


The VOICE

Nebraska School Journal March 2025



PERSONAL STORIES, POLICY CHANGE

*Educators Lead the Charge
for Family Leave Reform*

- Summer Conference Announced
- Introducing NSEA Family of Teachers
- Documenting Personal Items in Your Classroom



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Share stories that raise up diverse voices and help kids discover their own potential by reading titles that reflect and respect all. March is National Reading Month, and NEA has curated a calendar of books, reading activities and events, reading tips for parents, and booklists to help connect children and their families to diverse books and cultures while spreading the joy of reading. Visit bit.ly/NEA-READ to find the complete calendar.

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We're joining together to make sure every student has to look no further than the shelves of their own school libraries to find age-appropriate books that show they are reflected and respected. Sign the pledge at bit.ly/freedom-read to protect the freedom to read.

Read Across America Day

Read Across America Day celebrations will be held on March 2. Find more at bit.ly/NEA-READ.

Free Resources for Teachers

Need help finding books to put into the hands of readers? Check out these resources and bring print and online books to qualifying schools and students. Find free materials at bit.ly/RAA-Free.

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

On the Cover: Nebraska's 2019 Teacher of the Year Sydney Jensen and others are sharing their personal stories to highlight the need for updated Family Leave Policies. Read the full story and see photos on pages 7-8.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

TIM ROYERS

Your Voice, Our Strength

We are at our strongest as an organization when we are able to use our collective voices and take action together to work to accomplish a goal. That was on full display in the early weeks of the Legislature when the details of LB645—a school employees retirement bill—were revealed.

Your Retirement

As originally introduced, LB645 would seek to take advantage of the State School Employees Retirement Plan being fully funded. The bill sought to completely eliminate the state's contribution to that retirement plan to help resolve the ongoing half-a-billion-dollar budget deficit the Legislature is facing. We had attempted to steer this bill in a better direction in the early part of January, but our input was largely ignored.

That all changed after we shared the details of this bill with NSEA members in one of our Capitol Updates. Hundreds of members across the state wrote emails, called and even met with their state senator in person to demand that the Legislature do better by our public school employees.

Your Voice

As a result of your action, we were able to sit down with Senator Beau Ballard, the Retirement Committee chair, along with members of the Governor's office, to craft a better way forward.

This past week, AM248 was filed by Senator Ballard that would make significant changes to that bill. Now, with that amendment, if the State School Employees Retirement Plan is above 96% funded (which it currently is), the employee contribution rate would be reduced from 9.78% to

7.28%. This means that, if this new version becomes law, starting on Jan. 1, 2026, every public school employee under the state plan would see a 2.5% increase in their take-home pay.

The amendment also protects needed funding for the Omaha School Employees Plan. So, for both plans, employee contributions will decrease only if the plan maintains a healthy financial status and the state's obligations will be linked to the retirement fund's financial status, ensuring stable long-term funding.

This is a major win, and while we still have much to do, it clearly demonstrates the power of collective action.

Our Strength

When we all use our voices, we have the potential to make a profound difference in our state, and even across our whole country. That's why our theme for Delegate Assembly this year is "Your Voice, Our Strength." Find more information about the 2025 Delegate Assembly on pages 14-15 and at NSEA.org.

Taking just five minutes to speak out, contact an elected official, or encourage others in your community to get active makes a huge difference. And together, utilizing our collective voices and the work NSEA governance and staff do directly with lawmakers at the State Capitol, we have the potential to make this one of the most pro-public education sessions of the Legislature.

So again—THANK YOU—to everyone who used your voice to help make this important change possible and remember that it is through your voice that we have our strength.

"Hundreds of members across the state wrote emails, called and even met with their state senator in person to demand that the Legislature do better by our public school employees. As a result of your action, we were able to sit down with Senator Beau Ballard, the Retirement Committee chair, along with members of the Governor's office, to craft a better way forward."





Nebraska Educator Remembered for Shaping "Read Across America"

Launched in 1998, the National Education Association's Read Across America program opens National Reading Month every March 2 with classroom reading celebrations.

In the 27 years since the launch, thousands upon thousands of books have been given to children across the country and millions of children have taken part in reading events.

Few people outside the NEA headquarters, however, knew that one of the key minds and co-founders of Read Across America was a Nebraskan.

Educator Richard John "Rick" Geier grew up in Lincoln and graduated from Lincoln East High School. Geier, 68, died in Lincoln on Jan. 28.

NSEA Executive Director Trish Guinan was a math teacher and member of the Fremont Education Association where Geier taught marketing and served as the FEA president.

"Rick was my first local president in Fremont," said Guinan. "One of his proudest accomplishments was being a co-founder and the manager of the RAA program, supporting children."

Geier attended the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. After graduation, he took a teaching job at Fremont, which led to a career at the Texas State Teachers Association. He eventually landed a job with the NEA in Washington, D.C. And that led to the creation of Read Across America.

Geier retired in 2011 and returned to Lincoln. He is survived by his father, two sisters, a brother, nieces and nephews.



Why Documenting Your Personal Items in the Classroom Matters

Many teachers go above and beyond their official duties, often using their own money to buy supplies for their classrooms. School budgets are tight, and educators are often expected to make do with limited resources. As a result, educators reach into their own pockets to fill the gaps, ensuring their students have the tools they need to succeed. These can range from everyday supplies to more specific educational tools like books, technology and hands-on learning materials. Many educators also buy items for classroom decorations to help create a welcoming and engaging environment.

NSEA Director of Advocacy Jason Wiese encourages educators to document their personal classroom items with photos or videos as a safeguard for their property.

"Whether transitioning between classrooms or schools—or facing an unfortunate scenario like a reduction in force (RIF) or termination—video documentation serves as a neutral, reliable source of information," said Wiese. "Just as insurance companies advise clients to maintain a visual inventory of their property, having a detailed record of your belongings provides peace of mind. It ensures that valuable teaching tools and personal items are accounted for in case of theft, fire or other unforeseen events."

Wiese recommends storing these photos or videos on personal devices such as a cell phone or computer for easy access and security.



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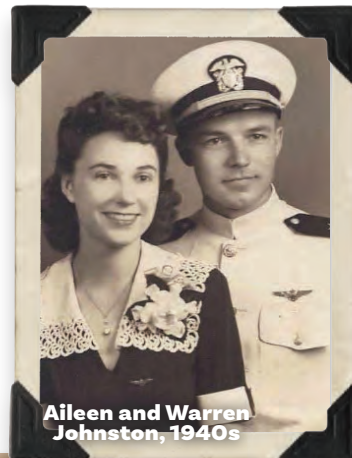
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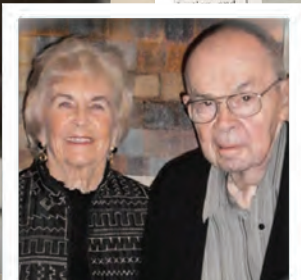
Aileen Johnston
Papillion La Vista



John Johnston
Crete Public Schools



Aileen and Warren Johnston, 1940s



Aileen and John Johnston



Esther Busby Linneman, with two students, circa 1963



Jed, Brandon and John Dennis Johnston

NEEA
150
Presents

Family of Teachers

A Legacy of Teaching: The Johnston Family's Impact on Education

For the Johnston family, teaching is more than just a career, it's a family legacy. Careers in education have been a calling passed down through generations of Johnstons, shaping lives across Nebraska and beyond.

Brandon Johnston, a member of the Millard Education Association, embarked on an extensive exploration of his family's genealogy after his wife, Nicole, gifted him a subscription to Ancestry.com.

"I've traced family history on both sides quite a ways back," Brandon said.

The Johnston family's journey in education began with the first generation of teachers, many of whom taught in rural, one-room schoolhouses. The second generation, many of whom served in World War II, contributed 816 years of teaching experience, including teachers, professors and administrators.

"Many of the Johnston family served in World War II, prior to their careers in education. For example, John Johnston and four of his brothers all served in WWII at the same time," Brandon said. "These gentlemen, as well as most of their wives, taught to varying degrees throughout their careers."

The third and fourth generations have added to the family's impressive total, with 1,245 and 572 years of experience, respectively.

For Brandon, exploring his ancestry has deepened an understanding of his identity, and reinforced his own decision to pursue a career in education.

"I work with Tier Two students as a MTSS

interventionist. When you see something click for your students, see them light up and understand what you're explaining—that's easily my favorite part of teaching," he explained.

Brandon is the fourth generation of Johnstons in education. There are several Johnstons in this generation still actively teaching in Nebraska and other states. Brandon's father, Dr. Jed Johnston, recently "un-retired" to serve as the interim elementary principal at DC West.

The family recently lost Aileen Johnston who, along with her husband John, was a lifelong champion of education.

"Aileen was the last member of the Greatest Generation for the Johnston family. She was music teacher for 25 years, mostly in Papillion La Vista Community Schools. She was 96 when she passed. Her husband, John, was a superintendent in Nebraska for 37 years," Brandon said.

Aileen's passing marks the end of an era, but the Johnston family's commitment to education lives on. See the full story on the Johnston teacher family at www.nsea.org/johnston-family-teachers.

Be Part of the Family of Teachers!

Family of Teachers celebrates those who dedicate their lives to shaping young minds. If teaching runs in your family, we want to hear your story! Submit a photo of you and your fellow educators—parents, siblings, grandparents, or even aunts and uncles—who share this incredible calling. Let's honor the passion, dedication and impact of families who make a difference in the classroom every day. Submit your photos today and be featured in Family of Teachers! Visit www.nsea.org/Family.

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What would six weeks paid Family and Medical Leave mean for you?

Personal Stories Highlight the Need for Updated Family Leave Policies

Nebraska's 2019 Teacher of the Year Sydney Jensen will welcome her second child in May. The 9th-grade English teacher at Lincoln High School is hoping her second birth will have fewer challenges than when she and her husband welcomed their first child Gloria, "Glo," in the throes of the pandemic.

"School shut down in March 2020 and I found out I was pregnant with Glo in early May. So, my entire pregnancy was caught up in all the unknowns of the pandemic. I was 9 months pregnant and teaching in a mask," Sydney said.

The Best Laid Plans

Sydney and her husband had always dreamed of becoming parents. She meticulously planned for years, saving up sick leave days to prepare for both the birth and care of her newborn.

"I had been saving leave at that point for eight years to be able to afford maternity leave and I had enough days saved—about 8 weeks," she said.

As Sydney's due date approached in January 2021, her doctor

recommended she take a week off to isolate as there was not yet a vaccine available and if she tested positive before her due date, her husband would not be allowed to attend the birth of their daughter.

"I had a doctor's note to take that week of isolation. The district had a policy granting five days of COVID leave and I had been very careful not to use it," she said. "But it was determined that I wasn't eligible to take those COVID days and they were deducted from my banked leave."

Outdated Policies

After welcoming baby Glo, Sydney, like so many women, struggled through the postpartum period. Research shows about a third of women who delivered babies during the early days of the pandemic experienced symptoms of postpartum depression. Even before the pandemic, one in eight women experienced postpartum depression. Often misunderstood as a temporary or expected emotional response to childbirth, rather than a serious medical condition that requires treatment and time to recover

from, many leave policies are designed to cover only the immediate physical needs of childbirth and newborn care. Describing these experiences can be hard to articulate, making it difficult for many women to seek help or even acknowledge their feelings.

"It got to a point where I felt like if I went back to work, I was going to die," she explained. "I didn't even know how to explain this to my principal. I didn't go into details, I just explained that I needed more time. I reached out to district Human Relations, and I told them the same thing."

Sydney ended up filing for unpaid leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act, a federal law that allows eligible employees to take unpaid, job-protected leave for specific family and medical reasons without the fear of losing their job.

The unpaid leave was a financial hardship for their family, but it was the only option Sydney could find in a system that doesn't currently provide support for working parents.

"I had done everything to try and prepare and do it right. It felt like at every turn there were obstacles.

Nothing about the way that policy was set up—in our school district and our state—was working for me. It was all working against me.”

Preparing to welcome a second child has been years in the making for Sydney and her husband.

“My daughter just turned four and, since I had her, I’ve barely taken a day off. All to save my leave time in planning to expand our family,” she said.

Bryant's Story

Across Nebraska, educators often feel the strain of balancing the demands of a teaching career with the need for family leave.

Millard Education Association member Bryant Bull’s experience with illness and family planning left a lasting impact. In 2011, Bryant and his wife, Sabrina, were expecting their first child when Bryant began experiencing unexpected health issues.

“I was hospitalized, I lost 40 pounds, and eventually diagnosed with Crohn’s Disease,” he said. “It took months working with doctors before I was in recovery.”

Bryant ended up missing more than two months of work battling health complications. Sabrina, also a Millard teacher, took time off to care for him.

“My wife had to take a bunch of time off too. There were times when I couldn’t even get out of bed,” he said.

At the time, Bryant had accumulated a generous amount of sick leave. However, it wasn’t enough to cover both his illness and his wife’s needs after the birth of their daughter later that year. This left Bryant with an impossible decision: return to work after just five days with his newborn, or take unpaid leave, which was not financially viable for the family.

“My wife was able to take a couple of weeks to spend with our daughter when she was newborn. I got five days. That’s it,” he said. “It was one of the worst situations of my entire life. I had built up those sick days purposely because my wife and I knew that we wanted to have a family.

The emotional toll of missing those early weeks with his daughter, compounded by the physical challenges of his illness, left a lasting impact on Bryant.

“I’ve never really gotten over that. The timing was just so wrong. The policy is that there is no paternity or maternity leave, you take your sick leave. And the only other option is to take unpaid time. In a household with two teachers, there’s no way we could afford to take unpaid leave to care for our new baby. I still to this day have trouble getting over the fact that I could not spend time with my daughter in those formative first few weeks of her life. It haunts me.”

Change Needed

As teachers across Nebraska continue to navigate the demands of their classrooms, many—like Sydney and Bryant—are calling for critical policy changes that would support their family’s needs. The NSEA worked with Omaha Senator Ashlei Spivey to propose The Education Leave and Support Act (LB440), which would provide six weeks of paid FMLA for public school educators.



Bryant with baby Matilda

LB440 would allow teachers to stay in their careers without the strain of unpaid medical leave. The program would establish a 0.35% payroll tax on teachers and be matched by local districts to provide six weeks of paid leave, ensuring teachers have the support they need for personal and family health matters. The modest payroll contributions would reimburse districts for the costs of long-term substitutes.

Bryant and Sydney both agreed to share their stories to help ensure that other educators are not forced to make the same difficult choices.

Sydney sees the proposed bill as a vital step in addressing the state’s teacher retention challenges, with many educators considering leaving the profession because of the lack of support for family leave.

“It has so much to do with retention. There are so many great teachers who find out that they’re pregnant or that they’re going to be a parent and they look at leave policies and think, ‘Well, I guess that it makes more sense for me to switch careers to make more money, or to stay home,’” she said. “There are also teachers who struggle with postpartum as I did.”

LB440 could be a lifesaver for someone who, like Bryant, faces unforeseen health problems or needs to spend time with their family. Bryant’s support for the bill is rooted in the understanding that such policies would benefit not only educators but their students as well.

“When teachers are supported in times of need, they can be more present and effective when they return to the classroom,” he said. “We need to take care of teachers so they can take care of their families.”

Tell Your Story

NSEA is encouraging teachers and educators to share their stories at nsea.org by uploading a quick video to show support for the bill. Share your personal story on what paid FMLA would mean for you and your family. Videos will be shared on social media and presented to state lawmakers to help drive change. Learn more at www.nsea.org/FMLAStory or scan the QR code.

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LEGISLATURE

Protecting Public Education in Nebraska

Members lend their voices to advocate for the future of education

In late January, several state senators joined NSEA at a new conference to discuss the importance of enacting its 2025 Legislative package of bills to support children, their teachers and public education in Nebraska. Senators Conrad, DeBoer, Dungan, Juarez, Prokop, Quick and Fredrickson joined NSEA President Tim Royers to unveil the association's legislative agenda to the public.

What Members Want

NSEA has worked closely with state senators to introduce a legislative package to strengthen public education by addressing teacher retention, compensation and working conditions. These initiatives reflect the concerns and priorities of educators across the state, as identified through an NSEA survey of nearly 10,000 teachers.

The survey results highlighted key challenges facing Nebraska educators, including concerns about workplace conditions, compensation, and the sustainability of their profession. Only a small percentage of respondents felt that the Legislature considers their perspectives when crafting



Member Voices: OEA member Katie Cameron, a School Counselor at Benson High School in Omaha Public Schools testified in support of LB598 to provide funding to cover limited English proficiency student expenditures.

education policy, and many expressed uncertainties about remaining in the profession without meaningful changes. These insights guided NSEA's legislative agenda for 2025. NSEA has collaborated with lawmakers to introduce key bills that will support educators and enhance Nebraska's public education system:

- **Paid Family and Medical Leave (LB440 – Sen. Ashlei Spivey):** Establishes a 0.35% payroll tax on teachers, matched by local districts, to provide six weeks of paid leave, ensuring teachers have the support they need for personal and family health matters.
- **Paraeducator Retention Bonuses (LB524 – Sen. Margo Juarez):** Provides \$1,000 retention bonuses for paraeducators working at least 28 hours per week, recognizing their critical role in schools.
- **Student Teacher Stipends (LB523 – Sen. Margo Juarez):** Creates a statewide stipend program awarding student



Member Voices: Hastings Education Association Member Melissa Burke testified in support of LB589 which allows districts to be reimbursed for substitute teachers when special education teachers take designated paperwork days.



Member Voices: Eustis-Farnam Education Association member Karen Kloepping testified in support of LB161, which increases state funding for early childhood education.

teachers \$4,000 per semester, easing the financial burden of entering the profession.

- **Early Childhood Education Funding (LB161 – Sen. Margo Juarez):** Increases state funding for early childhood education, ensuring equitable support for Nebraska's youngest learners.
- **Teacher Supply Reimbursement (LB282 – Sen. Jason Prokop):** Provides up to \$300 in reimbursements for classroom supplies, alleviating the personal financial burden on teachers.
- **Retention Grants (LB411 – Sen. George Dungan):** Establishes baseline retention grants starting at \$2,500 for early-career teachers and increasing to \$4,000 for those with 16+ years of service, incentivizing experienced educators to stay in the classroom.
- **Planning Time and Special Education Support (LB598 – Sen. Wendy DeBoer):** Increases state funding for schools providing teachers with at least 60 minutes of daily planning time and enhances funding for special education programs and Section 504 plan support.
- **Substitute Coverage for Special Education Teachers (LB589 – Sen. Danielle Conrad):** Allows districts to be

reimbursed for substitute teachers when special education teachers take designated paperwork days, improving compliance and reducing burnout.

Protecting Retirement Security

LB645, introduced by Senator Beau Ballard of Lincoln at the request of Governor Jim Pillen, originally proposed eliminating the state's 2% contribution to the statewide school employees' retirement plan. However, after discussions between Senator Ballard, Governor Pillen and NSEA's Government Relations team, AM248 has been introduced to revise LB645, providing a more balanced approach.

The amendment adjusts both the state's contributions and employee retirement contributions based on the funding status of the plan. If adopted, beginning Jan. 1, 2026, employee contributions will adjust based on the fund's actuarial funded ratio: if the fund is less than 96% funded, employees will continue contributing 9.78%, but if it is 96% or higher funded, employee contributions will decrease to 7.28%. Under the new proposal, school districts would continue contributing 9.88% of compensation.

The state's transfers to the School Retirement Fund would also be adjusted. Beginning July 1, 2025, these state transfers would depend on the fund's actuarial status: if the fund is less



Member Voices: OEA member Lee Perez testified in support of LB598, which would help provide funding to assist districts with creating plans of action to support this rapidly growing student demographic.

than 96% funded, the state will continue contributing 2%; if it is between 96% and 100% funded, the contribution will decrease to 0.7%; and if it exceeds 100%, no state transfer will be required.

These changes have several implications. Employee contributions will decrease if the plan maintains a healthy financial status, employers will continue supporting employee contributions and the state's obligations will be linked to the retirement fund's financial status, incentivizing stable long-term funding. The NSEA Government Relations team will keep you informed about an ongoing actuarial study that will assess the long-term viability of AM248. Depending on the study's findings, further benefits may be introduced if they do not compromise the sustainability of the statewide school employees' retirement plan.

It is important to note that AM248 does not apply to OSERS. Due to its lower funding status, OSERS will need to continue building reserves before similar contribution reductions can be considered.

The State of Nebraska is facing a \$432 million budget shortfall, and Governor Pillen and Senator Ballard originally sought to balance the budget by eliminating the state's contribution to school employees' pensions. This proposal was met with strong opposition from NSEA and educators across the state, as it would have destabilized the retirement system and jeopardized educators' financial futures.

Your strong advocacy and hundreds of emails and phone calls to state senators have had a resounding positive impact. By staying engaged and voicing support for policies that protect retirement security, Nebraska educators can continue



Member Voices: Raymond Central Education Association member Tasha Osten testified in support of LB598, which provides funding to cover limited English proficiency student expenditures.

Committee to support AM248, particularly the reduction in employee contribution rates when the plan is financially strong. Retirement Committee Members include:

- Sen. Beau Ballard, Chair, Lincoln bballard@leg.ne.gov
- Sen. Tony Sorrentino, Omaha tsorrentino@leg.ne.gov
- Sen. Robert Clements, Elmwood rclements@leg.ne.gov
- Sen. Danielle Conrad, Lincoln dconrad@leg.ne.gov
- Sen. Brian Hardin, Gering bhardin@leg.ne.gov
- Sen. Margo Juarez, Omaha mjuarez@leg.ne.gov

Section 504 Not at Risk

NSEA members have expressed concerns about a lawsuit filed this past fall, Texas v. Becerra. Nebraska is currently one of 17 states involved in the suit. While the primary focus is on challenging rules issued by the Biden administration, the lawsuit also raises questions about the constitutionality of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Thousands of students across the state rely on 504 plans, making the prospect of Section 504 being deemed unconstitutional concerning.

To address these concerns, NSEA President Tim Royers and NSEA Director of Government Relations Jason Hayes, along with representatives from the school boards and administrators' associations, met with Nebraska Attorney General Hilgers to discuss the issue.

Attorney General Hilgers made several commitments to NSEA. He explained that the complaint is not targeting Section 504 funding, and he cited a status report from the states filed which clarifies that is not the intent. He also stated that Nebraska will not join any request during the proceedings that challenges the constitutionality of Section 504. He also assured NSEA that he would not seek any relief that would seek to restrain the disbursement of federal funds dedicated to disability programs or otherwise prevent the allocation of spending to those programs.

NSEA will continue to monitor the situation and remains committed to preserving and expanding services for students with disabilities.

Dine With Senators

The NSEA Legislative Dinner will be held at the



Member Voices: Lincoln Education Association member Nicole Lopez-Bettendorf testified in support of LB408 which would adopt the Special Education Teacher Forgivable Loan Program Act.

to ensure a stable financial future for themselves and future generations.

CALL TO ACTION: NSEA encourages all members to take action in response to these legislative changes. Educators should contact Senator Ballard, and thank him for introducing AM248 as a more balanced alternative to LB645. Additionally, members should urge the Retirement



Champions Club in Lincoln on Wednesday, March 26. The reception will begin at 5 p.m., with dinner at 6:15 p.m. There is no cost; mileage is paid. For those traveling more than 120 miles, substitute costs and sleeping rooms will be available if your senator plans to attend. Member registration can be found at www.nsea.org/2025LegisDinner

Voices in Education

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

1. Opposing Voucher Schemes: A group of public school advocates came together to voice their opposition to LB509. Left to right: Brenda Council, Vanessa Chavez Jurado (Stand For Schools), Ben Welsh (NSEA Tri Valley President), Dr. Shavonna Holman (Omaha Public Schools) and Kathy Danek (Lincoln Public School Board).

2. Standing Up for Students: Omaha Education Association (OEA) members Amanda Kloke, OEA President Kathy Poehling and Sherrie Campbell testified as individuals in opposition to LB89.

3. All Together: NSEA Director of Government Relations Jason Hayes with members Nicole Lopez-Bettendorf, Lee Perez, Melissa Burke, Katie Cameron, Megan Andrews and Tasha Osten.





DELEGATE ASSEMBLY: Your Voice, Our Strength

April 25-26

The theme for the 2025 NSEA Delegate Assembly will be “Your Voice, Our Strength” to underscore the power of collective action and the importance of every individual’s contribution in driving meaningful change.

A testament to the power of the people is the repeal of LB1402’s voucher scheme in Nebraska during the 2024 November Election. It took two years, two successful petition drives, thousands of volunteers and more than 200,000 signatures from Nebraskans to ensure voters could decide at the ballot box.

So when in early February, when lawmakers heard testimony on LB509—which would provide a dollar-for-dollar tax credit to wealthy individuals and businesses that contribute money to private schools—there could be no mistake that public school supporters will fight to keep this voucher scheme out of Nebraska.

“If you chose to not listen to your constituents I want to reiterate

something and make it very plain: We will get the signatures again. We will repeal this bill, too,” NSEA President Tim Royers told Education Committee members.

In the context of education, “Your Voice, Our Strength” highlights how the voices of teachers, support staff, and advocates come together to form a united front that can influence policy, improve working conditions, and enhance student outcomes. When individuals speak up and share their experiences, concerns, and ideas, they contribute to a larger, more powerful movement that reflects the shared goals and values of the entire community.

This theme serves as a reminder that real strength comes from collaboration, solidarity, and the belief that every voice matters in shaping a stronger, more equitable future for education.

Keynote Address

National Education Association Vice President Princess R. Moss has been tapped to deliver a keynote address to delegates. An elementary school music teacher from Louisa County, Virginia, Moss is a respected and unwavering advocate for children and public education.

In her role as vice president, she helps steer the NEA’s mission to fulfill the promise of public education by preparing every student for success in a diverse and interconnected world. A vital part of her work focuses on being a strong and outspoken ally for marginalized students, educators, and communities. This

includes supporting Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities, LGBTQ+ individuals, students with disabilities and those who embody the intersection of these identities. Moss’s address will reflect her dedication to equity, inclusion



and the collective strength of the education community. Moss will address delegates on Saturday, April 26.

Bylaws

The deadline to submit Bylaws Amendments is 11:59 p.m. on Monday, March 10.

Resolutions

To submit Resolutions Amendments for consideration, submit online before the 11:59 p.m. deadline on Friday, April 4.

New Business Items

The deadline to submit New Business Items is fast approaching! All submissions must be received no later than 11:59 p.m. on Friday, April 4.

Delegate Assembly

The April 25-26 Assembly is NSEA's annual business meeting.

Delegates will gather at Lincoln's Marriott Cornhusker Hotel for the 165th assembly in NSEA history. At the helm will be NSEA President Tim Royers.

Members from across the state, representing local associations large and small, urban and rural, are elected to attend and represent the NSEA's 26,000 members. These delegates manage the business and set the future course of the Association.

Delegates will discuss educational issues and consider updates to NSEA Bylaws and Resolutions as part of the assembly action.

The event also features an awards presentation, recognizing the Early Career Educator of the Year, Educational Support Professional of the Year, Teaching Excellence Award recipient, NSEA's 2025 Friend of Education and more.

Members must be elected by their local association in order to attend as a delegate to the assembly. To make your interest in serving as a delegate known, contact your local association president, your local association building or faculty representative or your NSEA organizational specialist.

NSEA is the state's oldest professional association and has held a Delegate Assembly almost every year since, and in some cases, twice a year.

Delegate Assembly

April 25-26

BYLAWS: Deadline to submit

Bylaws Amendments is 11:59 PM

on Monday, March 10.

Cornhusker Marriott Hotel

RESOLUTIONS: Deadline to submit Resolutions

Amendments is 11:59 PM on Friday, April 4.

NEW BUSINESS

ITEMS: Deadline

to submit New

Business Items

is 11:59 PM on

Friday, April 4.

DA
Deadlines
to Remember!

BINGO!

Educators: This two in one Bingo! card game is a fun way to teach second through fifth graders about the many useful items made from pig and soybean by-products. The "Pork" game is on one side of the card, the "Soy" game on the other. The free Bingo kit includes game tokens, worksheets, call-out-cards, and a classroom poster.

The Nebraska Pork Producers Association is proud to offer this educational resource and several others, all available to you for **FREE**.

NEPork
RESPONSIBLE PEOPLE.
SUSTAINABLE PORK.

Order your Bingo!
kit today by visiting
neporkeducation.com
or scan the QR code.



Millard Public School Bond PASSES WITH 64% VOTER APPROVAL

Voters in the Millard School District approved a \$158 million bond issue in February.

The bond issue aimed at improving safety and security and meeting renovation and maintenance needs for all 35 schools—all without raising the tax rate.

Approximately 64% of votes were cast in support of the bond, according to unofficial results.

Millard Education Association President Stacy Kester-Pearson said the results reinforce to educators that their community stands behind their public schools.

“The passage of this bond was important for the district and to our members. These improvements will directly affect the teaching and learning experiences for all students,” said Kester-Pearson.

The average age of a Millard building is more than 40 years and

regularly scheduled repairs and renovations are needed. All 35 schools will be impacted by the bond funds.

Millard Education Association (MEA) members wrote and mailed hundreds of postcards to get the vote out for the bond election. MEA members, along with the guidance and expertise of NSEA Director of Field Operations Brian Mikkelsen, worked to educate voters about the bond and to ensure that mail ballots are returned before the voting window closed.

NSEA provided matching funds to the MEA to support the pro-bond efforts and also provided yard signs.

“I’m thankful for the efforts of our MEA members and retired members, our community and NSEA in moving this forward,” Kester-Pearson said.

To learn more out how NSEA can assist locals with bond efforts, contact NSEA at 1-800-742-0047.

APRIL

15

**What to Do if You
Receive a RIF Notice:
Call NSEA.**

Notification Deadline: April 15

It happens every year: Some K-12 Nebraska teachers receive Reduction in Force (RIF) notices informing them that their teaching contract may not be renewed for the coming year. The statutory deadline for school districts to hand out RIF notices is April 15.

The best way to deal with a RIF notice is to be prepared. The moment you receive a RIF notice, a countdown begins. To preserve your rights when facing a RIF you must always request a hearing. The hearing must be requested within seven days of receiving the RIF notice (five days for community college faculty). While your situation may never reach an actual hearing, immediately calling NSEA will give you and NSEA’s Advocacy department time to determine what steps are in your best interest.

Email a copy of the notice to your NSEA Organizational Specialist. Once a copy of the RIF notice is received at NSEA headquarters, members will be encouraged to request a hearing to preserve their rights.

If you have questions concerning the RIF process, contact your NSEA Organizational Specialist or NSEA Director of Advocacy Jason Wiese by calling 1-800-742-0047.

Free Simply Swine Fact Sheet!

Attention, middle school and high school educators: Nebraska pig farmers have created a worksheet just for your students.

This four-page worksheet, Simply Swine, gives your students the opportunity to learn fun facts about pigs, identify breeds, be able to distinguish between facts and “hogwash,” learn pork jargon, and identify the section of the pig that gives us our favorite pork products. Plus, they’ll get a recipe for grilling a tasty pork burger.

The Nebraska Pork Producers Association is proud to offer this educational resource for FREE!

Order your Simply Swine worksheets today by scanning this QR code or visiting neporkeducation.com



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.



Turn to the NSEA Children's Fund



Are You Nebraska's Next Teacher of the Year?

Nominations for the 2026 Nebraska Teacher of the Year Will Open Soon

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 the website listed below. 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.



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

The generosity of Children's Fund donors has helped to pay for glasses, warm clothing, medical and dental needs of children; provide assistance to a family whose home and belongings were destroyed by fire; purchase a bus ticket for a child with no other means to get to school; and more.

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



**One degree
can make a
difference.**

Wayne State College offers master's degrees in education (MSE), along with endorsements or certifications that you can add to your existing degree. Our programs are affordable, convenient, and accredited.

ONLINE CLASSES START SUMMER AND FALL 2025

Master of Science in Education: School Administration (Online)

The online master's degree in school administration is designed to prepare you for a career in an administrative position, such as principal, director, department head, or supervisor, and includes an extra focus area in athletic administration. If you already have an MSE, you may be eligible to add this as an endorsement to your existing degree.

Master of Science in Education: Special Education (Online)

Wayne State's online graduate studies in special education with field experience options is designed to help professionals and districts meet the needs of students with exceptionalities and their families. Our special education master's program is designed to help you meet current workforce needs while allowing you to develop culturally sustaining pedagogies and advocate for the needs of diverse learners.

Reading Specialist (PK-12) (Online)

This online reading endorsement can be added to your existing bachelor's or master's degree, or you can apply the credit toward earning a master's degree.

MSE Community of Learning (hybrid, one Saturday per month and online)

Take your teaching to the next level through this unique, community-focused program. Spend five Saturdays per semester collaborating and learning with others while driving your own professional development to directly impact your students. Two-year cohort starting this fall in South Sioux City. For more information: www.wsc.edu/community.

MSE Counseling: Low Residency Format

Complete the foundation courses for your master's degree in counseling in only four semesters! Classes meet two weekends per semester. Summer courses are completely online. Weekend residencies are interactive and involve small and large group processes, discussions, and experiential skills-building activities. For information: 402-375-7389 or visit

www.wsc.edu/mse-counseling.

APPLY TODAY!



Visit www.wsc.edu/mse to learn more about our MSE programs.



402-375-7389



ebs@wsc.edu



Benefits designed with **YOU IN MIND**

Explore exclusive benefits online:

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- Flexible insurance coverage
- Complimentary life insurance
- Easy retirement planning
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And so much more!

Scan below
to learn more





NCA: Community Training Available on Parents Role in Student Athletics

The Nebraska Coaches Association (NCA) and NSEA are dedicated to promoting values like teamwork both in the classroom and on the field. NCA has partnered with Proactive Coaching to offer in-person presentations to parents at schools. The 45-minute session, titled “The Role of Parents in Education-Based Athletics,” has been endorsed by NSEA and is currently used by 23 schools in Nebraska. NCA will also deliver keynote addresses at the Fall Athletic Directors conference and the Spring NRCSA conference.

The program encourages parents to view athletics from their child's perspective and challenges them to align their expectations with those of their student-athlete, avoiding potential conflicts. It emphasizes clear communication between parents, coaches and teachers, promoting responsibility, respect and resilience.

NCA will begin accepting Fall preseason bookings on March 17 for presentations from July 24 - Aug. 31, 2025. To book, contact Darin Bosin at darin@ncacoach.org or call 402-434-5675.

School Retirement Planning Seminars Dates Set

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

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

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

NPERS officials indicate that

according to state law “...leave with pay shall mean a day off paid by the employer and shall not mean vacation, sick, personal or compensatory time.”

The seminars are scheduled at locations across the state. Members must enroll in advance to attend at npers.ne.gov.

If you have questions, contact NPERS Education Services department at npers.seminars@nebraska.gov or call 402-471-9671.

In-Person

Webinar

In-Person Seminars (Location/Dates)	
LINCOLN:	Mar. 6, Mar. 12, Mar. 26, Mar. 27, Apr. 22, May 20, May 21
LA VISTA:	Mar. 11, May 15
GERING:	Apr. 8
NORTH PLATTE:	Apr. 9
COLUMBUS:	Apr. 16
KEARNEY:	Apr. 1, Apr. 2
VALENTINE:	May 6
NORFOLK:	Mar. 18
GRAND ISLAND:	Apr. 3, May 7
O'NEILL:	Mar. 19

1/2 Day
Mar. 25
Apr. 21
May 2
June 4



BlueCross BlueShield Nebraska

Here for *you*,
mind and body

If you feel less than your best, you're not alone. And you don't need to wait until a crisis to get help and start feeling good again.

Your EHA health benefits include mental wellness resources, ready 24/7/365 to help you thrive.

Visit NebraskaBlue.com/EHAPOP to see all your resources or to connect with a nurse.

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.

APRIL

24



SAC Aerospace Museum will Host NSEA-Retired Spring Conference

Join us and explore the history of aerospace

This year, NSEA-Retired members will gather at the renowned Strategic Air Command and Aerospace Museum in Ashland for the Spring Conference. The museum provides a fascinating and immersive experience, preserving and showcasing a collection of historic aircraft, missiles and space vehicles. NSEA-Retired members will be able to explore the history of aerospace technology and its significant role in both military and space exploration.

This year's NSEA-Retired Spring Conference is scheduled for April 24. The event is free for all NSEA-Retired members, and guests are welcome to attend for just \$10. More information and registration coming soon!

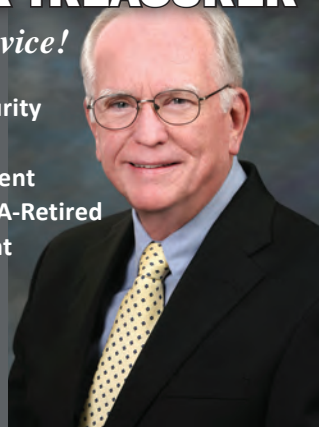
Don't miss out on the opportunity to connect with fellow retirees, learn from insightful speakers and immerse yourself in the history and innovation showcased at the SAC Museum. To register, visit nsea.org/retired under Calendars, Events & Registrations.

VOTE FOR ROGER REA FOR TREASURER

A record of advocacy, leadership, and service!

- Led coalition that eliminated taxation of Social Security
- Trustee for NPERS and OSERS Retirement Systems
- Chair of oversight for Educators' Medicare Supplement
- Served as Bookkeeper and Newsletter Editor for OEA-Retired
- Served as NSEA-Retired President and Vice President

I ask for your vote for NSEA-Retired Treasurer, NSEA Delegate Assembly, and NEA Representative Assembly.



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.



Elect Susan Kalina

**NSEA-Retired Secretary
RA and DA Delegate**

Return Your Ballots by March 19

Make your voice heard—vote today to help shape the future of NSEA-Retired!



NSEA-Retired members are encouraged to participate in the upcoming election by submitting their mail-in ballots before the deadline on March 19. This election is a vital opportunity for retired educators to have their voices heard and influence the future direction of the organization.

Mail-in ballots have already been distributed to members. The cover letter has the incorrect date. Ballots must be postmarked by March 19 to be considered valid. Members who have not received their ballots or need assistance with the voting process are encouraged to contact Kristen Sedlacek, Matt Pittman or Andrea Longoria at 800-742-0047.

The results of this election will play a significant role in shaping policies and supporting ongoing efforts to improve conditions for both retired and active educators.



Re-Elect Arlene Rea

Please Vote to re-elect Arlene Rea as NSEA-Retired Treasurer

Retired Board of Directors

- Secretary (3-year term)
- Treasurer (3-year term)
- Metro District (3-year term)
- Panhandle District (3-year term)
- Tri-Valley District (3-year term)

Delegate Assembly

- Capitol District: 4 delegates
- Elkhorn District: 2 delegates
- Metro District: 5 delegates
- Panhandle District: 1 delegate
- Sandhills District: 1 delegate
- Tri-Valley District: 3 delegates
- At Large: 2 delegates

Representative Assembly

- Metro and Capitol Districts: 1 delegate
- Other Districts and Out-of-State: 1 delegate
- At Large: 3 delegates



Vote Lisa Fricke

It would be an honor to represent you as an NSEA-Retired Delegate at Delegate Assembly (Metro & At-Large) and NEA Representative Assembly.

- Active NSEA member since 1976
- Past NE State Board of Education member
- Served on Elkhorn & Tri-Valley Boards
- Campaigned for candidates & legislation
- Longtime DA Attendee
- Presented a resolution that passed at RA
- NASBE policy chair
- Teacher mentor for NSEA
- Intergenerational Mentoring Program
- Government Relations Chair
- Local President



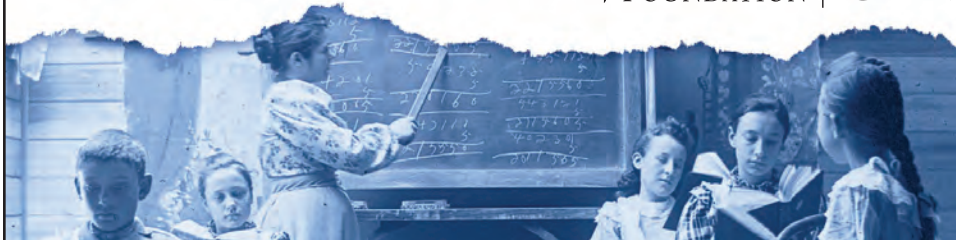
HONOR A LEGACY. INSPIRE THE FUTURE.

Celebrate the One Room Teacher in Your Life

Memorialize a beloved teacher or student on the University of Nebraska's Wall of Honor. Your nomination will honor a loved one and will also fund scholarships for future teachers. Over 70 students have already benefited from the One Room, One Teacher program.

Nominations can be submitted at nufoundation.org/OneRoomOneTeacher. Nominations are due **May 15, 2025**. Honorees will be recognized during UNK's Homecoming in October 2025. Attendance is not required.

Create a lasting legacy today!



Speaking of Education

“Human kindness has never weakened the stamina or softened the fiber of a free people. A nation does not have to be cruel to be tough.”

— Franklin D. Roosevelt

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



NSEA Summer Conference Announced

Save the Date: July 15-16

Plans are already underway for the highly anticipated 2025 NSEA Summer Conference, set to take place on July 15-16 at Kearney High School. The conference will offer a variety of sessions across four key areas, providing valuable opportunities for members to engage in training and discussions. These areas include local association leader training, collective

bargaining, social and racial justice and educator professional development. Each of these sessions is designed to address crucial components that contribute to the strength, growth and well-being of educators, as well as the success and development of their students. Registration details, along with additional information about the conference, will be made available as the event date approaches.

Avoid the Rush: Apply for Certificate Renewal in Advance



Educators who need to renew their certificate in 2025 may want to complete their application early to avoid processing delays with the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE).

Each year, the NDE sends certificate renewal reminders to thousands of Nebraska educators. The teaching

certificate is valid for teaching in all Nebraska school systems and must be renewed every five years. Certificates expire on Aug. 31 each year. Backlogs at the department in recent years have sent members to NSEA for help to get answers about the process. This year, the department is encouraging certificated teachers who will need to renew in 2025 to apply between the

months of January and March.

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.