take place during the official opening session on Saturday morning, April 22, 2017.

No campaigning or campaign materials will be allowed at the gala. However, candidates may purchase, for a small fee, campaign ads of predetermined size in the handbook that will be distributed to delegates. Proceeds from the ads will go directly to the Children's Fund.

Candidates who wish to secure vendor tables at the Delegate Assembly site must make that request of the NSEA executive director no later than 45 days in advance of the April 22 event.

In addition, any candidate who wishes to have campaign material included in a mailing to all delegates in advance of Delegate As-

Foreign Service Association Offers Essay Opportunity

The American Foreign Service Association is partnering with the United States Institute of Peace to offer an essay contest for students in grades 9-12.

The grand prize winner will receive a \$2,500 cash prize, an expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C., and a full scholarship for Semester at Sea upon the student's enrollment at an accredited university.

The essay must provide recommendations about the crisis involving refugees and internally displaced persons in that country. Students write the essays in a memo format.

Essays are due March 15. Learn more about the contest and the essay topic:

www.afsa.org

sembly, must submit that information to the NSEA executive director not less than 45 days prior to April 22. The actual deadline for both those actions is 11:59 p.m. CST on Tuesday, March 7, 2017.

Candidates may also advertise in NSEA's monthly magazine, *The Voice*. For rates and deadlines, email:

al.koontz@nsea.org

The 2017 Delegate Assembly will be held at Lincoln's Marriott Cornhusker Hotel.

Questions? Contact NSEA at 1-800-742-0047.

Three Dozen District Seats Open

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

Starting Friday, Feb. 24, NSEA members can vote for candidates to fill three dozen district leadership posts, as well as openings on the NSEA's Board of Directors. Electees will assume roles in determining the Association's future.

But first, those candidates must file.

The window for filing opens on Sunday, Jan. 1, and closes Sunday, Feb. 5. Voting will take place online, and will begin at 12:01 a.m. on Friday, Feb. 24. It will close at midnight on Saturday, March 11.

To view the openings, and to file, go to the NSEA website and click on the '2017 District Elections' link. Select your district, and then select the office of interest. Candidates will need their 10-digit NSEA membership identification number. Your number can be found on your NSEA Access membership card; above your name on the mailing label of *The Voice*, or on the email that delivers the digital editions of *The Voice*. Call NSEA if you have questions: 1-800-742-0047.

The NSEA website is at:
www.nsea.org



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Dr. Una Taylor, Chair of the Music Department



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Master teacher expertise: Standing in favor of funding the state’s Master Teacher Act are these Lincoln Education Association members. Nila Jacobson, left, holds National Board Certification in Early Adolescent through Young Adult World Language -Spanish. Sherry West, at right, holds National Board Certification in Adolescent and Young Adult Mathematics.

Worthy of an Encore

Master Teacher Act an Investment, Say National Board Certified Teachers

For a teacher to acquire National Board Certification requires a deep dive, a hard look at his or her teaching skills, methods and philosophies.

It also takes a fair amount of time and cash – \$450 for each of four components in the certification process.

Yet those who gain certification believe the effort and expenditure is worth the sacrifice. The value of improved teaching skills and enhanced student learning cannot be measured.

NSEA supports National Board Certification as a way to improve teaching and boost student learning. That is why NSEA pushed for funding of the state’s Master Teacher Act two years ago. The program puts state support of nationally certified teachers into statute and provides an annual stipend of \$5,000 to those teachers.

The reasoning for the program is sound, says NSEA President Nancy Fulton.

“This is about improving teaching skills and knowledge, and about improving student learning,” said Fulton. “It is also about keeping teachers in the classroom.”

Lincoln teachers Sherry West and Nila Jacobson agree. Both testified in favor of funding the Master Teacher Act before the Legislature’s Appropriations Committee two years ago.

“Kids deserve teachers who really know their stuff, teachers who are reflective,” said West, chair of the mathematics department at Lincoln Southeast High School.

“Certification has helped me to help students be the best they can be,” said Jacobson, a Lincoln Southwest High School Spanish teacher with four different teaching credentials from the State of Nebraska.

Funding for the Master Teacher Act, however, is threatened. OK’d by the Legislature in 2015, it faces potential elimination before a Legislature staring at a \$900 million budget shortfall over the next two years.

Strong Teacher Leaders

NSEA Organizational Specialist Jay Sears said the Master Teach-

Hang on! Forecast is for Bumpy Legislative Session

Fasten your seat belt, it may be a bumpy ride this legislative session. Your retirement benefits, collective bargaining rights, support for improving your teaching skills and more will likely be up for debate by state senators.

A \$900 million potential budget shortfall puts at risk funding for State Aid to K-12 schools, aid to the University of Nebraska, state and community colleges, and it paints a clear target on other educational programs such as support for the Master Teacher Program and National Board Certification.

As if that isn’t enough, other issues important to our public schools and teachers may be on the legislative agenda.

There is talk of changing the current retirement “Rule of 85” to a “Rule of 90” – along with other changes to important provisions in

the School Employees Retirement System.

The Governor has been signaling an interest in changes to collective bargaining statutes, while a bill eliminating payroll dues deduction may be introduced.

Certain to be offered: legislation authorizing charter schools, as well as private school vouchers – both schemes that would further reduce funding available for Nebraska’s public K-12 and higher education institutions.

NSEA President Nancy Fulton expects a busy, non-stop 90-day session over the next five months.

“To say that this session may be five months of fury is an understatement,” said Fulton. “We need all of our NSEA members to be watchful, alert and prepared to contact senators when asked.”

er Act improves instructional skills for all teachers. Nationally certified teachers become leaders in their departments, buildings and school districts. Some schools use these teachers as instructional coaches.

“When a school district has two or three of these teachers in their system, there is an expertise in instruction that is available to all teachers in the system,” he said. “That skill builds on the ability of all teachers in the district, if you use it correctly.”

Lincoln Southeast’s West holds a certification in adolescent and Young Adult Mathematics. Jacobson holds a certification in Early Adolescent through Young Adult World Language-Spanish.

West told senators in 2015 that Nebraska schools need teachers with strong content and pedagogical knowledge.

“A student’s chance for success is affected by the quality of his or her teachers. Providing money to help teachers improve skills is money well spent,” said West.

Jacobson said accomplished teaching must become the norm, not the exception. Not only would the Master Teacher Act encourage teachers to grow and learn, it would be an enticement as for Nebraska’s best and brightest to consider teaching as a career.

“In today’s marketplace we must have talented individuals entering the profession,” she told senators. “(It) would create an additional financial incentive to do so.”

Research supports the fact that student outcomes are enhanced by teachers with national certification. According to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, more than a decade of research confirms students taught by National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) learn more than students taught by other teachers.

Worth the Funding

For 15 years, the Master Teacher Act languished in state statute, ensconced in formal wording and intent, but without funding. Passed by the Legislature in 2000, the appropriation of funds that would have put the program in action was never approved.

In 2015, Lincoln Sen. Kate Bolz introduced LB185 at NSEA’s urging, proposing a \$1 million allocation for both 2015-16 and 2016-17. Legislative wrangling amended LB185 into LB657, and cut funding to \$470,000 each year.

Sharon Katt administers the Master Teacher and other programs for the Nebraska Department of Education. Katt reported that 68 of the 117 Nebraska teachers who have held National Board Certification were actively teaching in 2015-16, qualifying them for the \$5,000 annual award.

Katt said her office anticipates 70 teachers will qualify for the \$5,000 award this year, and as of Dec. 1, there were a dozen more in the pipeline who may qualify for reimbursement of registration fees. The National Board for Professional Teaching



Dining with the Senator and State Board Member: Association members from NSEA’s Capitol District met with state senators over dinner last month to talk about education issues. Seated, from left, are Mark Ortmeier, Centennial, State Sen. Mark Kolterman, Seward; Brooke Morse, Lincoln. Standing, from left, are Kathy Wilson, Lincoln, De Tonack, Lincoln; Dean Davis, Centennial; and State Board of Education member Maureen Nickels, Chapman.

What’s Up in the Unicam?

It’s Easy to Stay in Tune with Proceedings!

The Nebraska Legislature plays a key role in everything you do. From funding to curriculum, from the bus barn to the lunch room, action by state senators can touch what public school employees can do and what and how students learn.

Thus it is imperative that Nebraska teachers know what happens inside the legislative chambers. It is just as important that NSEA members let state senators know of their concerns about actions that affect public schools in a negative fashion.

It’s so very easy to be in the know! Here are some simple methods for staying on top of the issues and for contacting senators when the time is right:

- **Become a cyberlobbyist.** Add your name to NSEA’s e-mail list to receive regular legislative updates. To become an NSEA cyberlobbyist, email Cathy Schapmann at:

cathy.schapmann@nsea.org

- **Call the NSEA.** Call toll-free at 1-800-742-0047. An experienced NSEA team watches the legislative process closely.

- **Read *The Voice*.** NSEA’s monthly magazine keeps members on top of the latest legislative happenings.

- **Scan the Internet:** Follow the progress of any legislative bill through the Legislature’s website at:

nebraskalegislature.gov/

- **Call the Legislature.** Receive the Legislature’s weekly newsletter, Unicameral Update, by calling the Legislature’s 24-hour Request Line at 1-402- 471-2877. You may also request limited copies of bills, resolutions or amendments, but you must provide the bill number of any legislation you wish to receive.

- **Talk to your senator.** There is no better way to affect legislation than to get to know and talk to your senator. Most senators return home on weekends and set up meetings with constituents. Meet with senators at such opportunities. You can also e-mail your senator through the Legislature’s home page at:

nebraskalegislature.gov

ing Standards reports that 29 Nebraska teachers are at some stage of working toward certification. But Jacobson laments that number, noting that North Carolina, for instance, rewards teachers with a 12 percent salary increase in the year they receive certification. That may be why nearly 21,000 North Carolina educators have national certification.

In fact, Nebraska has just 120 teachers

with national certification, a number that lags far behind every adjacent state with the exception of South Dakota.

The truth is that Nebraska will continue to lag in that regard – and fall even further behind – if funding for the Master Teacher Act is cut.

“Some programs are just worth the funding, even when budgets are tight,” said Fulton. “This is one of those programs!”

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“My today started when I took my passion for the sciences and my ability to affect students through teaching to the next level. The online Biology, MS program at the University of Nebraska at Kearney was flexible and helped me advance my career. It helped me become a better educator because now I’m more comfortable. I have more knowledge and I’m able to get students interested. I also explain things better, and make it easier for my students to understand. I’m now teaching high school biology and environmental science, while also teaching anatomy and physiology as an adjunct instructor at a community college. It was hard work, but the program has opened up opportunities for me.”

Curtis Reese
Biology, MS
University of Nebraska at Kearney

NCUEA Fall Conference Inspires Members

By Isau Metes, Chair

NSEA Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee

The National Council of Urban Education Associations (NCUEA) is an advocacy organization of local affiliates of the National Education Association (NEA). NCUEA is dedicated to strengthening member advocacy and making the NEA more responsive to member needs.

Three EMAC members attended NCUEA's Fall Conference in San Antonio in early December. The theme conference theme was Building Equity. The conference focused on work being done in local organizations around elements and topics related to equity.

The conference was the catalyst some needed to take action and organize. The state of public education in Nebraska is changing and some are apprehensive about what the future holds for urban school districts.

Lincoln Education Association member Ed Aken attended and said "listening to the leadership and passionate competence of highly experienced teachers from Los Angeles, Milwaukee, Juneau, Trenton and other urban cities throughout the United States made me feel part of a collective whole as an educator.

"The passion that we all seek for social justice, quality education, and continued dedication to accredited teachers and schools was at the heart of the NCUEA," said Aken.

"As NEA President Lily Eskelsen said, 'Let's be honest...we need to respect and uphold this vision of high quality-education' especially with the political climate that has been voted into of-

ference," he said.

Omaha Education Association member Vincent Greggio said he was inspired "through my numerous discussions with my fellow members about the issues we face as urban schools."

The conference was a great time to network with emerging and established leaders from across the nation, all facing similar. The struggle is everywhere, but it can look different from region to region. Workshops centered around the theme of building equity and members had opportunities to learn about how to take action in their state and local affiliations. It was nice to have a safe and nurturing environment to discuss issues that directly affect us as well as the students we serve.

NEA Minority/Women's Leadership Training 2016-17

NSEA announced that four NEA-sponsored members will attend the Minority/Women's Leadership Training Conference in San Diego Dec. 9-11.

Attending were Ed Aken and Liz Carranza-Rodriguez, Lincoln; Vincent Greggio, Omaha; and Evelyn Brown, Douglas County West.

The training prepares early career educators and emerging leaders to be powerful advocates for their students, their profession, and their association. The curriculum teaches participants foundational leadership skills, the logistics of running for elected office, and how to advocate for student-centered policies and social justice issues that affect schools and communities.



Posing with the President: NEA President Lily Eskelsen presented Lincoln Education Association President Rita Bennett with paperwork certifying LEA as recipient of a \$5,000 grant to be used to plan and host a one-day professional development opportunity. From left are LEA members Jeff Pierce, Julie Colby, Linda Freye, Ed Aken, Eskelsen, Bennett, Isau Metes and Erika Bruening.

Lincoln Earns Grant for Professional Development

NEA Dollars to Assist Talks on Social Justice, Institutional Racism

The Lincoln Education Association has received a \$5,000 Urban Grant from the National Education Association that will fund a one-day professional development conference on institutional racism

and social justice.

Preliminary plans are under way to include a keynote address by nationally syndicated newspaper columnist, bestselling author and Pulitzer Prize winner Leonard Pitts as a highlight of the conference.

LEA President Rita Bennett and other LEA leaders learned of the grant approval at the fall conference of the National Council of Urban Education Associations, hosted by NEA. Bennett wrote and

submitted the grant, which will be used in 2017.

"The grant will be used to assist in planning and carrying out a daylong professional development opportunity for members, focusing on social justice and institutional racism and the effects of institutional racism in our schools and on our students," said Bennett.

A date for the conference has not yet been set, said Bennett.

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A Brother, a Sister and an Honors Assembly

150th Drive Gains Ground

A young brother and sister were preparing for their school's Honors Assembly when their NSEA member-teacher determined that the pair needed new clothing. Old, worn hand-me-downs needed replacements.

The response from the children is a wonderful snapshot of the fine results that come from giving to the NSEA Children's Fund. Both children received new outfits.

In a letter to NSEA, the brother gave details about his new jacket, shoes, two pair of shorts, one pair of pants and three shirts.

"I am really happy because I want to go to the Honors Assembly looking nice and cute and handsome," he wrote.

The sister's note was just as telling. "My favorite was the shoes because they are pink and glittery. I feel like a princess when I put the shoes on," she wrote.

The Children's Fund helps hundreds of Nebraska children in need each year, but barely meets needs each year. For instance, in 2015-16 the Fund sent out about \$3,200 more than it realized through donations.

To put the fund on sound footing, NSEA launched a drive to raise \$150,000 by October 2017, the 150th anniversary of NSEA's founding. The campaign hit \$30,000 in mid-December.

Local associations are encouraged to collect change; host a jeans day fundraiser; or consider other options. Individual members may also donate and have their name included in the NSEA 150th anniversary history book (see box).

To make giving easier, the Children's Fund now

accepts gifts through PayPal. Find the PayPal link at:

nsea.org/childrensfund

Questions? Call Sally Bodtke at 1-800-742-0047 or at:

sally.bodtke@nsea.org

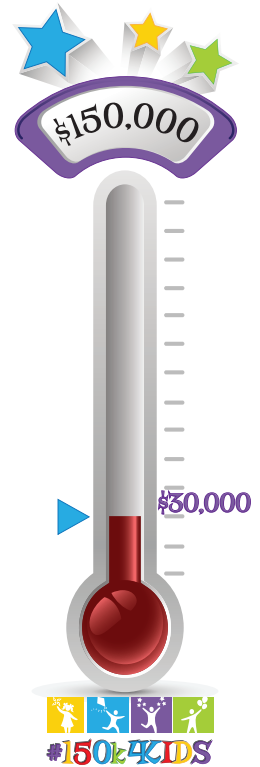
Member Donors Recognized

NSEA History Book Publication Set

NSEA members who donate \$500 or more to the NSEA Children's Fund before Jan. 15, 2017, will receive Platinum Recognition in NSEA's commemorative magazine, "The Nebraska State Education Association from 1867-2017: A 150-Year History." The magazine will be published in April 2017.

Members who give \$300 or more will receive Gold Recognition; those who give \$200 or more will earn Silver Recognition; and those who give \$100 or more will earn Bronze Recognition.

Checks may be sent to the NSEA Children's Fund at 605 S. 14th, Lincoln, NE 68508. Gifts may also be made through PayPal. To do so, find the PayPal link at nsea.org/childrensfund.



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Don't miss out—for more information on how you can take the trip of a lifetime at an affordable price, visit:

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Susan Estes is Nebraska's NEA Member Benefits representative

5 Techniques to Curb Classroom Chatter

Teacher-Proven Tactics Can Reign in the Ruckus

By NEA Member Benefits

Teachers share their proven tactics to rein in the ruckus and get students focused.

Karen Robertson spent 23 years as an elementary classroom teacher in Murrieta, CA. She says many teachers underestimate the power of positive reinforcement, which can quickly curb talking in the classroom.

"I was the ticket lady," says Robertson, who also spent 14 years as administrator. "I'd take a roll of tickets everywhere. Even adults responded to it."

For example, when the district was short a substitute, Robertson filled in at a continuing education high school geared to 14- to 20-year-olds. "They were throwing stuff across the classroom, talking—it was total chaos," she says. "I knew they were going to eat me alive if I didn't do something." So Robertson found the one student who was sitting quietly and handed that student a ticket.

"Thank you for being ready to begin," she recalls telling the student. "Write your name on the back of the ticket. You might win something."

"All of the others immediately began to wonder what that student was handed and the room got 50 percent quieter," Robertson says. "By the time I had given out two tickets, the entire room was quiet and with me."

Robertson jokes that the only thing she had to give the students as rewards at the end of class were a few muffins she had taken from the administrative break room — which she cut into halves and distributed — but it worked. "People respond to that because it's positive," says Robertson, who has also given out stickers, erasers and even old toys the students didn't want anymore that were donated and raffled off for tickets. "It gives the whole classroom a positive attitude because we all like rewards."

Here are four other ways to curb talking.

1. Validate student concerns. Most students love to talk. It might be about their dog, their family or anything that they consider important. "If they have a concern, something that's making them sad, I try to

honor it even if it's the silliest thing in the world," says kindergarten teacher Jennifer Bond Stuart, who works in Dunnellon, Florida. "If it's in the middle of teaching time, I validate their concern by saying 'I really want to hear this, but I can hear about this later.' It works with every child because they feel validated."

She says it's important to let students know that they are important and that you care about them, but there is an appropriate time and place to discuss things.

2. Use sign language; whisper. Debra Willems, a first grade teacher at Washington Elementary in Wheaton, IL, says her school has adopted a rule for the two-finger peace sign: Any teacher that holds it up needs the room to be quiet, especially during school assemblies or lunchrooms. In the classroom, Willems puts up her hand and counts down

— 5-4-3-2-1 — to get the room to be quiet. "Or, I lower my voice and whisper," she says. "All of sudden the students who are talking don't have a clue what I'm saying and they don't want to be left out if I start asking the other kids questions."

3. Re-work plans for classroom discussions. Sometimes students, especially older students, are going to want to talk about current events that may be relevant to homework. After a student began asking questions about the immigration policy debate in Congress, Don Fulmer, a social studies teacher at Lake Park High School in Roselle, Illinois, held a classroom dialogue and debate for 15 minutes. "It wasn't planned, but they walked on a high and so did I," Fulmer says. "I had to reshuffle the rest of the lesson and the rest of the week, but when something like that is happening, you've got to take advantage of it."

4. Get students involved; give respect. When Jane Nelsen, author of Positive Discipline: A Teacher's A-Z Guide, was working as an elementary school teacher in Elk Grove, California, she would always put problems on a class meeting agenda. "Get the kids in a circle, send a talking stick around and let them brainstorm and come up with a solution," Nelsen says. "Students will come up with the same solutions teachers have lectured them about, but when they choose it, it works like magic."



Boston Bound!

Attend NEA Representative Assembly in Historic 'Cradle of Liberty'

Next stop, Beantown!

Perhaps more appropriately, it should be said that NSEA delegates to the NEA Representative Assembly in 2017 will be participating in the world's largest democratic deliberative body in this nation's Cradle of Liberty — Boston, MA.

Every July, up to 9,000 American educators gather to talk about issues and challenges facing public schools.

The 2017 Representative Assembly will take place in the same city that played such a key role in the American Revolution. More history will be made!

About 100 Nebraska delegates will attend July 1-5. If you have an interest in attending, this would be a great year to do so!

All active NSEA members are eligible to serve. In addition, there are provisions for student members and retirees to attend.

NSEA's larger local associations — those with 76 members or more — will hold internal elections to select RA delegates. If you belong to an association of 76 members or more, and are interested in serving as a delegate, contact your local association president, or talk to your NSEA organizational specialist at 1-800-742-0047.

In all other cases, those who wish to be considered must qualify through one of the categories listed below and must file their intent to seek election as a delegate through the NSEA website at:

www.nsea.org

Those members who wish to seek a delegate spot by filing through the website will need their NSEA membership ID number to do so. That 10-digit individualized number can be found on each member's NSEA Access membership card; above the member's name on *The Voice* mailing label; or above the member's name in the e-mail that delivers the digital issue of *The Voice*.

When filing, candidates have the option of completing a 50-word statement that can be reviewed by voters.

The deadline for filing is Sunday, Feb. 5. The member's filing details will be posted to the NSEA website within 24 hours. If you do not see your name on the website list of candidates by Monday, Feb. 6, contact NSEA immediately.

Questions? Reach NSEA's Patty Schroer at:

patty.schroer@nsea.org

Here are the categories:

District At-Large RA Cluster Delegates

For the purpose of electing delegates, local associations with

fewer than 76 members are grouped in clusters in each of NSEA's six governance districts. For instance, all local associations in Elkhorn District with fewer than 76 members will vote on a common set of candidates for delegate to RA.

There are approximately 10 openings for Cluster Delegates from the Capitol, Elkhorn and Tri-Valley districts; eight from Metro District; seven from the Sandhills District; three from the Panhandle District. Cluster delegates fund their own RA costs.

Members interested in serving as a Cluster Delegate must complete the online filing by the Sunday, Feb. 5, deadline.

At-Large Delegates

Any active NSEA member is eligible to place his or her name on the statewide, At-Large Delegate ballot by filing through the NSEA website. Those elected as statewide delegates will be reimbursed for transportation, lodging and meal expenses. Depending on several factors, four to five of these delegate slots will be available to

At-Large candidates. Again, the filing deadline is Sunday, Feb. 5.

NSEA-Retired Delegates

Members of Nebraska's retired affiliate (NSEA-Retired) elect their NEA representatives to the RA by statewide balloting. Members will receive mail-in ballots in March.

Up to three delegates will be elected at large; one delegate will be elected by the combined retired membership of Capitol, Elkhorn, Panhandle, Sandhills and Tri-Valley Districts; and one will be elected by the retired membership of the Metro District. An individual filing as a district delegate may also file as an at-large delegate.

Members of NSEA-Retired wishing to file must complete the form that will appear under the NSEA-Retired tab on the NSEA website by Sunday, Feb. 5. That form will be available in January. Also required: a biography of no more than 50 words.

Student Delegates

Members of the Student Education Association of Nebraska (SEAN) elect their RA representatives by statewide balloting. SEAN members wishing to file as delegates must complete an online filing process by Sunday, April 2. Watch *The Voice* and the SEAN newsletter for details.

Questions? Call your NSEA organizational specialist at 1-800-742-0047.



Discussion Prep: An early morning caucus at the 2016 NEA Representative Assembly in Washington, D.C., saw these four NSEA members studying the issue before they made remarks at the microphone. From left are Michael Geist, Lincoln; Amy Sabatka, North Platte; Tracy Hartman-Bradley and Bridget Donovan, both of Omaha.



Smile! Giving big smiles for the camera at the 2016 NEA RA are, from left, Faith Johnson, Omaha; Deb Lyons, Hastings, and Brad Wellmann, Bellevue.

Students of Democracy

Like most Americans, I ended the election season with a great sense of uneasiness about the future of civil discourse in our democracy – about how we talk to or with one another. In the general presidential election, the candidates for both major parties brought great strengths and promise to the choice for the American people. I will let others question and debate issues of false news, promises made or broken, relevant experience, or potential for significant change. My concern is what we, as the adult population of America, have modeled and taught our children about how decisions are made in an informed democracy.

We often act as if no one were watching... or listening. Words matter. Language matters. Civility matters. The democratic process matters. So, it does matter who watches and who listens to how we make our democracy work. This nation has been working since 1776 to make this democracy stronger, more inclusive, more authentically representative, and more responsive of the individual. We are not finished with the project of democracy in this country. It takes constant work to nurture, protect, and improve the ideals of a free, democratic nation. And much of the work of nurturing, protecting, and improving, is the work we face in preparing young people, the students of America, to take on the mantle of active, informed citizens.

Constant Barrage

Our public schools are one of our most important institutions in teaching and socializing students to be able to discuss, civilly and peacefully, and to debate, truthfully and respectfully, the contentious issues they will face as adult citizens. It is not an easy task. We are a society in which important social and political issues are managed the same way that products are hyped. It is a constant barrage of selling, not informing. Radio and television newscasts have become spectacles of guests talking over each other, interrupting, insulting...and being interrupted, contradicted, and correct-

ed by the “neutral” interviewer. These are not news programs that deepen the understanding of the public, they are “survivor” offshoots, in which the strongest voice apparently wins.

An Informed Vote

This is what teachers have to overcome as they try to teach, not only the process, but the spirit and overall purpose of debate and discussion. If students are to become active members of a democratic society, they must understand the critical role that their voices will contribute. Schools utilize many ways of teaching democracy, including directed practice in group discussions, learning to speak, debate, and make presentations in public, to critically examine issues and claims of fact, and, finally, to make an informed vote. Not surprisingly, voting is held by some as the most important action of the democratic process. This ignores the role of discussion, debate, and the examination of contested issues long before any vote

is appropriate. In fact, some scholars of democracy point to the vote as the last step of what should be a deeply informative process. So, what did our students learn from this national campaign season?

The Most Threatening

Students of any age are not oblivious to the way democracy is practiced in an election season. They watch and listen to the TV, to their families, and to other adults. The question for us is whether we want the next generation of voters, activists, and candidates to follow our lead. We certainly know that, regardless of party or candidate, none of us are winners if the children in our communities grow into adult citizens with the idea that the loudest, the most threatening, or the most intimidating wins the issue.

As parents, teachers, or community members, we know the current directions in how we debate and decide critical issues in our communities (and our nation) cannot serve as democratic models for our children. How will your behavior teach a different model?



“Democracy — A Government of the People by the Same People”: NSEA Executive Director Craig R. Christiansen considering Lincoln’s words and the effect of a continual loss of informed and civil discussion in our public spaces.

A New Threat to the State Retirement Plan?

Out-of-State Group Hired to Influence Legislators

Is a new threat to Nebraska's teacher retirement plan on the horizon?

The answer is 'yes' and as NSEA-Retired President Roger Rea states in a new essay, "The elections may be over, but the fight to keep our defined benefit retirement plan is just beginning."

Rea says an obscure group known as the Retirement Security Initiative, RSI, has hired a premier Nebraska lobbying firm to work toward abolishing the state's defined benefit retirement plans for public employees. While new to Nebraska, RSI has a fairly long and storied track record attacking public employee retirement plans across the nation.

Rea's essay is a quick and easy read and should be required reading for all policymakers. For the entire essay, go to:

www.nsea.org/RSIThreat

Elections Ahoy!

NSEA-Retired members will elect two general officers of the Association next spring: president and vice president. Current NSEA-Retired President Roger Rea is term-limited and is not eligible to run for re-election. Vice President Tom Black is eligible to run for re-election if he chooses to do so.

District Directors will be elected for the Capitol, Elkhorn and Sandhills districts. Capitol Direc-

tor Pat Etherton, Elkhorn Director Francis Rohrich, and Sandhills Director Dee Gillham are eligible to seek re-election. All of these officers will be elected to three-year terms, beginning Aug. 15, 2017.

Delegates will also be elected to represent the retired members at NSEA Delegate Assembly in Lincoln on April 21-22, as well as delegates to NEA Representative Assembly in Boston June 30 – July 5.

Details regarding election procedures as well as the process for filing for election are posted on the NSEA-Retired website at:

www.nsea.org/retired

The filing deadline is Wednesday, Feb. 8.

Intergenerational Mentoring Ready to Take Flight

Applications are now being accepted for participation in the 2017 Intergenerational Mentoring workshop. Activities are set for Friday and Saturday, Feb. 24-25 at NSEA Headquarters in Lincoln.

Retired teachers have much experience to share with new teachers starting their careers. NSEA-Retired joins with the Student Education Association of Nebraska (SEAN) to allow retirees to assist SEAN members as they make the transition from full-time student to full-time teacher. The program needs you to share your vast experience

with the next generation of public educators. There is a selection process, and the roster will be finalized by the first week of February!

For details and to apply online go to:

www.nsea.org/2016IGLMentor

For details, reach Duane Obermier at 1-800-742-0047 or at:

duane.obermier@nsea.org

Lobby the Legislature

On Tuesday, Feb. 7, NSEA-Retired members will gather in Lincoln to address legislative issues.

Of particular concern to retirees is the taxation of Social Security benefits. The Legislature passed LB987 two years ago to reduce the tax burden on Social Security beneficiaries. NSEA-Retired members

will also visit with senators about bills that NSEA has identified as priority bills.

Lobby Day will start with an issue awareness training to familiarize members with the bills that are up for consideration. Firsttime Lobby Day attendees will have an orientation at 8:30 a.m. to learn how to effectively lobby senators prior. Registration and training will take place in the 4th floor conference room of NSEA, 605 S. 14th Street, Lincoln, NE.

There is no registration fee for members to participate. Guests are asked to pay \$10 to cover the costs of the program.

Register for Lobby Day on the NSEA-Retired website at:

www.nsea.org/retired

You may also call Rebecca Smith at 1-800-

742-0047. The deadline for registration is Friday, Feb. 3.

Save the Date for Spring!

The NSEA Retired Spring Conference is set for Lincoln on Thursday, April 20, at Wilderness Ridge Country Club. The keynote, I Conquered Mt. Everest, will be presented by Robert Kay.

Tentative breakout sessions include:

- The Great American (and Nebraska) Total Solar Eclipse of August 21, 2017 – get your solar-viewing glasses now!
- Aging Partners Lecture: The Transformative Power of Music.
- Antiques – Trash or Treasure?
- Health insurance after retirement.

Conference is no cost for members: Non-members/guests pay \$10 per person. Look for a complete agenda by March 1 at:

www.nsea.org/retired

Questions? Call or email Rebecca Smith at 1-800-742-0047 and:

rebecca.smith@nsea.org

— Renae Kelly, Editor
renaekelly@gmail.com



Decisions, Decisions! NSEA-Retired members at the organization's Fall Conference were asked to rank issues according to their importance to the Association during a strategic planning discussion. Yvette Engelhaupt and Christy Hewitt, both of Grand Island, participated.

Time is Near to Request PAC Refund

Request Deadline is Feb. 15

NSEA's Political Action Committee (NSEA-PAC) is supported by voluntary donations collected with NSEA membership dues.

Support for election of recommended candidates is provided by an annual contribution of \$15 from each NSEA member.

Any NSEA member may request a refund of those contributions for the current membership year. As an alternative to refund, members may also direct that the \$15 contribution be directed to bond election and school ballot issues.

Refund requests must be in writing to NSEA President Nancy

Fulton. Each letter must be individually composed, and contain an original signature of the member. Photocopied, computer copies or e-mail messages will not be accepted. Each letter must indicate whether all or part of the contribution is to be refunded, or whether the entire contribution is designated for statewide ballot issues.

Requests for refunds must be postmarked for delivery to NSEA Headquarters no later than Feb. 15, 2017. No refunds will be returned until after that date.

Send requests to NSEA President Nancy Fulton, 605 S. 14th St., Lincoln, NE 68508-2742. Questions? Call NSEA's toll-free number at 1-800-742-0047.

Kregel Museum Offers Free Professional Development

The Kregel Windmill Factory Museum, in conjunction with the American Groundwater Trust and Groundwater Foundation, will host a workshop on Nebraska groundwater, natural resources, and conservation. The workshop will qualify for professional development credit.

The free workshop will be May 31 and June 1 from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at the Kimmel Education and Research Center,

5985 G Road, Nebraska City.

Museum Executive Director David Flatt said the workshop includes lunch, snacks and several handouts. The workshop is aimed at middle and high school teachers in traditional or non-traditional courses. Register by sending your name, school, grades taught, email address and phone number to:

workshop@kregelmuseum.org

You may also register at:

kregelwindmillfactormuseum.org/event/teachers-workshop/

Flatt said the museum also co-sponsors an art show with the University of Nebraska Lincoln, to be displayed from Earth Day to Arbor Day in 2017. For details, go to:

kregelwindmillfactormuseum.org/event/art-show/

Contact Flatt about the art show at:

david@kregelmuseum.org

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AAA Grants Target Literacy, Innovation

Up to \$2,000, with
Deadline on Oct. 1

The Cornhusker Motor Club Foundation will once again offer grant opportunities to assist Nebraska K-12 educators. This year, the Foundation plans to award \$35,000 to support teachers in Nebraska.

Funding opportunities include traditional grants in amounts up to \$2,000, and literacy/book grants up to \$500. The traditional grants are designed to fund innovative programs or projects that will significantly enhance the students' classroom experience. Literacy/book grants may be used for classroom or library reading materials that will challenge and excite students.

Any employee in grades K-12 in Nebraska may apply for a grant through the fast and easy application process. Details pertaining to the program, including a list of the most recent grant award winning schools, can be found at:

www.CornhuskerFoundation.org

The submission deadline is Oct. 1, 2017. Grant award winners will be notified no later than Nov. 15.

Have You Moved? Changed Your Name?

Update Your Information
Easily on NSEA Website

Have you moved or are you planning a move? Have you changed your name by marriage? If so, you can update your NSEA membership information online.

How? Log on to the NSEA website and click on the 'Member Info' button on the left side of the screen. Then click on the 'For Members' link and look for the 'Member Update' icon in the center of the next screen, and follow directions. Keep your issue of *The Voice* near, as the mailing label includes your membership number, used to access your information.

The NSEA website is at:

www.nsea.org

Speaking of Education

"I have never met a man so ignorant that I couldn't learn something from him."

— Galileo Galilei,

*Italian astronomer, engineer,
philosopher, mathematician
(1564-1642)*

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



Navigational Guides: Members of the Bellevue Education Association's negotiations team were at NSEA's Lincoln Headquarters to study up on NSEA's Navigator program, which assists with comparability studies. From left are Tanishia Butler, Cindy Hudson, Megan Hobbs, NSEA Organizational Specialist Judy Roach, Angela Daughtrey and Kris Linder. The Navigator training assisted as they prepared for bargaining season, which is now underway.

Creative Research Papers

Provided by Ernest Beachey, a language arts teacher at Clearwater High School in Clearwater, KS:

"When my students write research papers, they do so with a unique twist. Tired of reading mundane topics, I revamped the assignment.

"Now, each student must research a year in history. In order to avoid information that's already on our minds, the year must be sixteen years ago or earlier, and only one student may choose that year. The student is then given specific tasks to complete; for example, he/she must find five features of the people of that year. These features might be what foods they ate, modes of transportation used, fashions of the year, and so on. In all, the student has to find a wide array of facts, which must then be incorporated into an original first person short story. The story must have a plot with a climax and a conclusion, and must be documented properly.

"Thus, our research papers have become creative products that require use of the imagination along with practice of rigorous research methods. The result has been greater satisfaction and sense of ownership for the students and much more enjoyable reading for the instructor."



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