

# THE VOICE

The Nebraska State Education Association ❖ January 2018

## TAKE

# 5

ISSUES  
TO WATCH  
THIS  
SESSION

## GET SPOTTED READING!

Read Across America in Nebraska - It's Wild!





# Change Coming to Delegate Assembly

## Business Session Condensed to Allow for Professional Development

### Friday Sessions Open to All Members

There is a new twist ahead for NSEA's annual Delegate Assembly. For the first time in years, and the first time perhaps ever — that aspect of Association history is unrecorded — members at Delegate Assembly will partake in professional development sessions.

In a further twist, the professional development sessions will be available to all teachers and not just delegates, whether or not they are Association members.

Delegate Assembly is the Association's annual business meeting. Elected delegates traditionally set policy and dues, elect officers and conduct other business as needed.

Recent evaluations of the event however, have increasingly sought a professional development offering.

The 2018 plans call for a series of professional development sessions on Friday evening, followed by a reception. All Association business will then be conducted on Saturday.

The event will be held at the Cornhusker Marriott in Lincoln this year, convening on Friday, April 27.



Tentative professional development topics include trauma-informed classrooms; bullying; NEA's Degrees Not Debt program; brain injury; motivation; legislative updates; teacher appraisal; social justice and more. Up to 10 options may be available, with each topic available at least twice during the evening. In addition, NEA Executive Committee member Eric Brown will keynote the Assembly with brief remarks on Friday evening. Brown is a high school biology teacher in Evanston, IL. He was elected to the Executive Committee in July 2015.

On Saturday, delegates will discuss and debate changes to Bylaws, any proposed new Resolutions or New Business Items. Dues for 2017-18 will also be set by Delegates on Saturday.

Delegates will also, for the first time, elect an at-large representative of the Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee to the Association Board of Directors. This board seat was previously appointed by the NSEA president.

To make your interest in serving as a delegate known, contact your local association president, your local association building representative, or your NSEA organizational specialist at 1-800-742-0047.

## Reminder: Letter of Intent Date is March 15

### Know Your Rights Concerning Intent

Letters of intent are no laughing matter, and PK-12 educators should be aware of their rights. But educators can relax a little bit if their school district has distributed those letters this early in the school year.

School districts can distribute letters of intent, which ask teachers to declare whether they plan to continue employment with the district for the next school year. However, educators are not required to sign the letter before March 15, said NSEA Director of Advocacy Trish Guinan.

State statute 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. Those letters signify whether the teacher intends to return for employment the following school year.

In recent years, teachers have been asked to declare intentions early, said Guinan. Some administrators have sent letters as early as mid-January. In rare instances, letters have been sent out before Jan. 1, sometimes asking for response within 10 days.

Guinan says 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 March 15 or later is a serious threat to a teacher's employment.

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 NSEA organizational specialist, or Guinan, at 1-800-742-0047.

**Cover:** Property taxes will dominate debate when the Nebraska Legislature convenes on Jan. 3, but there are issues of interest to educators, as well. To learn more turn to

**Page 7**



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Regularly cited by the State Education Association Communicators, including these honors: Best Magazine, Best News Story, Best Feature Story, Best Photography, Best Editorial Design.



# EHA Makes Health Easier



**NSEA President  
Jenni Benson**

“

**The EHA  
does great work  
managing your  
Blue Cross and  
Blue Shield of  
Nebraska health  
care plan. Yet  
some aspects of  
the plan are not  
well known.**

”

Do you make resolutions for the New Year? Do you revel in your resolution accomplishments and languish in defeats?

I can report to you firsthand that resolutions are sometimes forced upon you. But it might be better to make proactive changes before changes are forced upon you.

A year ago, I was quite proud of the healthy changes I was making in my life. I had started my journey by simply walking, every day. I eventually added running, thanks to my coworkers, friends and my daughter. Michelle, Isau and Jannah have supported me in my healthy journey, and we have finished four 5Ks together.

Eighteen months ago, having lost 35 pounds and headed to my annual physical, I was proud but leery. Nagging symptoms suggested something was not quite right. I had dutifully completed my ‘over 50’ screenings/tests/pokes/prods. My blood work had been normal. Yet something was off kilter, so I pushed my doctor for another blood test. The new results revealed Type 2 diabetes.

I became even more vigilant and worked to develop an even healthier lifestyle. I exercised daily, and over the next six or seven months I lost another 30 pounds. I felt great. In January, I was hit with a bout of stomach flu, a normal teacher illness. Once the symptoms passed, however, I had trouble regaining my strength. The doctor said it was a virus that would run its course.

Meanwhile, coworkers Isau, Michelle and I had earned a grant to visit career academies in Las Vegas and Phoenix. I felt better and made the trip. I even completed a 5K in Las Vegas, walking most of it, but pleased to finish. Yet something was still off. On the journey home I ended up in a Phoenix-area intensive care unit in critical condition with ketoacidosis.

The diagnosis: I was dealing with Type One diabetes.

## A Year of Growth

My journey to wellness has now taken a huge detour. With more support from family, friends and co-workers (and the medical profession) I maintain good health. I lead a (mostly) normal lifestyle as I fight the good fight for children and our public schools.

I share my story to educate others not only about diabetes but about health and well-being in general. I have learned a great deal about health insurance, health care and wellness recently.

Much of my growth in knowledge comes from my seat on the Educators Health Alliance Board of Directors. As your NSEA president, I am one of six NSEA representatives on the 12-member board (there are also three representatives each from the Nebraska Association of School Boards and the Nebraska Council of School Administrators). This board manages the health care plan that NSEA founded more than 50 years ago. Today the plan serves nearly 80,000 Nebraskans, all but four K-12 school districts, and several higher education institutions.

## Your Spouse is Eligible

The EHA does great work managing your Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska health plan. Yet some aspects of the plan are not well-known. For instance:

■ If your school does not participate in the EHA wellness program, now is a good time to start. Beginning now, your spouse may enroll and participate fully in the wellness plan.

■ EHA now offers a telehealth program that lets you connect with a board-certified, licensed and credentialed doctor using your computer, tablet or telephone. Rather than scheduling an appointment and traveling to a doctor’s office, telehealth lets you interact with a doctor at your convenience for common conditions such as sinus, cold, flu, fever, rash, ear infection, migraines and the like.

■ Coming soon: A mental health telehealth program. Watch *The Voice*, the NSEA Facebook page and the NSEA website for details after Jan. 1.

■ EHA Advocate Greg Long works on your behalf. If you have a question about EHA coverage, he’s your man. Reach him at 1-866-465-1342, or via email at: [greg@ehaplan.org](mailto:greg@ehaplan.org).

Consider this resolution for 2018: Check out all the EHA plan benefits and programs at the EHA website at [ehaplan.org](http://ehaplan.org).

That’s one resolution that will be easy to keep!



**Your EHA Board Representatives:** Serving on the Educators Health Alliance Board of Directors are, from left, NSEA Director of Communications Karen Kilgarin; NSEA President Jenni Benson; NSEA Past President Nancy Fulton; NSEA Comptroller Sheri Jablonski; NSEA Director of Research Larry Scherer; Ray Girard, Nebraska City Education Association; Joan Trimpey, Metro Community College; NSEA Associate Executive Director Neal Clayburn, who also chairs the EHA Board; Rita Bennett, Lincoln Education Association president; NSEA Executive Director Maddie Fennell; and Jerry Layher, Springfield-Platteview Education Association. Kilgarin, Fulton, Jablonski, Scherer, Girard and Al Koontz are alternates.





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## NSEA Seeks Tutors, Instructors for Praxis

### NEA Grant will Boost College of Ed Count, Minority Teachers

Using a grant from the National Education Association, NSEA will offer study sessions and tutoring to help college students gain the skills and knowledge needed to pass the Praxis Basic Skills test required for entrance to Nebraska colleges of education.

As part of that grant, NSEA is seeking instructors and tutors for the Praxis Core Project, which is funding through the NEA Great Public Schools Fund. The skills tests reviews the student's skills and knowledge in reading, writing and math.

Declining enrollment in colleges of education, and a desire to encourage more ethnic minorities to enter the profession, are among reasons for the push to offer such assistance.

"It is our goal to assist future teachers as they work to complete this first step in their professional journey," said NSEA President Jenni Benson.

"We continue to work to grow our teaching ranks to reflect the diversity of our student population."

Instructors will provide students with a one-time session which in-

cludes an overview of the Praxis Study companion, and covers the core skills of reading, writing and mathematics.

#### Across the State

Plans call for those study sessions to happen across the state. Tentative locations include the Omaha area, Lincoln or Crete (Dorane College), Grand Island/Hastings, Peru/Nebraska City, Kearney and Chadron areas. Instructors may choose to offer their services at one or more sites.

Upon completion of the initial Praxis Core Session, students may then request a tutor. Tutors will be available to tutor individuals and/or groups of two to five students. Each student will be eligible for up to five hours of tutoring.

Instructors will be paid an hourly fee for up to five hours (two hours of preparation and a three-hour instructional session). Tutors are needed at each location to serve in each of the areas of reading, writing and math. Tutors will also be paid an hourly fee for their services.

If you would like to be considered as an instructor or tutor, please contact NSEA Organizational Specialists Matt Pittman or Carol Hicks at 1-800-742-0047, or at:

**[matt.pittman@nsea.org](mailto:matt.pittman@nsea.org)**  
**[carol.hicks@nsea.org](mailto:carol.hicks@nsea.org)**

## Open in April: EMAC Seat on NSEA Board

At NSEA's Delegate Assembly in Lincoln on April 27-28, delegates will for the first time elect an at-large representative of the Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee to the NSEA Board of Directors.

The EMAC seat on the NSEA Board of Directors has historically been a non-voting position appointed by the Association president. Delegates at the April 2016 Assembly, however, voted overwhelmingly to give the EMAC representative a voting seat on the board.

The EMAC seat will be open to any NSEA member in good standing including, but not limited to, those who have self-identified as one of the NEA four identified racial minorities: Black, Hispanic, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and Asian/Pacific Islander.

In addition to filing for the board position, nominations may be taken from the floor during the Assembly. The elected representative will serve a three-year term.

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 27-28 event. That date is midnight on Monday, March 12.

Candidates who wish to have campaign material included in a mailing to all delegates in advance of Delegate Assembly, must submit that information to the NSEA executive director by the March 12 date.

Candidates may also advertise in *The Voice*. For details, email:

**[al.koontz@nsea.org](mailto:al.koontz@nsea.org)**

The 2018 Delegate Assembly will be held at Lincoln's Marriott Cornhusker Hotel. Questions? Contact NSEA at 1-800-742-0047.

## Does One of Your Co-Workers Deserve a 'Pat on the Back'?

Now is a good time to begin discussing who you or your association might nominate for one of the honors to be given at NSEA's Delegate Assembly in April.

Any NSEA member may nominate a member teacher, ESP or deserving group. Mailed nominations must be postmarked by Friday, Feb. 16, 2018, and should be sent to NSEA Awards, 605 S. 14th St., Lincoln, NE 68508-2742. Nominations may also be submitted online, with required supporting material mailed to the NSEA. Online nomination forms are found under the 'Call for Nominations' link at:

**[www.nsea.org](http://www.nsea.org)**

The 2018 Delegate Assembly will be held at Lincoln's Cornhusker Marriott Hotel April 27-28. NSEA members are eligible for:

- **NSEA Rookie of the Year:** To honor a first-year teacher who excelled in the 2016-17 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 of classroom hours.

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

Also to be presented:

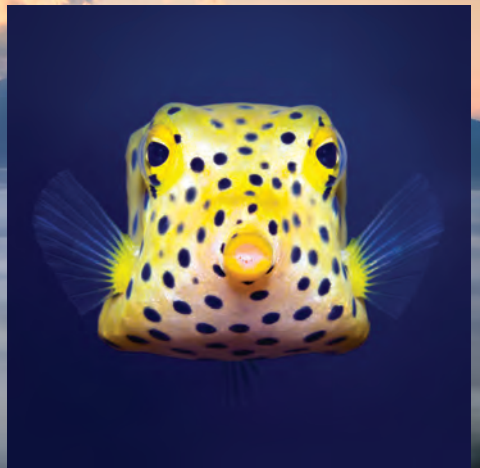
■ **Friend of Education:** Honors an individual or organization that has made a statewide contribution to education.

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



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**Getting to Know You:** Making a connection at the 2016 NSEA Legislative Dinner were, from left, Lincoln Education Association President Rita Bennett, Lincoln Sen. Anna Wishart, and Lincoln Education Association member Lesa Christiancy.

# Five Education Issues @ 75 Words Each

## What You Need to Know about the 2017 Session

### Taxes Will Dominate Debate, But Mental Health Services, Reading Will Also See Light

As the Nebraska Legislature begins, one issue overshadows all others: property taxes.

One group has filed an initiative petition seeking a budget-busting income tax credit for property taxes paid, while another group is threatening a lawsuit seeking property tax changes. State senators know that if they don't resolve the state's long-festering over-reliance on property taxes in this session, Nebraska taxpayers could be facing "solutions" that could do more harm than good.

So, while many issues need senatorial attention, one onlooker observed that property taxes "will suck up a lot of oxygen in the legislature this year."

The Department of Corrections disarray will also draw a spotlight, as will a Department of Health and Human Services request for an additional \$50 million in state dollars to cover increased child welfare costs.

Even with those juggernaut issues on the agenda, education is among the topics likely to rise to the fore during this session. A handful of important education-related bills will carry over from the 2017 session, and more are certain to be introduced.

#### Tax Cut Chatter

The property tax deliberations will play

out against the backdrop of a state budget that is already \$195 million or so in the hole, sprinkled with foolish talk of further diminishing state revenues through cuts to the state's corporate and personal income tax rates. That tax cut chatter ignores any as-yet-unseen damage that will be inflicted on state income tax revenue by recent federal tax cuts, as Nebraska income tax rates are tied to federal tax rates.

Property taxes are certainly of interest to educators, particularly those who teach in the K-12 realm, where budgets are heavily funded by that revenue source. Policy-makers – chiefly the governor and others in his corner – have lamented that "out-of-control" local spending is responsible for elevated property tax rates. Those remarks conveniently overlook that school spending in Nebraska has grown at a slower pace than state government in recent years, while State of Nebraska funding of K-12 schools has ranked at or near next-to-last among all states for decades. Simply raising Nebraska state aid levels to the mid-point of all states would provide hundreds of millions of dollars of property tax relief for Nebraskans.

Instead, policymakers threaten to further restrict local budget control. In August, Education Committee Chair Mike Groene voiced the idea of placing additional spending caps on already cash-strapped school budgets. He also threatened to cut state aid – which grew by just 1.18 percent last year.

### Meet, Greet, Eat with Your Legislator

Members are encouraged to attend NSEA's annual Legislative Dinner at the Nebraska Champion's Club in Lincoln on Monday, Jan. 22. A reception will be held from 5-6 p.m., with dinner beginning at 6 p.m.

Meal choices are: chicken, salmon, beef or vegetarian. There is no cost to attend, carpooling is encouraged, and mileage is available.

For those traveling more than 120 miles, substitute costs and sleeping rooms will be available if your senator plans to attend.

RSVP your entrée selection by Jan. 15 to Cathy Schapmann or Jan Anderson by phone at 402-475-7611, or at:

[cathy.schapmann@nsea.org](mailto:cathy.schapmann@nsea.org)

or

[jan.anderson@nsea.org](mailto:jan.anderson@nsea.org)

There is also discussion about imposing a 2.5 percent cap on annual increases in property tax askings, with some exceptions.

Meanwhile, a group called Reform for Nebraska's Future is collecting signatures on a petition that would give property owners a credit equal to half the amount of property taxes paid in support of K-12 schools. Sen. Steve Erdman has promised to introduce a similar plan in the Legislature in order to jump-start discussions in that arena. This tax credit scheme would blow a \$1.1 billion hole in state revenues. Officials from the State Chamber to the governor's office to the Open Sky Institute have decried the plan. Another group, Fair Nebraska, may seek property tax changes through a lawsuit filed with the Nebraska Supreme Court.

So, with that background, we give you



these Five Other Issues That Are Not Property Taxes, Each in 75 Words or Less.

### Mental Health Services

Anecdotal evidence indicates that Nebraska schools need additional mental health services for students. A concept bill, LB552, by Fremont Sen. Lynn Walz would create a Children's Connection program in each of Nebraska's 17 Educational Service Units, and provide mental health services to local school districts. Each program would be a partnership between the ESU's, public and private schools. The estimated cost statewide is \$1.2 million.

### Third Grade Reading Bill

Elkhorn Sen. LouAnn Linehan introduced LB651 last year. The language would require teachers to flunk any third-grade child who was not reading at grade level. Linehan wangled the votes to pull LB651 from committee without a committee vote – a rare feat. NSEA believes the decision to hold a child back should be made by the teacher and child's parents, not the state. NSEA testified against, and continues to oppose, LB651.

### Tax Credit/Voucher Scam

The LB295 tax credit/voucher scam diverts public taxes to private schools via credits for private school donations. Credits

## Keep Current on Legislative Events!

The NSEA Legislative Update is a weekly email that recaps the past week's legislative action and gives a peek at what's headed down the aisle in the coming weeks.

The Update begins in early January, and repeats weekly until the end of the session. Special events may also dictate special editions of the Update, as well, weekly beginning in January.

You and your colleagues may receive the Update by notifying NSEA's Cathy Schapmann at:

[cathy.schapmann@nsea.org](mailto:cathy.schapmann@nsea.org)

could reach \$10 million annually.

Now, private school donors receive partial reduction of federal and state income tax for each dollar donated. Under LB295, if state liability is \$1,000, the donor could give \$1,000 to a private school, pay no state income tax, and take federal deductions, essentially redirecting \$1,000 from state coffers to a private school.

### Retirement Plan Funding

Linehan will again try to end the annual state contribution to the teacher retirement plan. The state adds the equivalent of 2 percent of all school employee wages

(\$46.4 million) to the statewide and Omaha plans, part of a 2013 compromise in which educators agreed to higher contributions and lower benefits. The state plan is forecast to be 100 percent funded by 2030. Without the \$46.4 million contribution, the state is liable for plan shortfalls.

### Special Education

A proposal to require the state to reimburse school districts for at least 80 percent of special education costs from the previous school year is a property tax relief bill. Modeled after LB826, introduced in 2016, the language would replace current statute, which authorizes up to a 10 percent annual increase in aid for special education programs. The fiscal note is anticipated to land at about \$125 million.

### Charter School Bill Lives

There is one other bill of interest to public school supporters. LB630 would authorize charter schools. It was introduced last session and still alive. It would allow charter schools to operate exempt from accreditation standards like instructional hours, curriculum, graduation requirements and other basic tenets of sound educational philosophy. LB630 also allows teachers without teaching certificates, and would compete with K-12 public schools for a limited amount of local and state funding.

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# #SpottedReading

## Read Across Nebraska!

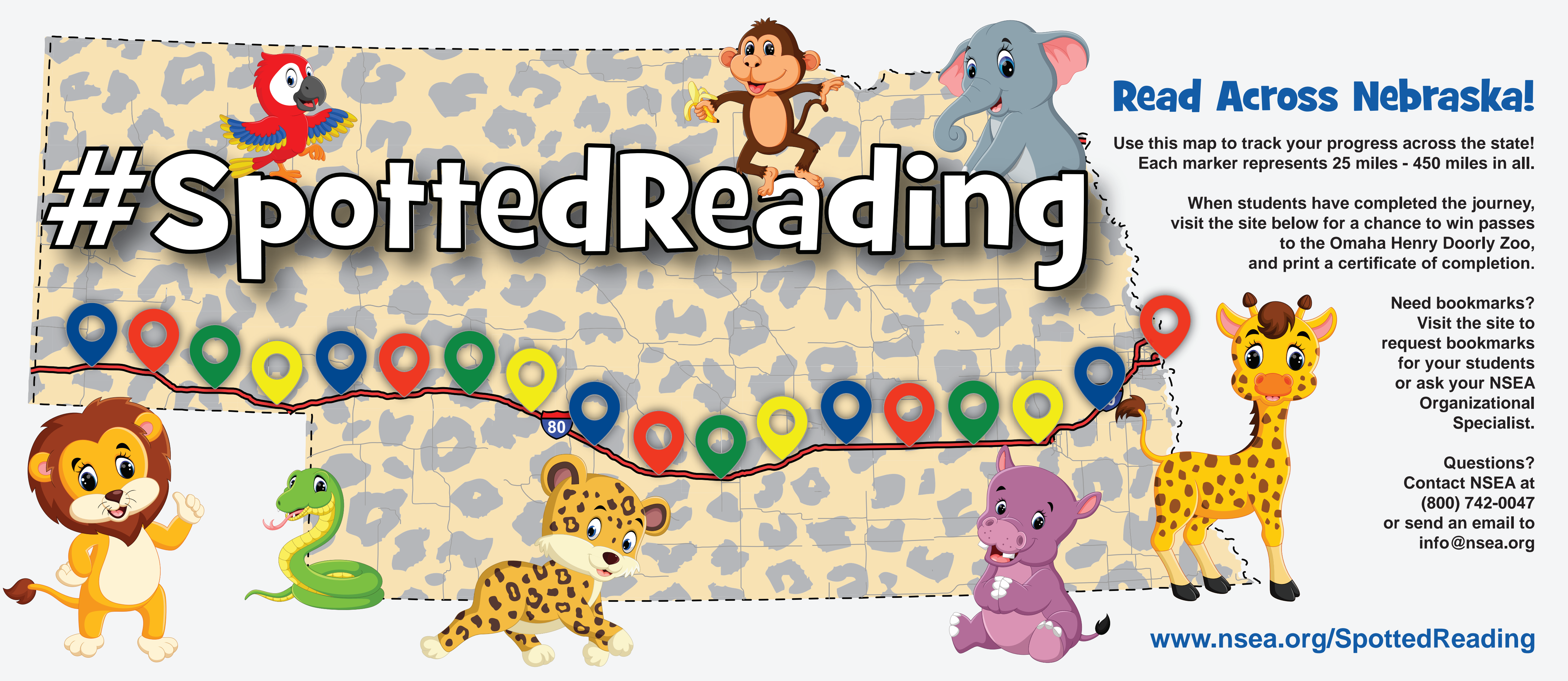
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or send an email to  
info@nsea.org

[www.nsea.org/SpottedReading](http://www.nsea.org/SpottedReading)







# GET SPOTTED READING ACROSS NEBRASKA!

## NSEA Maps Reading Contest for Your Students, Classroom

*One book, two books, three books, four!  
Read those books, and then read more!*

The National Education Association is building a nation of readers through its signature program, NEA's Read Across America. Now in its 20th year, this year-round program focuses on motivating children and teens to read – through events, partnerships, and reading resources. This year, NSEA is sponsoring a Read Across Nebraska program.

All Nebraska first, second and third graders are encouraged to complete a 450-mile Reading Across Nebraska journey from now through March 2, the birthday of Theodore Geisel, aka Dr. Seuss.

The map on the center spread of this edition of *The Voice* can be used to track the progress of a student or a classroom. There are mile markers along "I-80" for each 25 miles – 18 mile markers in all. Teachers can best determine their students' abilities: perhaps first graders will read 18 new sight words and earn 25 miles per word. Second graders might work to read 450 sentences over the next two months, and track their progress along the way. Third graders could try to complete 450 pages in 60 days. Teachers are the professionals and are best equipped to deem an appropriate reading journey for their students!



Bookmarks are also available for teachers to distribute for students to track their progress. Ask your NSEA Organizational Specialist for bookmarks (available in packs of 25) or go online to [www.nsea.org/SpottedReading](http://www.nsea.org/SpottedReading) and a pack of bookmarks will be mailed to you!

When your classroom's 450-mile reading journey is complete, visit [www.nsea.org/SpottedReading](http://www.nsea.org/SpottedReading) and submit the requested information. Each student completing the journey will have a chance to win four tickets and a trip to Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo! Teachers will be able to print personalized certificates of completion for each student.

Finally, share pictures of your students as they read! Use the hashtag #SpottedReading on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. On Snapchat? Add [nsea.org](http://nsea.org) and send us snaps! As always, we'll share the good work you're doing with your students.

Not an elementary teacher? Remember, "You're never too old, too wacky, too wild, to pick up a book and read with a child."

Visit [www.nea.org/readacross](http://www.nea.org/readacross) for details and resources. From booklists to tips for reading out loud, find what you need to inspire students to pick up a book and become life-long readers!



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## Costume Library

"I knew you all were amazing, but to get everything to fit so perfectly is beyond amazing! The designs, look and colors are wonderful—the students love how the costumes enhance the performances."

>Kaitlyn Clark

Musical director, Gothenburg Public Schools

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when classes are in session





**Team Ogallala:** These Ogallala Education Association members sought to improve district reading scores through a process facilitated at an NSEA event. From left are NSEA Organizational Specialist for Ogallala Cindy Copich, Heather Orth, Julie Laflan, Jenny Hesser, Nancy Armstrong, Amanda Boyle and the team's "critical friend" John Schliecher.

# NSEA Grows Innovation, Leadership

## LEARN Aids Teachers in Pushing Change in Education

When Ogallala teachers reviewed the district's most recent Nebraska State Accountability (NeSA) test reading scores, they knew change was needed.

"We looked at our scores and knew that they were lower than we would like them to be," said Ogallala librarian and reading specialist Nancy Armstrong.

But how to raise those scores?

"Our kids are already in school six to seven hours a day. How do we get them to increase their outside reading? What can we do to be teachers of the pleasure of reading?" she asked.

Who better to lead the change than teachers? With the help of a new NSEA initiative, Armstrong's five-member team believes they have initial answers to those questions. Along with eight other teams from across the state, they met in Kearney in December for NSEA's first Powered by Teach to Lead Teacher Leadership Conference.

Using a model developed largely by NSEA Executive Director Maddie Fennell while she worked for the U.S. Department of Education three years ago, attendees arrived in search of solutions to education-related problems.

In a facilitated process, teams honed the problem they hoped to solve. They then developed outcomes, measures and impact; listed inputs and activities; and wrote a brief rationale – the approach each team will take to "sell" their solution to other stakeholders as they move their plan to implementation. The plans will ultimately improve education opportunities for kids and also thrust teachers into leadership roles as they develop curriculum, practice and policy.

Sound reasoning supports the leadership component. NSEA President Jenni Benson told conferees that early in her 30-year teaching career she was "always excited to go listen to experts."

"But my career taught me that teachers are the experts," she said.

Fennell said Powered by Teach to Lead puts teachers at the table in leading educational innovation and policy.

"If teachers are not at the education policy table, even with the best of intentions, that policy can be flawed," she said.

### 'This Work is Inspiring'

A team of past Nebraska Teachers of the Year worked on plans they hope will improve teacher evaluation. Embedded in that team was Norris Public Schools Superintendent John Skretta. At day's end, he was ready to take home and use some of the ideas generated.

"The authenticity and professionalism of the conversations in

this room today are reflective of the commitment these teacher leaders and school board members and other stakeholders bring to the table," he said. "This work is inspiring."

Near the back of the room, a team from the Tekamah-Herman Public Schools wrestled with a community-wide issue. The five team members set a goal "to engage our communities, enhance school pride and develop resiliency."

By the end of the day, plan components included academic pep rallies, a student of the month series, classroom of the week series, creation of a student advisory board and implementation of a "Monday Mindset" throughout the district.

Linda Richards is a 22-year member of the Ralston Board of Education and immediate past president of the Nebraska Association of School Boards. She advised one team and applauded all teams.

"The work you put in today is going to make an immense difference in the lives of our students well into the future," she said.

### Teachers Should be Talking

Facilitating was Tami Fitzgerald, a Sandusky, OH, physics and science teacher. She is director of Outreach and Engagement for the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

"The people who should be talking about what is going on in the classrooms are the teachers," she said.

Now, teachers have done just that through Powered by Teach to Lead in 48 states. The program has 180 supporting organizations, including NEA, AFT, administrator groups and more. A grant from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska funded the NSEA event.

### 'Empower Students'

When the day was done, the Ogallala team had defined the problem in four words: Less emphasis on reading. The team set a goal to "increase reading experiences to engage, motivate, connect and build a system of supporter for students (PreK-5) and their families."

Among their ideas: create a Million Word Club; host read-aloud sessions in the school library during the intermission between boy-girl doubleheader basketball games; arrange a Read-a-Thon with community readers; and hold a Family Literacy Night to show parents the best new tools and ideas in reading.

"These are all things we can do within the school and also do to assist parents," said Armstrong.

The Ogallala team's final impact statement was encouraging and inspiring: "If a culture of reading exists at OPSD and throughout our school, homes and community, then we will empower students to become lifelong readers and leaders."

"Isn't that what we all want?" said Armstrong.





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You might find some cool gifts for the adults in your life, as well!

#### AT&T—Your Path to Speed and Savings!

If you're an NSEA member and you're not using AT&T for your phone service, you're missing out on the blazing fast speeds of the nation's largest and most reliable 4G network, a 15 percent discount on qualified monthly cell phone service charges, and 20 percent off most eligible wireless accessories.

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<https://www.neamb.com/shopping-discounts/nea-wireless.htm>

#### Get Great Deals on End-of-Model Year Cars

If you're looking for an end-of-model-year car, the NEA Auto Buying Program is the first place to look! NSEA members and families enjoy preferred pricing year-round, save an average of \$3,000 off MSRP, and get these benefits:

- **Used Car Discounts:** Save hundreds off the list price on most cars.
- **See What Others Paid:** See what others have paid for the same car.
- **Upfront Pricing:** See pricing, price rankings, and lock in guaranteed savings on your car before you even leave home.
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Visit NEA's Auto Buying Program at:  
[www.neamb.com/buyacar](http://www.neamb.com/buyacar)

# Wanderlust? Indulge on a Budget!

## NEA Vacations Save You Cash on Your Travels

Want to travel but money's tight? Let NEA Vacations find you a dreamy discounted vacation that will work for your budget.

As the weather turns cold, you might already be dreaming about a spring break getaway or maybe even planning a full-blown summer vacation. Before you make plans, check out the new money-saving benefit for NEA members: NEA Vacations. It's a one-stop-shop that will help you secure the best vacation deals available — whether you're looking for a flight, a hotel or resort stay, a cruise or even a guided vacation.

Exclusively available to NEA members, educators can nab discounted rates for cruises, hotel stays, resorts and various attractions around the world simply by logging in to the NEA Member Benefits website at:

[www.neamb.com](http://www.neamb.com)



#### What's NEA Vacations All About?

NEA Vacations is an online shopping portal offering the guaranteed best value on a whole slew of vacations and related excursions — everything from resorts to hotel bookings to guided vacations to cruises.

If you're a cruise fan, you'll be pleased to know that the website sells discounted voyages from the top cruise lines, including popular river cruise lines AmaWaterways, Viking and mainstream oceangoing cruise companies such as Carnival, Celebrity, Disney, Holland America, Norwegian, Princess and Royal Caribbean. Cruises aboard a number of luxury lines, like Regent, Seabourn and Silversea, are also offered. With more than 21,000 cruise departures, there is sure to be one that fits all of your needs.

A variety of guided vacations are also available from well-known travel companies like Globus, Insight Vacations, Cosmos, Monograms, Tauck and more.

If you prefer independent land vacations, the travel portal still has you covered. Just search for your destination and date of travel to browse a variety of hotels and resorts, or you can purchase a package that includes airfare and hotel. Checking deals in Las Vegas last July, we found rates at the well-

rated Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino for just \$72 per night.

#### What are NEA Travel Dollars?

To sweeten the deal, you can earn NEA Travel Dollars to use as partial payment on future purchases, reducing your travel costs.

Further, you accumulate NEA Travel Dollars simply by acting on emails from NEA Member Benefits that encourage you to keep your records current or ask you to participate in other ways. For example, if you have a new email address, updating it on the NEA system will earn you \$100

worth of Travel Dollars, while sharing your birthday will earn an additional \$250.

You can also earn Travel Dollars by opting in to receive the NEA Travel newsletter or by purchasing non-travel products and services.

Members can accrue up to \$1,500 in Travel Dollars annually and portions can be used as partial payment for travel services (Airfare and car rentals are excluded). Travel

Dollars expire a year from when they are received. As part of NEA Vacations, you can also earn a variety of incentives such as Onboard Credit to use on a cruise, an upgrade to a bigger hotel room or free WiFi.

#### What Can You Expect from NEA Vacations?

Like most educators, you are very busy. You may not have time to search for the best deal on flights and hotels. That makes NEA Vacations more valuable. You can make all your vacation plans, at discounted rates, on one website. You'll make your plans faster and save money doing so. And, for most purchases, you'll earn NEA Travel Dollars, which can be spent the next time you travel.

It's important to note that travel packages are not limited to NEA members alone. You can bring your family along on your adventures and still make use of this benefit.

You can also purchase associated travel insurance through NEA Vacations. Costs vary depending on the provider and ages of travelers. You will see the insurance policy specific to your booking and can decide whether you would like to add it to your trip.

So hop on board! Your next adventure awaits. Visit NEA Vacations to learn more!



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## It's Going to Take All of Us



**Executive  
Director  
Maddie Fennell**

“

*My students  
didn't care how  
much I knew until  
they knew how  
much I cared. But  
every student  
knew one thing:  
that I was there  
for them. The  
same is true in  
our relationships  
with our elected  
leaders.*

”

One of the most rewarding aspects of my job as NSEA Executive Director is our collective work in the Legislative arena.

Is it challenging? Oh boy, YES!

Misinformation can spread through the State Capitol like a bad flu, and there are a few folks who really don't seem to care about kids or educators.

Then there are those well-meaning people who suffer from “implementation gap.” That's when bad decisions are made with good intentions, but without the needed input of education practitioners.

My favorites, of course, are the education stalwarts; those who stand and fight for kids at every turn. There are far too few of that group, when you consider how important children are to our future.

### **‘Do I Have to Answer?’**

There were times during the 2017 session when action was fast and furious.

For instance, several times we learned at 9 p.m. (the time each evening when the next day's legislative agenda is released) that an important education bill had been scheduled for debate the following morning. In each case, our crackerjack NSEA staff used social media and other measures to notify YOU – our passionate and just plain awesome members – who then flooded senatorial email boxes and jammed state capitol phone lines.

In one instance, a pro-education senator came off the Legislative floor and said “Maddie, I've gotten over 300 emails from teachers since last night. Do I have to answer all of them?”

My response? “Not if you vote right. Your vote will tell them if you're listening!”

### **What You Think and Need**

As an educator, my job was all about relationships. My students didn't care how much I knew until they knew how much I cared! And, of course, those students who were the most challenging needed the most attention. But every student knew one thing: that I was there for them.

The same is true in our relationships with our elected leaders. NSEA is at the legislature every day, living our mission of A Great Public School for Every Child by making sure our Unicameral supports public schools.

But our legislators need to hear from YOU – the professional, committed educator and voter back home. They won't know what you think – and what you need – unless you reach out and let them know.

There are several ways to do this, such as meeting them in person, calling or writing them. Let's get down to the nitty gritty of how to do these most effectively.

### **Try These Contact Tips**

First, remember to make these contacts on your personal time and use your own computer, personal email account or phone. You can find the contact information for every state senator at:

[nebraskalegislature.gov/senators/senator\\_list.php](http://nebraskalegislature.gov/senators/senator_list.php)

Let's start with writing your senator. I first credit Sen. Adam Morfeld who shared these tips with a group of

teachers at a recent policy workshop at the University of Nebraska-Omaha. He said when sending an email:

- Put the bill you are addressing in the subject line.
- Let the Senator know if you are his constituent and include your U.S. mail address.
- In your opening, clearly state whether you support, oppose or simply want details about the bill.
- Keep your letter to two or three paragraphs (I always tell a story wrapped around a fact. For instance, when discussing early childhood education, I tell a story about one of my first-grade students, but then I reference that every dollar invested in early childhood has up to a \$12 return on investment).
- Include your phone number. They may want to talk to you about your point of view!

### **Change of Heart**

If you're short on time, pick up your phone and call your senator's office. When calling, keep it short and sweet. Provide your name, contact details, what bill you are calling about, and clearly state your position.

You have the greatest impact when you get to know your senator. If they have an open coffee time in your area, attend! Crete Sen. Laura Ebke has held several “Political Brew” events, even bringing along colleagues with very divergent opinions to discuss their work.

Invite your senator to attend a school event that highlights the work your school is doing, and be intentional about what you want them to see and learn. For the past several months, Sens. Patty Pansing Brooks and LouAnn Linehan have visited schools across the state to learn more about how reading is taught and how reading disabilities are diagnosed.

After Linehan visited Mary Schleider's classroom at Norris High School, she invited Schleider to Lincoln for more discussion. Schleider, a special ed teacher and 2008 Nebraska Teacher of the Year, said she felt the senator was really listening. And she was! Linehan called later to let me know that she was changing her reading bill based on what she had learned from Schleider and others.

### **Join a Contact Team**

The NSEA supports back-home “teacher contact teams” across the state. These teams meet with senators frequently to make sure they understand their educator constituents' views on important legislation. If you are interested in serving on a team, get connected by emailing NSEA's Cathy Schapmann at:

[cathy.schapmann@nsea.org](mailto:cathy.schapmann@nsea.org)

And, of course, remember to thank your senator when he or she supports students, educators and public schools!

Finally, every NSEA member must stay informed. NSEA's Legislative Update is emailed weekly beginning in January. You receive the update by sending a note to Schapmann or by signing up at:

<https://www.nsea.org/subscriber>

We have a short, 60-day session this year, but we face big challenges. Working together – our staff team on the ground and NSEA members in contact with their elected leaders – we will continue to be the guardians of a great public school for every child!

# InterGen Mentoring Mixing it Up in 2018

## Will be Scheduled at Three Sites

NSEA-Retired has received a grant to take Intergenerational Mentoring to three sites in Nebraska on Saturday, April 7.

The event will be held at the Lifelong Learning Center in Norfolk, at UNO, and at Hastings College.

This is a chance to work with Student Education Association of Nebraska members as they prepare for teaching in their undergraduate program, and hopefully through their beginning years of the profession.

An opportunity at Chadron State College may also provide a chance for retired members in that part of the state to become involved. Please register online at:

[www.nsea.org/retired](http://www.nsea.org/retired)

Registration deadline is March 10. Early registrations are helpful. For details, reach Rebecca Smith at 1-800-742-0047, or at:

[rebecca.smith@nsea.org](mailto:rebecca.smith@nsea.org)

### Retired Lobby Day

Mark your calendars for the NSEA-Retired Lobby Day on Tuesday, Feb. 13.

Legislation affects education in many ways and this is an important way to promote and support NSEA's legislative efforts.

The day starts with 8:15 a.m. registration and coffee at NSEA Headquarters. The luncheon speaker is Ann Hunter-Pirtle, executive director of Stand For Schools, a nonprofit dedicated to Nebraska's ongoing tradition of public school excellence. This nonprofit supports policies that will further strengthen public schools and allow every Nebraskan to develop the skills they need to thrive. The registration deadline is Tuesday,



**The Challenge!** When the Elkhorn/Sandhills District Education Association-Retired met in November, members took up a collection for the NSEA Children's Fund. In doing so, they challenged other NSEA-Retired chapters to also collect for the Children's Fund. Pictured, from left, are Fran Rohrich, Marlene Petersen, Lu-Etta Clark and Art Tanderup. For details on the Children's Fund, contact NSEA's Sally Bodtke at 1-800-742-0047.

Feb. 6. Register online at:

[www.nsea.org/RetiredLobby](http://www.nsea.org/RetiredLobby)

Questions? Call Smith at 1-800-742-0047 or reach her at:

[rebecca.smith@nsea.org](mailto:rebecca.smith@nsea.org)

### Election Ahead in 2018

The New Year will bring the possibility of only minor changes to the NSEA-Retired Board. Because of an election cycle quirk, only one of 11 seats are contested.

Open for election is the Metro District

representative seat, where Carol Krejci of Omaha is completing her first term. Candidates seeking that post will serve a three-year term beginning Aug. 15, 2018.

Also to be elected: delegates to 2018 NSEA Delegate Assembly, to be held in Lincoln on April 27-28; and delegates to the NEA Representative Assembly in Minneapolis from June 30 to July 5.

Probable numbers for Delegate Assembly include four delegates from Capitol District; three from Elkhorn District; five from Metro District; three from Tri-Valley District; one from the remainder of the state; and three at-large delegates. Members in good standing are eligible. Candidates must live in the district they hope to represent. Details on filing will be posted soon at:

[www.nsea.org/retired](http://www.nsea.org/retired)

### Make a Reading Difference!

NSEA-Retired earned a Read Across America Cat in the Hat grant from NEA-Retired.

This is an opportunity for retired teachers to read to self-selected classroom(s) on or close to March 2, Dr. Seuss's birthday. Volunteers will receive a Dr. Seuss hat, \$15 toward a selected book, and classroom kits, including pencils, to give to students. Contact NSEA-Retired President De Tonack at 402-525-4264 by Jan. 28. Or reach her at:

[dttonack@neb.rr.com](mailto:dttonack@neb.rr.com)

— De Tonack

— President, NSEA-Retired



**Leadership at Tri-Valley:** The Platte Valley Retired Education Association began its year with an afternoon meeting in Grand Island. Pictured are Guy Roggenkamp, Tri-Valley representative on the NSEA-Retired Board; Tri-Valley Retired Board Secretary Karen Hastings; President LaVila Van Boening; Treasurer Christy Hewitt; and Vice President Yvette Engelhaupt. The program, presented by Jan Greenland who described Life in Ozu, Japan, Hastings' sister city. Greenland related stories of the education, agriculture, daily customs and points of interest in and around Ozu and also treated participants with samples of food from the area.



## Sandhills District Board has Opening

Members of NSEA's Sandhills District are encouraged to consider filing for election to the district's executive committee. A vacancy on the committee will be filled through the statewide NSEA election process that begins on Feb. 16.

The Sandhills District falls in an area roughly bounded by Perkins, Grant, Boyd and Merrick counties.

The filing deadline is Sunday, Jan. 28. To file and to learn more, go to:

[www.nsea.org](http://www.nsea.org)

## Celebrate Public Lands with Park Trust Contest

The National Park Trust (NPT) now offers a contest to help educators as they help students engage in local parks. The contest is open to all Title I schools, grades pre-K through 12. Classes can receive funding for a NTP event at a park or public land. Students must research and write the proposal; teachers can provide support and feedback.

NPT will give grants up to \$1,000. Schools are asked to implement their plan in May. Deadline is Feb. 1. Learn more at:

[kidstoparks.org](http://kidstoparks.org)

## Holocaust Memorial Offers PD Workshop

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, along with the Institute for Holocaust Education and ESU No. 10, offer a one-day professional development workshop offering resources and pedagogical approaches to teach about the Holocaust.

The workshop is open to grades 6-12 Language Arts, Social Studies and pre-service teachers. Participants will receive books and resources from the museum. The event is Thursday, Jan. 25, from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at ESU No. 10 in Kearney. Continental breakfast and lunch is provided. To register, or for details, go to:

<http://bit.ly/ESU10HMM>

## Classroom Makeover Offered by Steelcase

Steelcase Education seeks applicants for its Active Learning Center Grant program. The grant invests in visionary teachers and institutions that promote active learning.

The company will award up to 16 classrooms for grades 6-12 or a college or university. The grant provides an active classroom, furniture, installation and on site training. The deadline is Friday, Feb. 2. Go to:

[info.steelcase.com/active](http://info.steelcase.com/active)

## Jacobs, Beaty Join NSEA Family

Two new faces have joined the NSEA family.

**Tanishia Jacobs**, the new organizational specialist for the Lincoln Education Association, has had a busy two months.

On Oct. 23, she defended her dissertation, and the next day began work at LEA. On Dec. 30 she was married in Hawaii.

Though Bellevue is her hometown, Jacobs comes from a military family and grew up in Japan. She earned a BA from the University of Nebraska and has master's degrees from Peru State College and Creighton University. Her doctorate in leadership also comes from Creighton.

Jacobs taught first grade for the Bellevue Public Schools for 14 years. She was active in the Bellevue Education Association, and was BEA vice president at the time she left teaching.

**Kami Beaty** has joined NSEA as assistant comptroller. She recently became a Certified Public Accountant, and assists with operations and management in membership and accounting.



**Jacobs**



**Beaty**

The Bradshaw native completed undergrad work at Doane College and studied toward her CPA at Doane. She earlier worked for HBE CPAs and Consultants in Lincoln.

Beaty and her husband have two children in high school. She and her husband are learning French and hope to travel to France one day.

## Time is Near to Request PAC Refund

NSEA's Political Action Committee (NSEA-PAC) is supported by voluntary donations collected with NSEA 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 Jenni Benson. Each letter

must be individually composed, and contain an original signature of the member. Photocopied, computer copies or e-mail messages are not 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 no later than Feb. 15, 2018. No refunds will be returned until after that date.

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

## Thomas Dickey

Omaha South High School teacher and curriculum specialist Thomas Dickey died unexpectedly on Nov. 28. He was 37. A career education and technology supervisor, Dickey died at the Nebraska Medical Center after being taken there from South. He had worked at South since 2015. He had also spent 12 years as a marketing and math teacher at Omaha North High School. He was an active member of NSEA, having served as an association building representative and having attended NSEA Delegate Assembly three times in recent years.

Dickey is survived by his wife, Thea, two children and three brothers and their families.

## Joseph Conrad Huerta

Longtime Nebraska teacher and NSEA member Joseph Conrad Huerta, 90, thought to be the first Mexican/American student to attend Chadron State College, died Dec. 1.

He was born in Kansas City and raised around Mitchell, graduating from Mitchell High School in 1945. After service in Korea with the Army, he enrolled at Chadron State, setting an example for many fellow Mexican/Americans. He lettered in baseball and track.

He graduated from Chadron in 1955, married Mary Nell Semroska in 1956, and for nearly 40 years taught and led schools in South Dakota, and in Nebraska at Mirage Flats (near Alliance), Hay Springs, Sargent, Newman Grove, Beaver City and Elwood.

Wife Nell, six children and spouses; 16 grandchildren; and seven great-grandchildren survive.

# Take Action!

## Help a Student Teacher Become a Member

Will you have a student teacher in your classroom this next semester?

If your answer is 'yes,' then there's an easy way to help that student teacher thrive and survive: if your charge is not already a member, encourage him or her to join the Student Education Association of Nebraska.

A SEAN membership provides peace of mind with the backing of NEA's \$1 million liability policy, as well as the confidence that goes with belonging to one's professional association.

And here's a twist: in some school districts, the local association makes it a habit to pay SEAN dues for their student teachers. NSEA and NEA student dues are \$25 (some local college campus chapters have minimal dues as well).

For details, or to join, click on the 'Member Info' link on the left side of the NSEA home page and look for the 'Join' link. The website is at:

[www.nsea.org](http://www.nsea.org)

It's also a good idea to take student teachers to local association meetings, particularly if they are a SEAN member.

## Speaking of Education

"As a rule, teachers teach more by what they are than by what they say."

— *Anonymous*

## Wellness Reward

The NSEA joined nearly 30 other Educators Health Alliance groups at the 15th Safety and Wellness Conference in Kearney last fall to receive a second Governor's Wellness Award.

The awards focus on established wellness programs and look for programs that change the health behaviors within the organization.

NSEA earned the first level, the Sower Award, in 2014. This year NSEA earned the second level, the Grower. Lt. Gov. Mike Foley gave the award to Wellness Committee members Rebecca Smith, left, and Megan Lyons. Schools honored were:

Axtell Community School  
Battle Creek Public Schools  
Bayard Public Schools  
Bennington Public Schools  
Bloomfield Community Schools  
Blue Hill Public Schools  
Boone Central Schools  
Bruning-Davenport School  
Columbus Public Schools  
Educational Service Unit 6

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

## Responsibility in Drama Class

From Mary Jane McElroy, a theater and speech teacher in West Virginia:

"I have taught theater for many years and have sometimes had similar students with behavior/emotional problems in my classes. The first thing I do is to talk with the students individually (in the hall or before class) to let them know that I care and am interested in their well being.

"However, I have had the most success by trying to involve these students in physical tasks that give them some responsibility, and for which they can feel successful and important. For instance, I try to give these students little jobs in the classroom to help them feel special. Or if we are going to do a play, I will assign them a small part in the play that I believe they can master. Or I will have them be part of the stage crew or even work in the light booth with supervision. If we are doing a puppet show, I ask them to help me assemble our puppet stage and possibly be the emcee for the show.

"I have found that these special students, who find some measure of success in the theater, take great pride in their contributions and will behave for me in the classroom."

Sign up for Works4Me messages at: [nea.org/tools/Works4Me.html](http://nea.org/tools/Works4Me.html)

**Works4Me**  
nea's e-mail  
classroom tip of the week!



Educational Service Unit 9  
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Rock County Public Schools  
Seward Public Schools  
Shelby-Rising City Public School  
Shickley Public School  
Silver Lake Public School  
Thayer Central Schools  
University of Nebraska-Kearney