

# *The* VOICE

Nebraska State Education Association • May 2025



## **A CERTIFIED WIN**

***Educators and Administrators Collaborate  
in Successful Certification Election***

• LB645 Awaits  
Governor's Signature

• Inspire. Educate.  
Empower: NSEA  
Summer Conference

• 2025 Delegate  
Assembly Recap





Nebraska State Education Association  
605 S. 14th Street, Lincoln, NE 68508  
www.nsea.org  
402-475-7611 • 1-800-742-0047  
**Volume 78, No. 8**  
ISSN Number: 1085-0783  
USPS Number: 000-369

Executive Director	Trish Guinan
Assoc. Exec. Director	Isau Metes
Dir. of Public Affairs, Communications	Cassie Ivy
Asst. Dir. of Visual Communications	Kristi Capek
Multimedia Communications Specialist	Kelsey Foley

#### NSEA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

President	Tim Royers, Millard tim.royers@nsea.org
Vice President	Paul Schulte, Millard paul.schulte@nsea.org
Sec./Treas.	Renae Noble, Chadron nobledr635@gmail.com
NEA Director	Edward Ventura, Jr., Omaha venturaomaha@gmail.com

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

Published 9 times yearly according to this schedule: October, November, December, January, February, March, April, May and August.

Payment of annual NSEA membership dues entitles Nebraska educators to receive *The Voice*. Total cost of producing 9 monthly issues of *The Voice* each year is less than \$2 per member.

Advertising rates available upon request. All advertisements and advertisers are screened prior to publication. Appearance of an advertisement in *The Voice* does not necessarily imply NSEA endorsement of either the product being advertised or the views expressed.

**A Great Public School  
for Every Child.**



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



[@nsea\\_org](https://twitter.com/nsea_org)



[@nsea\\_org](https://www.instagram.com/nsea_org)



[NSEAMEDIA](https://www.youtube.com/NSEAMEDIA)



[www.linkedin.com/company/nsea](https://www.linkedin.com/company/nsea)

# NSEA Board Certifies District Elections

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

These electees begin their terms on Sept. 1, 2025.



## Capitol District

**NSEA Board:** Jake Jolliffe  
Nicole Lopez-Bettendorf  
**President:** Julie Colby  
**Exec. Committee:** Carla Hinkle,  
Ross Pickel  
**NEA Representative Assembly  
Cluster Delegate:** No candidates

## Elkhorn District

**NSEA Board:** Michele Brand  
**Secretary:** No candidates  
**Exec. Committee:** No candidates  
**NEA Representative Assembly  
Cluster Delegate:** No candidates

## Metro District

**NSEA Board:** Sarah Dragon,  
Terri Childers  
**Vice President:** Stacie Stevens  
**Exec. Committee, Subdistrict 3:**  
Michelle Richards  
**Exec. Committee, Subdistrict 6:**  
Emily Mildenerger  
**Exec. Committee, Subdistrict 9:**  
Judith Ann Stucky  
**NEA Representative Assembly  
Cluster Delegate:** No candidates

## Panhandle District

**NSEA Board:** Andrew Lenzen

**Treasurer:** No candidates  
**Secretary:** No candidates  
**Exec. Committee, Area 3:**  
No candidates  
**Exec. Committee, Area 6:**  
No candidates  
**Cluster Delegate:** Renae Noble,  
Dashiell Rohan

## Sandhills District

**Treasurer:** Stephanie Holdsworth  
**Secretary:** Becky Meyer  
**Exec. Committee:** No candidates  
**NEA Representative Assembly  
Cluster Delegate:** No candidates

## Tri-Valley District

**NSEA Board:** Karen Kloepping  
**Vice President:** No candidates  
**Exec. Committee, Central:**  
Judy Henning  
**Exec. Committee, East:**  
No candidates  
**NEA Representative Assembly  
Cluster Delegate:** Karen Kloepping  
**R.A. At-Large Delegate**  
**Delegate:** Devin Garcia

## Would You Like to Write for The Voice?

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

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

**On the Cover:** In a powerful show of unity, the North Platte Education Association and administrators worked collaboratively in a successful certification election, ensuring long-term protections for teachers and strengthening labor relations. See the story on pages 7-8.



# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

TIM ROYERS

## Building a Better Future for Public Education

**“Lawmakers took notice. This session, every other ballot measure from last year has faced legislative significant pushback. The issue of vouchers hasn’t. Not one voucher bill advanced out of committee this session. Why? Because they know we don’t bluff.”**



As I stood before our members at the 2025 Delegate Assembly, I felt the weight—and the privilege—of serving as your NSEA president. Representing educators across Nebraska isn’t just a job; it’s an honor. From Sidney to South Sioux, I’ve witnessed incredible things happening in every corner of our state—not because of policies or politics, but because of the educators who show up every day for kids.

This past year, we set out to strengthen our association from the ground up. We listened. We learned. We took action.

In January, we began holding local leaders’ meetings in each governance district. These were spaces for real conversations—what’s working, what’s not, and what we can do better. From those talks came targeted training for local association presidents, vice presidents, and bargaining team members. Our summer conference in Kearney will be a continuation of that effort—full of resources designed to equip and empower our local leaders.

But one effort of which I’m most proud is our “Just One” membership campaign. In just two months, we brought in more than 200 new members spanning 50 different locals—our second most successful campaign ever. That growth is a testament to your hard work and our shared belief that when educators stand together, we are a force.

### **We Don't Back Down**

Last year, we faced down LB1402—the second voucher scheme bill in as many years—and when some assumed we wouldn’t have the energy to fight it again, we proved them wrong. Collecting signatures for a second summer in a row was not just about repealing bad legislation, it was a declaration: When it comes to our

kids and our public schools, we don’t back down.

Lawmakers took notice. This session, every other ballot measure from last year has faced legislative significant pushback. The issue of vouchers hasn’t. Not one voucher bill advanced out of committee this session. Why? Because they know we don’t bluff. When a high-ranking senator asked what our response would be to a last-minute voucher deal, I told them we would take it to the ballot just as we had done in 2023 and 2024.

We also fought hard to protect our retirement system. When a bill threatened to reduce state contributions to school employee pensions, we mobilized. One weekend of emails and calls from our members flipped the script. The result was LB645, a bill now before the governor for signing at the time of this publication. LB645 would lower educator contributions from 9.75% to 7.25% (a 25.64% decrease) of their salary when the plan is fully funded, putting hundreds back in the pockets of hourly workers and at least \$1,000 more a year into the hands of our certified staff.

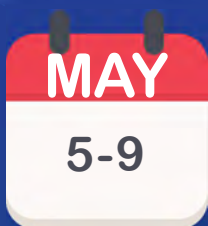
But we can’t just play defense. That’s why we’re going on offense with bills like LB440, which would finally provide paid family and medical leave to K–12 educators. We’re funding it ourselves, and we’ve got momentum, but we need continued pressure to get it through committee.

Public education is under siege. Federal decisions have already stripped local food programs and playground upgrades designed for children with disabilities. And no one is coming to save us. But we can save each other—if we act.

Let’s show our lawmakers and our communities what it looks like when educators lead.



**This Teacher  
Appreciation  
Week, turn  
appreciation  
into action.**



National Teacher Appreciation Week (TAW) will be held from May 5 through May 9, with National Teacher Day falling on Tuesday, May 6. As always, the week offers an opportunity to recognize the hard work and dedication of educators across the country—but this year, it's about more than just saying “thank you.” It's about transforming appreciation into meaningful action.

This year's focus is on protecting students, strengthening public schools, and ensuring that educators are treated with the respect and dignity they deserve. Here are ideas of how to be involved with Teacher Appreciation Week:

- ♥ Tell teachers how much you care about their work, and tell lawmakers to protect public schools
- ♥ Drop off a gift card and drop by a school board meeting
- ♥ Shout out your appreciation on social media and show your Members of Congress you're paying attention

The National Education Association (NEA), along with schools, communities, and supporters across the country, is calling on Americans to go beyond kind words and take tangible steps to support teachers. NEA created a toolkit to help inspire action. Visit [bit.ly/taw-2025-action](https://bit.ly/taw-2025-action).



## Remembering Jim Rea: A Life of Service, A Legacy of Advocacy



Rea

On a cold February evening in 1989, more than 3,800 NSEA members gathered at a Nebraska State Fair building in Lincoln to urge the Legislature to advance LB89, which created the HELP Act and added \$40 million in state funds to teacher salaries across the state.

Then-NSEA President Jim Rea led the effort, still believed to be the largest legislative committee hearing in state history. Rea, 77, died in Lincoln on April 27.

In addition to his two terms as NSEA President, Rea served two terms as NSEA's representative on the National Education Association Board of Directors.

Rea eventually joined the NSEA staff where he continued to work on behalf of Nebraska teachers, serving as executive director of both the Millard and the Lincoln education associations until his retirement in 2012.

In his retirement, Rea volunteered as a Court Appointed Special Advocate, working for children caught in the juvenile justice system. He also gave more than 1,000 hours to Clinic with a Heart as director of communications.



## Migrate to Better Banking!

Checking



Savings



eServices



Auto Loans



Mortgages



Credit Cards



**Do your banking wherever you are  
with online banking and mobile signing!**



**First  
Nebraska**  
CREDIT UNION

To learn more,  
scan the QR code.





**Apply online at [firstnebraska.org](https://firstnebraska.org), or call (402) 492-9100**

All loans subject to approval. Rates, terms and conditions vary based on creditworthiness, qualifications and collateral conditions.

NMLS# 416540  
Federally insured by NCUA.



Rain Or Shine

## Turn to the NSEA Children's Fund

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

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

The generosity of Children's Fund donors has helped to pay for glasses, warm clothing and medical and dental needs of children; provide assistance to a family whose home and belongings were destroyed by fire; and more.

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

# Are You Nebraska's Next Teacher of the Year?

## Nominations are now open for the 2026 Nebraska Teacher of the Year.

In 2026, one teacher will represent the good work of all the teachers in the state as the Nebraska Teacher of the Year (TOY).

Application forms will soon be available through your school administration or at [www.education.ne.gov/toy](https://www.education.ne.gov/toy). Teachers may self-nominate or nominate a colleague for the honor.

A panel will review applications, and up to five finalists will be selected for interviews in August. The 2026 recipient will be recognized at an awards luncheon.

Since 1972, the Nebraska Teacher of the Year program has recognized outstanding certified teachers in a pre-K-12 classroom setting who plan to continue in active teacher status in a state-approved or accredited school.

The application seeks information on educational background and

personal development, community involvement, philosophy of teaching and learning and commentary on the teaching profession.

The Teacher of the Year will maintain a regular teaching schedule while also participating in a year of professional learning through the National Teacher of the Year Program.

The TOY review Committee also selects up to five Award of Excellence Teachers.

The NSEA, Nebraska Council of School Administrators, Nebraska Association of School Boards, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska, Data Recognition Corporation, as well as the State Board of Education, present cash awards or grants to the Teacher of the Year and other finalists. For additional details, visit [www.education.ne.gov/toy](https://www.education.ne.gov/toy).







**BlueCross BlueShield**  
Nebraska

### MORE FACE TIME LESS WAIT TIME

Your EHA health benefits give you access to virtual visits with doctors and specialists.

So you can get the care you need — wherever you are, whenever you need it.

Visit [NebraskaBlue.com/EHAPop](https://NebraskaBlue.com/EHAPop) to connect with a coach and schedule a screening today.



Educators  
Health  
Alliance

Health benefits for EHA are provided by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska, an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.





# EARN YOUR M.A. IN ENGLISH ONLINE

## Experience Flexible Learning, Unwavering Support at UNK

As a language arts teacher, you know the power of writing, literature, and critical thinking. With UNK's **online Master of Arts in English**, you can deepen your expertise and advance your career – on your schedule.

- ✓ **Engaging, interactive courses** that feel like an in-person classroom
- ✓ **Flexible online format** designed for working professionals
- ✓ **Affordable tuition** with some of the lowest rates in the region
- ✓ **Choose coursework to fit your needs**, with four focus areas:
  - Literature
  - Creative Writing
  - Childhood and Youth Studies
  - Composition, Rhetoric, and Language



**UNK**  
ONLINE

**Take the next step in your  
career with a program  
that blends flexibility and  
connection!**

**Visit: [go.unk.edu/englishma](https://go.unk.edu/englishma)**

**UNK** UNIVERSITY  
OF NEBRASKA  
KEARNEY



# A Certified Win: Educators and Administrators Collaborate in Successful Certification Election

In Nebraska, public schools and local education associations share a common goal: ensuring students have what they need to succeed. Collective bargaining is key to achieving that goal—and educators know the future of collective bargaining hinges on unity among educators *and* between local education associations and school administrators.

The fact is that collective bargaining isn't just a tool for negotiating contracts—it's the foundation for fair, transparent and collaborative decision-making in public schools.

## The Right Time

After successfully negotiating a two-year contract in 2024, North Platte Education Association (NPEA) President Kenzie Mollring and Chief Negotiator Jacqueline Mraz turned their energy toward attaining permanent certification status with the Nebraska Commission of Industrial Relations (CIR).

It started with a discussion at the 2024 Delegate Assembly last spring

with NSEA Organizational Specialist Kim Story and Collective Bargaining Specialist Jen Dubas.

"Kim and Jen discussed the process with our team last April, and we really felt that this might be the best time to have this election," Mollring said. "They told us they'd help us through the process but the decision on whether to proceed was ours to make."

Under provisions of a 2011 rewrite of the state's collective bargaining law, local associations are required each year to formally request that the local school board recognize the local association as the bargaining agent for members. That recognition requires a vote of the school board.

With permanent certification, however, a local association can forego the yearly formal request, and instead

simply work with the school board to set dates to commence bargaining. Statutorily, negotiations must begin by Nov. 1 each year.

Certification elections are conducted by the CIR. NSEA staff and attorneys work with local leaders at each site to ensure the CIR's rigid guidelines are met, that elections are conducted fairly and properly and that all members of

the bargaining unit—including non-members—have their voice heard through the balloting.

Mraz and Mollring agreed the benefits of attaining permanent bargaining status would be an investment in the future.

"This isn't just about today's negotiations," Mraz said. "It's about securing a strong, unified voice for educators in the years to come."

**"This isn't just about today's negotiations. It's about securing a strong, unified voice for educators in the years to come."**

— Jacqueline Mraz  
North Platte Education Assoc.



While the process was detailed and often complex, Mraz emphasized that it was driven by strategy, timing and a shared sense of purpose between the local leadership and district leadership.

## The Collaboration

NPEA credits the support of Superintendent Dr. Todd Rhodes; Executive Director of Finance, Facilities, and Operations Stuart Simpson; and Director of Human Resources Kevin Mills with the high engagement during the certification election.

The process was a coordinated team effort. Building representatives helped collect authorization forms, and NPEA leaders communicated timelines, explained procedures and reminded staff not to overlook the ballots.

Their efforts culminated in a resounding vote of confidence this past March. Of the 121 certified staff who returned ballots, 116 voted in favor of the certification—a move that solidifies the NPEA's role as the official voice for educators at the bargaining table.

**AAE markets itself as a “non-political” choice. In reality, staying on the sidelines of policy debates that affect school funding, teacher rights and curriculum is a political stance—one that benefits those seeking to dismantle public education.**

**AAE doesn't just offer an alternative—it represents a direct challenge to the collective power educators have built through decades of organizing. Supporting collective bargaining means supporting the structures that make it possible — and AAE is not one of them.**

With a certified voice and strong relationships intact, the North Platte Education Association has set a model for local associations and school districts across the state: collaboration, not conflict, is the foundation for lasting progress and success in public education.

As of now, 100 out of 263 PreK-12 and Educational Service Unit (ESU) local associations in Nebraska have successfully achieved permanent certification status—a milestone that strengthens their collective voice at the bargaining table and secures long-

Local association leaders who are interested in exploring or pursuing permanent certification are encouraged to reach out to their NSEA organizational specialist by calling 1-800-742-0047. Specialists can provide guidance, answer questions and help navigate the certification process step-by-step.

It's important to remember that while local associations may not always agree on every issue or strategy, there is one principle that unites us all: when we stand together, we uphold a process that ensures every voice has the opportunity to be heard.

Defending the right to collective bargaining is about more than negotiating contracts—it's about preserving the stability of our schools, affirming the dignity and rights of educators and ensuring that every Nebraska student benefits from a strong, supported education system. Together, we build lasting change.



# Choose Your Own Adventure

Classes all summer  
long starting in May.



**QUESTIONS?**  
[enrollment@doane.edu](mailto:enrollment@doane.edu)

**READY? SCAN THE QR**



**DOANE**  
UNIVERSITY





Special guest and keynote speaker NEA Vice President Princess Moss celebrated her birthday with delegates and NSEA staff members on Saturday, April 26. Pictured are (left, front): Associate Executive Director Isau Metes, Moss, Executive Director Trish Guinan, NSEA Secretary/Treasurer Renae Noble, (back) NEA Director Edward Ventura, Jr., NSEA President Tim Royers and NSEA Vice President Paul Schulte.

## DELEGATE ASSEMBLY: Your Voice, Our Strength

United by a shared commitment to student success and educational excellence, more than 200 educators from across Nebraska came together in late April for the Nebraska State Education Association's annual Delegate Assembly.

On the evening of Friday, April 25, Tim Royers in his first Delegate Assembly as president struck the gavel to officially open the 2025 Assembly, ushering in a weekend of collaboration, advocacy and vision for the future.

### New Leadership

On Saturday, April 26, delegates elected Mary Reynolds-East, of the Millard Education Association, as the ESP At-Large Representative to the NSEA Board of Directors. Reynolds-East faced incumbent Jenny Wood of the South Sioux City Education Association. Reynolds-East will take office on Sept. 1.

Running unopposed and elected by acclamation was NEA Director Edward Ventura, Jr., of the Omaha Education Association. This will be Ventura's second 3-year-term on the NEA Board of Directors. Renae Noble, of the Chadron Education Association, was elected by acclamation to serve as NSEA Secretary/Treasurer. Delegates previously elected Noble to serve as an NEA Representative but due to declining membership, NEA reduced Nebraska's two NEA Representative positions to a single position. In 2024, delegates voted to revise Article II Officers and Article III Board of Directors to add the new officer position of Secretary/Treasurer. The NSEA Board of Directors appointed Noble to fill the position until Aug. 31. Noble will serve her first full

3-year-term beginning Sept. 1.

### Keynote Speaker

Delegates heard from National Education Association Vice President Princess R. Moss in her keynote address on Saturday. An elementary school music teacher from Louisa County, Va., Moss is a respected and unwavering advocate for children and public education. In her address to delegates, Moss asked delegates to remain steadfast in their commitment to public education and their students. Throughout her speech, Moss emphasized the importance of collective power, community organizing and legislative advocacy. Educators were encouraged to share their personal stories and experiences with policymakers.

"Your Congress people need to hear from you. They really do, and it does have an impact," she said. "Your personal stories make a difference—how you see and work with your students each and every day."

Moss thanked delegates for their work in fighting off vouchers in Nebraska and encouraged members to continue organizing, mobilizing and speaking up. "We will not give up," she said.

"We will organize. We will mobilize. We will move forward together with love in the only direction we know—forward, forward, forward."

### Dues, Bylaws & NBIs

Delegates voted to revise Article II Officers and Article V Delegate Assembly to give additional time to candidates

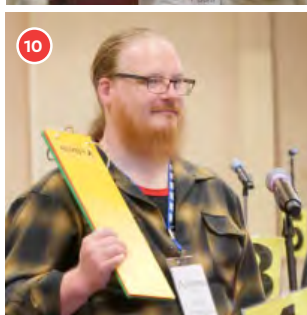
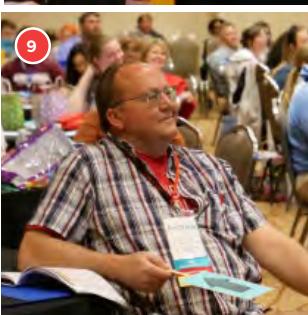
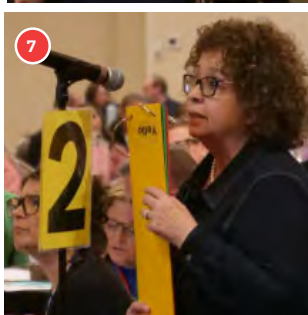
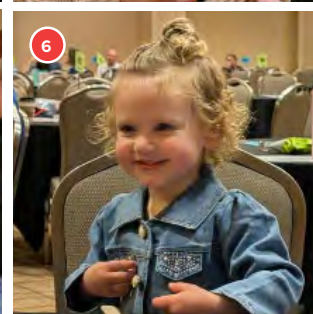
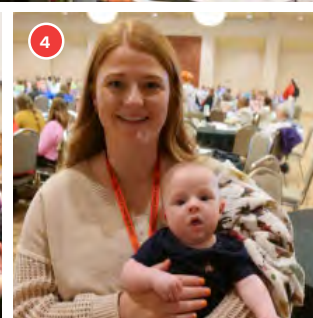
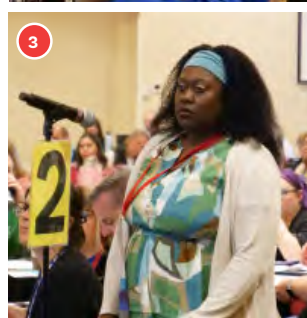


running for office to submit campaign information. Previously, any candidate who wished to have campaign information included in the Delegate Assembly digital packet had to submit the information to the Executive Director or Association Executive Director no fewer than 45 days prior to Delegate Assembly. Now candidates must submit the information no fewer than 21 days prior to delegate assembly. Both bylaws revisions were passed as written in the April edition of *The Voice*.

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

- Extend the work of the Legal Representation Committee for one additional year to research alternatives that could be made available to members accused of criminal offenses;
- Study the feasibility of adding a SOGI (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity) Committee to the Association;
- Continue the feasibility study regarding ESP dues;
- Cause a bill to be introduced in the 2026 Legislative Session that will ensure that the automatic annual cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for members of the Omaha School Employees' Retirement System (OSERS);
- Create a Unity Committee as a standing committee of the NSEA Board of Directors;
- Print personal pronouns on badges at NSEA-sponsored events and conferences
- Continue working on NBI No. 13, passed during the 2023 Delegate Assembly, continuing research on the feasibility of a full-time release vice president;
- Study the leadership structures of other state associations that have three officers, President, Vice President, and Sec/Treas., to examine the job descriptions of the three positions in those state associations.

Delegates set dues for 2025-26 at \$439, a \$2 (or .46%) increase. A breakdown of dues can be found in the April edition of *The Voice*.



**Delegates Take Center Stage:** 1. NSEA President Tim Royers is all smiles. 2. Delegates vote to bundle several NBIs. 3. Dr. Tanishia Jacobs waits for a turn to speak. 4. Eustis-Farnam Education Association member Bailey Smith smiles with her son, Hank. 5. Lincoln Education Association President Deb Rasmussen, Nicole Lopez-Bettendorf and Noelle Milovich discuss language changes. 6. Future delegate (Teagan) accompanies her grandma, and NSEA-Retired delegate, Rita Bennett. 7. NSEA-Retired delegate Lisa Fricke speaks with a yellow card. 8. Paula Aguirre and Sarah Dragon give a standing ovation to NEA Vice President Princess Moss. 9. Delegate Andrew Lenzen listens during the assembly. 10. OEA delegate Andrew Hillmer waits with a yellow card. 11. Noelle Milovich and first-time delegate Bailey Dennis wait to speak on a motion.



# 2025 Award Winners

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

1. Former Nebraska State Board of Education members **Lisa Fricke** and **Patsy Koch Johns** were jointly honored with NSEA's 2025 Friends of Education Award.
2. **Haley Santin**, Palmer Education Association, receives the 2025 NSEA award for Teaching Excellence.
3. **Ross Pickel**, Lincoln Education Association, receives the 2025 Early Career Educator Award.
4. **Dina Lado**, Lincoln Education Association, receives the 2025 NSEA Great Plains Milestone Award.
5. **Lincoln and Wisner-Pilger education associations** were recognized for leading the way with their contributions to the Children's Fund over the last year. LEA President **Deb Rasmussen** accepted on behalf of her association.
6. **Mary Reynolds-East**, Millard Education Association, was presented with the 2025 NSEA Education Support Professional of the Year.
7. **Matt Erb**, Chief Negotiator for the Lincoln Education Association, receives the newly renamed Tom Black Public Relations Award.
8. **Rob Geise**, principal for the Conestoga Jr./Sr. High School, receives NSEA's 2025 Administrator of Excellence Award.
9. **KETV News Capitol Bureau Chief Andrew Ozaki** accepted the 2025 Outstanding Media award.
10. **Not Pictured:** The Elkhorn District received the 2025 William Gallagher Jr. award for enrolling the largest percentage of eligible members.







### Your Voice Belongs at the Bargaining Table

As public employees, Nebraska's teachers have the right to collectively bargain—a right many educators across the country, including in Iowa—have lost. The 2025 NSEA Summer Conference, set for July 15–16 at Kearney High School, will feature sessions on negotiations, covering roles, responsibilities and bargaining timelines. NSEA Collective Bargaining Specialist Jen Dubas will lead sessions for both new and experienced negotiators and facilitate mock negotiations so participants can practice before the real thing.

When it comes to collective bargaining, few educators illustrate the spirit of engagement and leadership like Lincoln Education Association (LEA) member Matt Erb. A long-time music teacher and former NSEA staff member, Erb has become a pivotal figure in LEA's bargaining efforts, stepping up to lead when it mattered most. Erb's path into negotiations wasn't something he planned—it was something he was asked to do.

"I was starting to get active in the association when then-LEA President Jenni Benson just sunk her hooks into me," Erb said with a laugh. "Without that ask, I don't think I ever would've sought it out."

That invitation turned into a

lasting commitment. Over the past several years, he's moved from being a team member to a lead voice at the negotiating table—though he's quick to point out that it's always a team effort.

"You never learn more about your association or your job than when you're in negotiations," he said. "Reading and understanding the contract line-by-line gives you a whole new perspective on your rights and responsibilities as an educator."

Erb encourages anyone interested in bargaining to jump in—whether by joining the formal team or by

sharing insights through surveys and conversations. In a profession built on collaboration, Erb's story is a reminder that leadership often begins with a simple invitation—and that the work of collective bargaining is too important to leave to someone else. You don't have to wait until retirement—or be asked by a colleague—to pass the proverbial baton. The next generation of leaders is built by those who get involved now. Members are encouraged to mark their calendars and take full advantage of this opportunity for bargaining training. Find more details and register at [www.nsea.org/summer25](http://www.nsea.org/summer25).



## BARGAINING GLOSSARY

**ar·bi·tra·tion** A process where a neutral third party makes a binding decision on a dispute that the parties could not resolve themselves.

**ar·ray:** any school or group of schools that is comparable to your school district in a certain radius and that has a student population of at least half the size and up to twice the size of your school.

**bar·gain·ing u·nit** The group made up of employees who negotiates with employers on salary, benefits and working conditions.

**col·lect·ive bar·gain·ing** The negotiation of a contract—including wages, benefits and working conditions—between employers and bargaining unit members.

**coun·ter·pro·po·sal** A response to a proposal, offering alternative terms or adjustments.

**good faith bar·gain·ing** The legal obligation of both parties to meet and negotiate at reasonable times with a willingness to reach an agreement.

**im·pas·se** A point in bargaining when both sides believe further negotiations will not lead to agreement.

**me·di·a·tion** A process where a neutral third party helps the union and employer resolve disputes and reach agreement.

**mem·or·and·um of**

**un·der·stand·ing (MOU)** A formal agreement between the parties, often used for side agreements or temporary arrangements outside the main contract.

**pro·po·sal** A formal suggestion or offer made during negotiations, intended to be part of the final agreement.

**ten·ta·tive a·gree·ment (TA)** An agreement reached between the union and employer on specific issues or an entire contract, pending ratification by both parties. It is not final until formally approved.

# LEGISLATURE

## Protecting Public Education in Nebraska

Members Lend Their Voices to Advocate for the Future of Education

### Retirement Bill Final Reading

In late April, lawmakers gave wide final approval on the changes to the state's school retirement pension plan. LB645, introduced by Sen. Beau Ballard, as amended, ties retirement contributions to the funding status of the statewide school employees' retirement plan. As of this publication's press deadline, LB645 awaits Governor Pillen's signature, marking a significant step toward equitable retirement savings for educators.

This legislation does not affect employees in the Omaha School Employees Retirement System (OSERS) due to its lower funding status and will not impact current retirees' monthly benefits or future retirees' defined benefit payments.

The statewide plan's robust financial health, with a funded ratio of 99.91% (actuarial value) and 103.34% (market value) as of July 1, 2024, supports the bill's graduated contribution structure. Starting Jan. 1, 2026, employee contributions

will adjust based on the plan's funded ratio: 7.25% if over 100% funded, 8% if between 98% and 100% funded, 8.75% if between 96% and 98% funded, and 9.75% if below 96% funded. State contributions will vary similarly, ranging from 0% to 2%. Plan funding triggers ensure stability; if the funding level declines due to market fluctuations (smoothed over five years), rates will gradually increase to restore 100% funding.

Actuarial projections bolster confidence in the plan's resilience. Even with a hypothetical -7% market downturn with the year ending June 30, the plan would remain over 99% funded, allowing employee contributions to decrease from 9.78% to 8%. If the plan exceeds 100% funding, contributions are anticipated to drop to 7.25%, increasing educators' take-home pay. For example, a teacher earning \$45,244 annually could save \$1,144.67 pretax yearly at the 7.25% rate, while one earning \$60,377 could save \$1,527.54.

This legislation, shaped by advocacy from educators and collaboration with the NSEA's Government Relations team, promotes fiscal prudence while enhancing job satisfaction and recruitment. Unlike OSERS, which remains under 80% funded, the statewide plan's strength enables these savings without compromising long-term solvency. The graduated structure incentivizes careful management, ensuring benefits remain secure for current and future retirees.

While LB645's benefits are limited to the statewide plan, it sets a precedent for future reforms. As OSERS' funding improves, similar adjustments may be considered. For now, educators in the statewide plan can look forward to increased financial flexibility, while reinforcing Nebraska's commitment to supporting its teaching workforce.

### Rule of 85 Blocked

A public hearing was held on AM1023, an amendment to LB645 that proposed allowing teachers in the statewide school employees' retirement plan to retire at age 55 with an unreduced benefit under the Rule of 85, aligning benefits for those hired on or after July 1, 2018, with those hired before that date. The Rule of 85 permits retirement with



**Day of Action:** Millard Education Association members Alissa Hinz and Megan Root meet with lawmakers during the Day of Action in early April.





**Day of Action: Metro District President and Millard Education Association member Marsha Edquist participates in the MEA Day of Action on April 9.**

full benefits when an employee's age and years of creditable service total 85 (e.g., age 55 with 30 years of service).

Unfortunately, the proposal faced notable opposition from the Nebraska Association of School Administrators and the Nebraska Association of School Boards, which both argued that LB645's already-slated reduction in employer contribution rates was sufficient; that an additional benefit change in AM1023 posed unnecessary financial risk without further study. However, they expressed a willingness to consider this change next year. Despite Sen. Ballard's efforts to introduce the amendment with stakeholder support, this opposition has halted its advancement. The NSEA appreciates Sen. Ballard's commitment to educators' retirement flexibility by introducing the amendment for hearing.

Currently, teachers hired before July 1, 2018, can retire at age 55 under this rule, but those hired after must wait until age 60, creating inequity. AM1023 aimed to restore fairness and flexibility for newer hires, with minimal cost to the overall \$16.3 billion statewide school retirement plan and potential state savings of an additional \$18.8 million over the biennium.

At the hearing, NSEA President Tim Royers passionately

advocated for AM1023, highlighting its minimal financial impact, with an actuarial study showing only a 0.25% increase in the plan's actuarial cost next year and less than 1% by 2040. He emphasized the need for fairness, sharing the story of a young special education teacher who faces physical and mental challenges and deserves the flexibility to retire at 55 after decades of service. Royers also noted that restoring the Rule of 85 for newer hires would aid teacher retention, addressing the critical shortage of early-career educators, and urged the committee to support the amendment to show solidarity with Nebraska's educators.

## **Paid FMLA Hangs in Balance**

The Education Leave and Support Act (LB440), championed by Sen. Ashlei Spivey, awaits a critical decision from the eight senators on the Education Committee. The fate of paid Family and Medical Leave (FMLA) for Nebraska teachers hinges on negotiations, with four weeks of paid leave currently being discussed to secure swing votes on the committee. Originally introduced with six weeks of paid FMLA, the bill's advancement is urgent as the session nears its close.

LB440 requires that school districts provide teacher paid FMLA, and it grants funding for a school's substitute costs incurred during the paid FMLA time period, through a 0.35% payroll deduction matched by school districts. This Act enables educators to welcome a new child, care for a loved one or recover from illness without depleting sick days or facing financial strain. Any surplus funds would be allocated to an Education Retention Fund to address teacher shortages and enhance professional development. If advanced, LB440's priority status guarantees a full legislative debate—a vital step toward a sustainable future for Nebraska's educators.

Paid FMLA tackles systemic inequities, particularly for young women who face disproportionate barriers due to limited leave options. By easing the need to exhaust personal leave, LB440 reduces burnout, supports teacher retention and ensures stable classrooms for students. This bill is a bold investment in educators' well-being and Nebraska's education system.

NSEA members, your voice is critical! Contact the senators on the Education Committee and urge them to support LB440's advancement. Share personal stories—





like the challenges of balancing life events without paid leave—to emphasize the bill’s importance. Your advocacy can sway the negotiations and secure a brighter future for teachers and students.

## Voices in Education

See photos of members and other important voices in education who have testified during this legislative session:

### 1. Millard Education Association

**Day of Action:** Left to right: MEA President Stacy Kester-Pearson, Tom Whisinnand, Mary Reynolds-East, Marsha Edquist, Megan Root, Christine Kaldahl, Alicia Ketcham, Amy Breiter, Alissa Hinz, Jamie Swanda, Bryant Bull and Diana Weis.

### 2. Day of Action on March 20:

Former NSEA President Jenni Benson, NSEA-Retired member Rita Bennett, AJ Bowen, Katie Cameron, Nicole Lopez Bettendorf and Linda Lannin.

**3. Friends:** Former Nebraska State Board of Education member and current NSEA-Retired member Lisa Fricke gives Sen. Dunixi Guereca (District 07) a warm hug outside of the chamber during the NSEA-Retired Lobby Day.





N E B R A S K A

SMART

Success Made Accessible Through Rural Tutoring



**CHADRON  
STATE COLLEGE**

## **Chadron State College invites rural students to participate in the expanded SMART tutor program**

Nebraska Success Made Accessible through Rural Tutoring (SMART) is expanding its mission to provide high-quality, free tutoring services to K-12 students across rural Nebraska school districts.

The program connects students with dedicated teacher education candidates from the three Nebraska State Colleges: Chadron, Peru, and Wayne.

### **Program Expansion and Eligibility**

- The program now serves students from all school districts affiliated with the Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association (NRCSA), those in districts supported by Educational Service Units 1, 4, and 13, and several other select rural districts.

### **How the Program Works**

- Tutoring services are delivered online, allowing students or parents to schedule sessions between Monday and Thursday.
- Students can either schedule an appointment or select on-demand tutoring.
- Tutors have been admitted to their college's teacher education program, passed background checks, and received comprehensive training.
- Nebraska SMART ensures students are paired with tutors who specialize in their grade level and subject area.



## **Learn More and Register**

For more information or to register for tutoring, visit the Nebraska SMART webpage.

#ForwardTogether | MAY 2025 | THE VOICE | PAGE 17



# NSEA-Retired Members Donate Flag to Fly at NSEA HQ



At the March LEAD Conference and NSEA Board meeting, attendees were reminded that the flagpole outside the NSEA building—facing the Nebraska State Capitol—was originally donated and installed by NSEA-Retired. This flagpole stands as a lasting symbol of retired educators' contributions to the Association.

It was noted that the flag periodically needs to be replaced due to weather and wear. In response, attendees quickly pooled funds to purchase a replacement flag to keep

on hand. Their generosity sparked a broader plan: to establish an ongoing program ensuring the flag is properly maintained and replaced as needed.

This gesture—small in scale, but powerful in symbolism—demonstrates the continued leadership and generosity of Nebraska's retired educators. Their commitment to the profession doesn't end with retirement; it lives on in the ways they continue to uplift their colleagues and the association, one flag at a time.

## Alliance Retirees Gather to Reconnect & Recruit



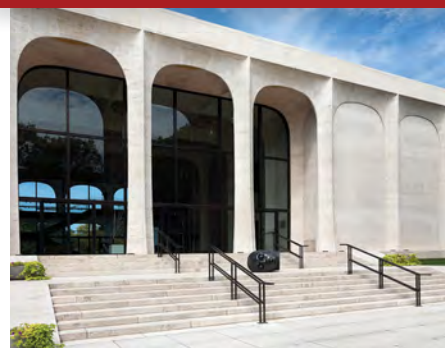
A group of retired educators gathered in Alliance on Monday, March 31, to reconnect, recruit and discuss forming a local NSEA-Retired chapter. The event, held at Sam & Louie's, brought together 16 attendees, including six current NSEA-R members, seven retired teachers and three guests.

The meeting focused on encouraging NSEA-Retired membership, exploring the formation of an Alliance-area group and discussing scholarship opportunities for future educators. Attendees enjoyed appetizers during the informal gathering.

An icebreaker activity kicked off the event, with participants sharing favorite classroom memories.

Photos were taken during the event, including one of NSEA-Retired members Roberta Rudden and Barb Kindle. While not everyone was captured on camera, the group expressed enthusiasm for continuing the conversation and building a stronger local network of retired educators.

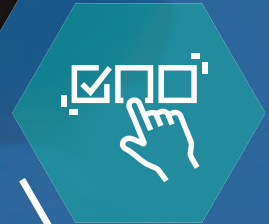
## Retired Volunteers Sought for Sheldon Museum of Art



Are you a retired teacher or part-time educator with a passion for the arts? The Sheldon Art Gallery in Lincoln is seeking enthusiastic volunteers to join their team for the fall of 2025. Volunteering at the gallery is an excellent way to stay engaged with the community, share your love for art and contribute to a vibrant educational experience.

Barbara Hoppe, a long-time volunteer at the gallery, encourages retired and part-time teachers to consider giving their time and expertise to the Sheldon. Volunteers will play an essential role in supporting the gallery's educational programs and events. Sheldon Art Gallery will be recruiting new volunteers this spring and summer for the upcoming fall season. If you are a retired educator or know someone who might be interested, please contact Barbara Hoppe at 402-730-5404 for more details or with any questions.





# Benefits designed with **YOU IN MIND**

Explore exclusive benefits online:

- Student debt reduction
- Flexible insurance coverage
- Complimentary life insurance
- Easy retirement planning
- Shopping and travel deals

And so much more!



Scan below  
to learn more



**nea** *Member  
Benefits*

CO301124

## Speaking of Education

"I strongly believe in the benefits of competition and free enterprise. But schools are not businesses and students are neither products nor consumers."

— Owen Butler,  
former chair of Procter & Gamble

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

# Family of Teachers

## Passing the Chalk: Mom and Daughter Make Teaching a Family Affair at Roper



*Caitlin Hoppe & Tiffany Patrick*

It's not every day you see a family reunion at school drop-off, but at Roper Elementary in Lincoln, a mother-daughter teaching duo not only share a passion for education—they also share a building!

Lincoln Education Association (LEA) member Tiffany Patrick is a seasoned 2nd grade teacher entering her 12th year in the classroom. Her daughter, Caitlin Hoppe—also an LEA member—is an art teacher beginning her second year of teaching. Hoppe joined the Roper team for the 2024–25 school year, making it their first year teaching together at the same school.

For many, teaching isn't just a career—it's a family tradition. Whether

you're part of a long line of educators or starting a new chapter together, Family of Teachers celebrates those who share the calling to inspire and support the next generation.

Does teaching run in your family? We want to hear from you! Send us a photo of you and your fellow educator relatives—parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles—anyone who shares your passion for making a difference in the classroom. Submit your photo today and be featured in Family of Teachers, where we honor the heart, commitment and legacy of families who teach at [www.nsea.org/Family](http://www.nsea.org/Family).

## Summer To-Do: Apply for Certificate Renewal in Advance

Educators, add this to your summer "to-do" list—right between sunscreen and iced coffee: If your certificate expires in 2025, now's the time to get ahead of the game and start the renewal process.

Each year, the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) sends certificate renewal reminders to thousands of Nebraska educators. The teaching certificate is valid for teaching in all Nebraska school systems and must be renewed every five years. Certificates expire on Aug. 31 each year. Backlogs

at the department in recent years have sent members to NSEA for help to get answers about the process. This year, the department is encouraging certificated teachers who will need to renew in 2025 to apply as early as possible.

Teachers who are unsure if their certificate expires this year can log in to the Nebraska TEACH portal and check the expiration date at <https://teach.education.ne.gov/#/verifylicense>. To renew, log on to <https://teach.education.ne.gov/#/> and

start an application. The application can be found at the top of the account portal.

