

The VOICE

Nebraska State Education Association • May 2020



ELECT EDUCATORS!

COVID 19 UPDATE

DA GOES VIRTUAL

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35 Percent Petition Folds; Property Tax Relief Unlikely

Newspaper Says LB1106 — Changes to State Aid and Property Tax — is ‘Effectively Dead’

The Nebraska Legislature has not met since mid-March, and no date has been set to reconvene in order to finish the session’s deliberations and action.

That does not mean, however, that the coronavirus pandemic has caused all to go quiet on the political front.

For instance, backers of a controversial statewide petition drive aimed at slicing property taxes by 35 percent “formally suspended” the campaign in April. Supporters cite the pandemic and resulting limited personal contact for collection of signatures as the reason for the campaign’s derailment.

NSEA and other education organizations, along with the governor and several state senators, said the petition plan would slash property taxes by 35 percent, with no method to replace the resulting loss of an estimated \$1.5 billion in local government revenues. The plan would have crippled school district budgets.

Meanwhile, the Legislature went into hibernation with Sen. Lou Ann Linehan’s flawed LB1106 still on the docket. LB1106 proposed shifting \$130 million in state monies to schools in FY2020-21 to reduce property taxes. NSEA and most other education organizations oppose LB1106 because it would further constrict state-imposed budget lids and levies for school districts. It would also alter the state aid formula and rely on projected increases in state revenue growth — increases that have all but evaporated given the eco-

nomie impact of the pandemic — to pay for short-term property tax reduction.

A Lincoln Journal Star editorial urged state senators to scrap LB1106 and use the months before the 2021 session to take a “hard look” at property taxes.

The Journal Star wrote “with the unprecedented instant drop in economic activity and the accompanying record increase in unemployment filings triggered by the virus, state tax receipts will be significantly lower than anticipated for at least three months and, realistically, far more.

“Combine that fiscal reality with the political reality surrounding the bill and it is hard to find a reason why the Legislature should spend any more time debating an effectively dead proposal” (emphasis added).

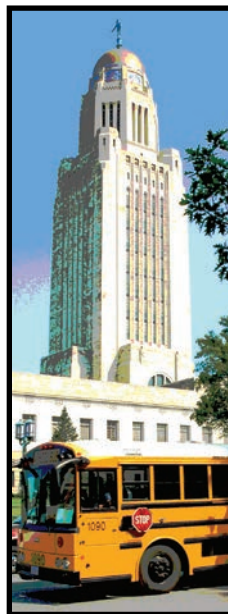
Instead, editors said senators should spend time between sessions reviewing all tax policy and crafting a bill from all parties that “addresses property tax relief by rebalancing property taxes with sales and income taxes.”

Also left unresolved was the fate of Sen. Wendy DeBoer’s LB1073 and LB1023, property tax relief bills favored by NSEA.

Appropriations Committee Chair Sen. John Stinner said COVID-19 erased property tax relief opportunities for the year.

He estimates that a 10 percent drop in tax revenues would eliminate \$500 million in state revenues — the amount state leaders hoped to have available for property tax relief and other legislation.

University of Nebraska System officials said NU will also feel financial shortages. NU President Ted Carter said a shortfall of \$50 million is expected in the current budget year, with more “economic pain” to continue into the 2020-21 school year.



**Nebraska
Legislature ‘20**

Would You Like to Write for The Voice?

Would you like to write an item for *The Voice*? Would you like to write an opinion column or an article on what is working in your classroom?

NSEA would like to begin a regular page for members, entitled Voice from the 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: In the face of the pandemic, with schools closed and social gatherings limited to 10 or fewer, Nebraska’s May 12 Primary Election will go forward, with many voters casting ballots by mail. This round of voting includes many educators on the ballot for Legislature and the State Board of Education. Learn more starting on Page 13.

Hope. It is for Everyone.



**NSEA
President
Jenni Benson**

“

*Every soul, every
person needs
hope.*

*In this moment,
we need hope
more than ever.*

”

When I speak to outside groups and organizations about our state's great system of public schools, I often play on Nebraska's new tongue-in-cheek tourism slogan, "Nebraska. Honestly, It's Not for Everyone."

I tell those groups, with emphasis, that "Nebraska. It *Is* for Children and It *Is* for Public Education." These last two months dealing with the pandemic, school closures and uncertainty has only confirmed that truth. Schools and school staff are the lifeblood of communities across Nebraska.

As we navigate the vagaries of this pandemic, we must maintain hope. Or, to paraphrase the Nebraska catchphrase once again, "Hope. It *Is* for Everyone." That's a basic fact of life. Every soul, every person needs hope. In this moment, we need hope more than ever.

Hope Often Lies in Our Actions

As I listen to the stories of teachers, support professionals, administrators and school boards going above and beyond to provide their students and families with the tools, the learning and in many cases, the food they need to survive this situation, I am filled with a great deal of hope.

Hope often lies in the actions we take. NSEA moved into action on Day One. In truth, it might be a more truthful characterization to say that we moved into action on Day Zero. NSEA Executive Director Maddie Fennell began planning with staff and leaders several weeks before the pandemic was known to have crossed our borders and make itself known in Nebraska. We had meetings and planning sessions with staff and leaders across the state and nation. Today, we continue to meet – now in a socially distanced

manner – with dozens of stakeholder groups to ensure our children and our members are getting the resources they need.

Our teachers, professors, college students, counselors, administrators, para-professionals, bus drivers, and more have sprung into action in every corner of the state. They are stepping up to serve through digital means where possible, in person on the front lines, where necessary. They advocate for those who are not being served equitably.

The NSEA Children's Fund Board of Directors invested heavily and voted to give \$25,000

in funding to the Food Bank for the Heartland, which serves all 93 Nebraska counties. The NSEA-Retired board followed suit and will give \$10,000 to that same food bank.

All of these actions continue to fill me with Hope.

'Never Lose Infinite Hope'

I know some may experience feelings of hopelessness. There are children and families suffering, the sorely needed aid is not reaching everyone in need. In response to that, I would suggest that you do not give up hope, that you seek and help those in

need, and that you keep this quote from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in mind: "We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope."

I find hope in inspirational stories of service, in music and humor, too. We need to practice self-care as well. Singing and laughing help me every day. Connecting with family and friends raises spirits and sustains a sense of hope.

Finally, don't forget to give yourself some grace. I want you to know that I believe in you. NSEA is here for you. Never hesitate to reach out. Through hope and action, we will endure together.



One Bright Moment: Tiffany and Mike Failla, along with daughter Kora, teased Columbian Elementary School teachers in Omaha as the teachers drove through the school neighborhood in early April. The Failla's son, Kroy, wrote a more sentimental message on the driveway in chalk, 'Aw...man, no school!' The photo was snapped by OEA member and Columbian teacher Connie Tefft.

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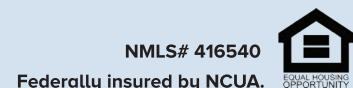
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NSEA University will be Virtual

Association Will Piggyback on National Network of State Teachers of the Year Meeting

Finalization of Plans Now Underway; Watch NSEA Website for Details

Perhaps there is no more valuable skill in the teaching profession than flexibility.

And in this era of dealing with the coronavirus pandemic, flexibility has certainly been a handy skill. Flexibility will be needed again by those Association members who had planned to attend NSEA's second NSEA University, scheduled for mid-July. That conference, along with the Leadership Institute that parallels NSEA U, has been moved to the first full week in July.

Rather than an in-person conference at the Innovation Campus at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the conference will be virtual, and will piggyback on the July 8-10 National Teacher Leadership Conference sponsored by the National Network of State Teachers of the Year.

A pre-session, for NSEA members only, will take place on Tuesday, July 7.

"We had a wonderfully successful NSEA University last year, and we never envisioned this scenario when we began planning for the 2020 edition," said NSEA President Jenni Benson. "But with social distancing and ongoing concerns, we



believe this will be the best way we can provide high-quality professional development to our members."

At least some of the programming for NSEA U will remain intact. Keynote speakers Ted Dintersmith and Rodney Robinson were also on the agenda for the NNSTOY conference. NSEA will seek to have Lincoln's Dr. JoAnne Owens-Nauslar keynote at the pre-session, schedule permitting.

NSEA is working with NNSTOY regarding registration. Members are urged to check the NSEA website for updates and details and should **not** register via the NNSTOY website right now.

Members are urged to check the NSEA website for updates and details. That website is at:

www.nsea.org

The 2020 National Teacher Leadership Conference will connect you with change-makers that are transforming education. Educators and school leaders from across the globe will unite to collaborate on three promising practices:

- Diversity is the norm, equity is the way.
- Unleashing leadership.
- Learner-centered instructional practices.

Calling All NSEA Members: Complete the Census

Census Numbers will Affect Federal Funding to State's Schools

NSEA leaders are working to make sure all Association members, students and communities are fully and properly counted in the U.S. Census, the federal government's head count of U.S. households that occurs every 10 years.

The information collected by the Census is vitally important to the allocation of federal education funding to states and localities, said NSEA President Jenni Benson.

"Census data is the foundation for allocation of billions of dollars of federal education aid to states and localities using formulas that factor in population and poverty levels," said Benson. "An accurate

census is key to schools getting the funding they need to serve every child who walks through their doors."

More than \$800 billion in federal education funding is based largely on census data, according to the NEA.

As of mid-April, 57 percent of Nebraskans had completed the census, one of the top response rates in the nation and matching Iowa as the highest among contiguous states. Find out more about the U.S. Census through the NEA website at:

nea.org/census

By now households should have received invitations in the mail to fill out the Census online (2020census.gov). Mailings will continue during the months of April and May, with door knocking scheduled to run May to August.

Blomstedt Seeks Teacher Advice

Nebraska Education Commissioner Matt Blomstedt will develop an Advisory Panel of Teachers to assist him in gaining insight into and understanding of the issues that affect educators.

The panel will be modeled after the Advisory Panel of Superintendents that currently advises the commissioner.

How often and in what format the panel meets will be up to Blomstedt. He is seeking teachers to represent each of the eight State Board of Education Districts across the state. Find the eight district boundaries here:

www.education.ne.gov/stateboard/members/

Educators interested in participating in these discussions with the commissioner should apply by Friday, May 15:

www.nsea.org/NDEPanel

Grants Respond to COVID-19 Needs

In response to educators' emerging needs, addressing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on teaching and learning, the NEA Foundation is offering three new grant opportunities.

The purpose of the NEA Foundation's Rapid Response Funding is to support educator-led initiatives to adapt to the unique circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic during the summer months of 2020. Among other things, the grants may be used to address the social and emotional needs of educators, students, and students' families; to learn new pedagogy and/or adapt curricula to support distance/virtual learning and instruction; and address students' summer learning loss.

To learn more, go to the NEA Foundation website at:

www.neafoundation.org



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NSEA Leads with Teacher TV

Facebook Live Events Provide Answers; Anthone Gives Hope of Vaccine Advances

The effect of the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic in Nebraska was so great that it caused the Omaha Public Schools, and perhaps other school districts, to abandon a longtime social norm.

The pandemic caused OPS to hire – Gasp! – married women to fill teaching vacancies.

The Spanish flu made its first known appearance in Nebraska in early October 1918 (see related story). The January 1919 edition of *The Nebraska Teacher*, the predecessor to *The Voice*, included this news report:

“So great is the need of teachers in the public schools of Omaha the board at its meeting on October 7 lifted the ban on married women. This measure was decided on because of the growing shortage of teachers and the continued resignations and requests of leaves of absence. The conditions reported at Omaha are repeated in every town and community in the state.”

Now, 101 years later, the coronavirus is causing changes to social norms. Shaking of hands as a greeting has all but disappeared. Facemasks are routine. On-line learning is the rule. Yet whatever the method, one societal norm must continue to be met: children must be taught.

NSEA’s Teacher TV

To that end, NSEA has led by offering televised learning five days a week since early April. Aired on the News Channel Nebraska network to households across the state, the NSEA Teacher TV programming provides elementary lessons in the morning, and secondary classes in the afternoon.

The response to the NSEA coursework has been remarkable. News Channel Nebraska said more than 72,000 households had watched the programming on cable, and another 12,000 were watching on



Screen Quartet: NSEA’s Facebook Live event on Sunday, April 19, featured, clockwise from top left, Commissioner of Education Dr. Matt Blomstedt, NSEA Executive Director Maddie Fennell, NSEA President Jenni Benson, and Nebraska Chief Medical Officer Dr. Gary Anthone.

antenna television. Total estimated viewership was at 145,000 viewers.

“We’ve had a lot of members help make this work,” said NSEA President Jenni Benson, who provided her own session of programming. “It has been phenomenal.”

OPS teacher Mahala Jankowski’s session for elementary students on Dealing with Fear drew praise from a Nebraska City mother. Jess Womochil, with children ages 5 and 8, posted this comment on NSEA’s Facebook Inbox:

“...my kiddos love Mahala Jankowski’s videos. They get so excited and inspired. We have to frequently pause because they want to work out their own role plays in real time. The strategies

she provides are things we value in our own home.”

Facebook Events Do Well

With all the success of NSEA Teacher TV, the Association’s series of Sunday evening Facebook Live events has performed just as well in offering vital information to educators and the public.

On March 15, in the very early stages of the pandemic’s reach into Nebraska, NSEA Executive Director Maddie Fennell hosted a Facebook Live event from NSEA Headquarters. Fennell spoke about what might come as a result of the coronavirus, while NSEA President Jenni Benson – at home with the flu – watched and answered questions in the Facebook

Live chat feature. The event drew a large audience. More than 28,000 people engaged in the event and nearly 73,000 were reached, according to Facebook statistics.

Subsequent Facebook Live events also drew broad audiences. Fennell and Commissioner of Education Dr. Matt Blomstedt reached 31,000 people. Fennell and Nebraska Association of School Board Executive Director John Spatz reached 18,000. Benson and Lincoln Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Steve Joel reached 15,000.

An April 19 Facebook Live with Nebraska’s Chief Medi-

NEAMB Assistance

There might never be a better time to reassess your financial stability or to seek financial assistance, especially if you have been affected by layoff or illness by the COVID-19 pandemic.

NEA Member Benefits has arranged that assistance. From student loan payment reduction, to personal loans, to retirement concerns, NEA’s website offers programs for educators at all levels and career stages. Find more at:

neamb.com/pages/coronavirus-assistance

Stay Up-to-Date

For the most current details on COVID-19 pandemic and education, go to:

www.nsea.org

cal Officer, Dr. Gary Anthone, along with Blomstedt, reached nearly 13,000 people.

"These guests have allowed us to present very timely and important information about testing, school closures, summer school and the virus itself," said Benson. "The cooperation and collaboration during this pandemic has been outstanding – and that includes the work of our members."

The Facebook Live events also helped to grow NSEA's Facebook presence. On March 1, the NSEA Facebook page had 4,500 "likes." By mid-April, that number had nearly doubled to nearly 8,300.

Like the Manhattan Project

On the April 19 Facebook Live event, Blomstedt spoke about how school might look different when the 2020-21 school year convenes. Anthone gave assurances that progress is being made on the medical front. He is confident that there will be a vaccine, within a year, and perhaps even yet this year.

"I don't think they've worked on anything harder than getting this vaccine since the Manhattan Project back in World War II," said Anthone. "It's something we'll develop. America is such a great country and it's so innovative, we'll probably have that by six months, at least by next year."

He said Nebraska's 19 local public health districts were key in slowing the virus surge. Each district has a director, a staff of epidemiologists and nurses, and they took the lead in fighting the virus.

"Our local public health departments did a great job of doing these contact tracings, getting those patients quarantined,

1918 Flu Killed Many, NSEA Meeting

According to History Nebraska, formerly the Nebraska State Historical Society, the Spanish flu pandemic hit Nebraska in October 1918. Two deaths were reported in Red Cloud on October 2. Omaha reported a case on Oct. 3, Scottsbluff on Oct. 15.

The effects rippled through the state for months, closed schools and caused the Nebraska State Teachers Association, NSEA's predecessor, to move the Association's annual meeting to the day after Christmas. The meeting was later cancelled altogether.

By Oct. 7, a state order closed all "schools, churches, places of entertainment or public congregation, pool halls and other places of amusement."

The order on public gatherings was lifted on Nov. 1, and on Nov. 11 the armistice ended World War I. Victory celebrations were subdued and limited. The pandemic continued, and some communities continued to bar public meetings. The University of Nebraska did not resume classes until after Thanksgiving.

History Nebraska said the holiday was largely bare of celebration, with no events or entertainment and businesses suffering severe losses. At Gering, police arrested Santa and a department store manager – shocking hundreds of kids – for violating a local ban on gatherings.

According to a blurb in the NSTA magazine, *The Nebraska Teacher* (predecessor to *The Voice*), there were 125,000 cases of the Spanish flu reported in Nebraska by December 15. History Nebraska says Omaha reported 974 deaths by December 31, and as many as 7,500 Nebraskans may have died, though the state's reporting was called "woefully incomplete."

The *Nebraska Teacher* magazine also reported that a Dec. 17, 1918, meeting of state and county officials resulted in eight recommendations for dealing with the influenza. One recommendation allowed "Medical inspections in schools, and where this is not possible, that the teachers be instructed to send home any child showing signs of illness."

getting them tested, and then getting them isolated," he said.

It also helps that Nebraskans are usually compliant, said Anthone. "They've really done well about social distancing."

No Crystal Ball

Blomstedt said he did not believe summer school would open in June, unless digitally and remotely. July at this point is more difficult to predict and is probably a "wait and see" situation. The fall semester prognosis is even foggy.

"I don't have a crystal ball, but I do think we've got to plan for a lot of different scenarios and try to put as many kinds of safety nets in place as possible so we

can be ready to serve students this fall," said Blomstedt.

"The reality is that it's not going to be normal for a while," he said.

RA Goes Virtual

Other outcomes from the pandemic:

- The NSEA Children's Fund Board of Directors voted to give \$25,000 to the Food Bank for the Heartland.

- The NSEA-Retired Board of Directors voted to give \$10,000 to the Food Bank for the Heartland.

- The NEA Board of Directors voted in April to hold the annual Representative Assembly – complete with 7,000 attendees – via virtual teleconferencing.

Blue Cross, Horace Mann Adapt to Help Members

Blue Cross Blue Shield Opens Prescription Access

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska has increased access to prescriptions by waiving early refill limits on 30-day prescription maintenance medications (according to the terms of your plan). The company encourages use of the plan's 90-day mail order benefit.

Patients will not be liable for additional charges that stem from obtaining a non-preferred medication if preferred medications are not available due to shortage or access issues. Existing prior authorizations on prescription drugs due to expire are automatically extended until May 31. New prescriptions requiring prior authorizations continue to follow the normal process.

BCBS also alerted members that recent federal legislation allows individuals to use HSA/FSA funds for over-the-counter medical products without a prescription.

Effective March 16, telehealth visits with a network provider or Amwell will be paid at no cost share to the plan member.

Horace Mann Opens Teacher Appreciation Giveback

Like many educators, the Horace Mann Company's response

to COVID-19 is evolving. The company has announced the Teacher Appreciation Giveback Program, designed to assist the educators the company serves.

The program's enhancements during COVID-19 include:

- Providing all auto customers a 15 percent credit on two months of premiums (This is automatic; customers don't need to take action. Timing and the manner in which credit will be issued are subject to regulatory approval.).

- A grace period on auto, property, supplemental and life policies for those unable to make payments, through June.

- Extending personal auto coverage to cover those collecting a fee to deliver food, medicine and essential goods.

- Continuing to provide free Identity Fraud Advocacy Services through their Educator Advantage Program for home, condo and renter educator customers.

Enhanced support for educators and employees include:

- Horace Mann donated \$100,000 to support the DonorsChoose "Keep Kids Learning" fund.

- Providing a free, online teaching resource hub. Visit Horace Mann online for more details.

Virtual Success for Assembly

Benson, Freye Earn Second Terms, OEA's Miller Elected as Vice President

To say that NSEA's annual Delegate Assembly was a "virtual success" this year is an understatement.

First, the assembly convened at 9 a.m. on Saturday, April 25, with 312 participants, including delegates, Association staff, and guests from Ohio, Kentucky and Georgia.

The assembly was also the Association's first conducted virtually — all parties participated using the Zoom video conference technology — with virtually no glitches. NSEA's effort was monitored by leaders from those three states as they considered using the NSEA model for their annual meetings during the coronavirus pandemic.

From start to finish, the assembly was timed at just more than 4.5 hours — and that was without the usual Friday night session.

"Our executive team was pleased with how smoothly the virtual meeting worked," said NSEA President Jenni Benson. "I heard delegates were pleased as well."

NSEA Officers Elected

Benson was elected by acclamation to a second three-year term as president. Lincoln teacher Linda Freye was unopposed and will serve a second three-year term on the NEA Board of Directors.

Three members sought the vice presidency being vacated by Millard Education Association President Paul Schulte, who did not seek a second term. In a first round, Papillion-LaVista Education Association's Jordan Koch was first, Omaha Education Association President Robert Miller was second, and Omaha Education Association activist Edward Ventura Jr. was third. No candidate received a majority, and a runoff between Koch and Miller was held, with Miller edging Koch.

Schools to the Fore

State Sen. Kate Bolz, a candidate for Nebraska's First Congressional District seat in the House of Representatives, was the guest speaker. Bolz pledged to fight for affordable health care and prescriptions, as she has done in the Legislature for eight years. She also promised to put schools to the fore in the federal response to the pandemic.

"We should have an infrastructure bill in front of Congress and schools should be a part of that plan," she said. "The only reason we don't is because of a lack of political will. I think I have proven myself in that regard."

This is the third time Bolz has earned NSEA's nod as a supporter of public schools. Her legislative work over the last eight years has proven reliable (see page 16). NSEA Executive Director Maddie Fennell reiterated a phrase she has used often to describe the recommendation process: "We do not care whether you have an 'R' or a 'D' behind your name, as long as you have kids and education in your heart."

'Unprecedented Participation'

Benson said the Association experienced "unprecedented participation by members in governance and political activities this year. I am grateful for that effort."

Jason Hayes gave delegates an update on legislative issues. He said the post-coronavirus landscape may cause major changes to what was



Benson, Times Three: NSEA President Jenni Benson leads the NSEA's first virtual Delegate Assembly, seen twice via Vice President Paul Schulte's computer screens.

anticipated before the Legislature adjourned. Hayes, NSEA's director of Public Policy and Legislative Research, said Moody Analytics projects a state revenue shortfall of \$470 million to \$1 billion.

Hayes noted that NSEA had "resounding success" with LB1186, advanced to second reading on a 45-0 vote. The bill would provide up to seven days paid leave for educators injured in an on-duty assault. It will be ready for final action when the Legislature reconvenes.

Blomstedt Honored

Benson also announced annual award winners. Honorees are to be feted in person later. They include Commissioner of Education Dr. Matt Blomstedt as the Friend of Education, and Lincoln teacher Jen Yoder as the Teaching Excellence Award recipient.

The Rookie of the Year honor went to Palmer's Dawn Tedmon. The Champion of Education honoree was cartoonist Paul Fell. Lincoln's Mindy Diller earned the Community Service Award and Palmer's Judy Bennett was the Education Support Professional of the Year.

The Inclusive Communities organization in Omaha received the Great Plains Milestone Award. The Omaha Education Association was cited for raising more than \$10,000 for the Children's Fund. The Palmyra Education Association was cited for raising more than \$6,000.

The NSEA Metro District was cited for membership gains.

Budget Report, Dues Set

Nearly 70 members attended the virtual budget hearing on Friday night, a record number in recent years. On Saturday, delegates set the dues for 2020-21 at \$416, a \$3 or 0.72 percent increase, the eighth time in nine years that the increase was 1.75 percent or less.



Benson



Miller



Freye

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School Safety Committee Required

State Statute Sets Requirement, Mandates Employees on Committee

NSEA Provides Sample Contract Language

The question popped up in the chat box on one of NSEA's Facebook Live events in March, where the coronavirus pandemic was the main topic of discussion.

What if our school district officials are telling us that they don't have a safety plan?

The answer is simple: leadership in that school district had best start organizing a Safety Committee and put "Development of Safety Plan" at the top of the agenda. State statute clearly requires school districts to form and maintain a Safety Committee. Common sense says a safety plan for a variety of situations would make sense. Now, you can add "pandemic" to the list of those situations.

"Most school districts have plans for building lockdowns, for snow days, for tornados," said NSEA Collective Bargaining Specialist Randy Gordon. "The experiences we have all endured this spring will give every district the background to put together at least a foundational plan for dealing with epidemics and pandemics in the future."

'Obligated to Negotiate'

State statute 48:443 says that "every public and private employer in Nebraska" that "has one or more employees and is subject to collective bargaining obligations or is obligated to negotiate with employees who are in a bargaining unit shall have at least one safety committee."

The statute also mandates that the establishment of the committee "shall be accomplished through the collective bargaining process." NSEA's sample contract includes language for establishment of a school district Safety Committee, said Gordon.

"The language crafted by NSEA regarding safety committees is a place to start at the negotiations table," said Gordon. "If your negotiated contract does not already have the language, it would be a good idea to put that on the 'to do' list for the next round of negotiations this fall."

State statute also requires half of the members on the safety committee to be employees.

The overall language in the statute is ideal, said Gordon. It allows that the employer retains full authority to manage worksites; provides that the committee meet at least twice a year, or in a reasonable timely manner in response to unresolved employee complaints; and requires that the names of committee members be made available to employees. It also allows that employees be allowed to seek membership on the safety committee without fear of penalty or reprisal.

'Safe Workplace is an Employee Right'

Nebraska Department of Education rules also address the Safety Commit-

tee issue, said Gordon, but are less specific. Found in Section 011.01C of the NDE's Regulations and Procedures for the Accreditation of Schools, is language that says "each school system has a school safety and security committee which includes representatives of faculty, parents and the community." The language calls for "at least" an annual meeting, and an annual review of the safety and security plan by one or more persons not on the committee and not employed by the district.

"The bottom line is that a safe workplace is your right as an employee. Remind your employer that a safe workplace for teachers is also a safe place of learning for students," said Gordon.

"We need to hold employers accountable for providing a safe working environment and a safe learning environment for students," he said.

The committee could address a myriad of issues. For instance, if a student chokes a teacher or other students on a regular basis, with no consequences that halt the action, the issue could be addressed through the committee.

"That's an issue that could be run through the committee to get the ball rolling to resolution," said Gordon.

Should local associations press the school district administration to form a committee if there is none, or to activate a committee if the district's committee is dormant?

"Absolutely. The statute says 'shall have' a committee," he said.

For more information, contact your NSEA organization specialist at 1-800-742-0047.

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Shaking My Tail Feathers and Finding Happiness



**Teacher
Laura Enos**

“
I’ve reached the
‘middle years’
of my career
to find I’m no
longer a young,
new member of
the profession,
but rather that
I’ve progressed
to this strange
phase where I’m
wondering where
exactly I fit.

”

Laura Enos has taught for 17 years in Nebraska public schools, in Class A, C and D schools. Today she teaches high school English. She holds a bachelor’s degree in English and speech secondary education from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln; a master’s in reading speciality pre-K-12 from the University of Nebraska-Omaha; and a master’s in pre-K-12 principalship from the University of Nebraska-Kearney. She teaches at Gretna.

By Laura Enos

I remember clearly. I was behind the bleachers with zero visibility. I could see only a tiny portion of my legs, and they were losing circulation in thick yellow tights.

Queen’s “Another One Bites the Dust” began to blast and crackle over the gymnasium’s loudspeaker. That was my cue. I strutted out in front of a crowd of students as the school mascot, performing every wedding reception dance move I could recall, all incognito, well-disguised in a brand-new bald eagle costume.

I was smiling as I perspired profusely inside all that polyester. But I felt carefree, shaking my tail feather. I was in Year Two of my teaching career, an energetic and excited 24-year-old, fulfilling a bucket list item that dated back to my adolescence.

Fast forward 12 years to another pep rally. I had been asked, and reluctantly agreed, to join a teacher versus student tug-of-war. Rather than laugh about how entertaining this would be, I walked up to the rope with my inner monologue from my soaring eagle days changing from “I’m having so much fun!” to, “Okay, Laura, just don’t blow your knees out.”

No More Embarrassment

This school year was the first time I truly stopped to count the exact number of years I’ve been a teacher. I realized I have arrived at Year 17. I’ve reached the “middle years” of my career to find I’m no longer a young, new member of the profession, but rather that I’ve progressed to this strange phase where I’m wondering where exactly I fit.

There are always inspirational books for teaching newbies. Where are motivational materials for the middle-aged professionals who no longer get mistaken as a student on field trips, yet who still want to be just as excited to come to work? They deserve just as much joy as when they were 17 years younger (and without periodic hip pain from unknown sources).

Hear this, my middle-aged peers: We’re invested and we aren’t going anywhere. But the days of internal and external eye rolls, of growing levels of sarcasm, of a “slightly” more jaded mindset, have likely arrived for most of us.

The beauty of being in this limbo-like period is that nothing really embarrasses me anymore. I do not see it as a sign of weakness or feel the slightest bit of self-consciousness to admit (in a statewide magazine, no less) that not every year has been easy. Years Eight and Sixteen of my career were trying times with tough kids

I struggled to reach. I hope to break the pattern so Year Twenty-four becomes my best yet. I love this profession and I couldn’t imagine doing anything else.

But what have I found to be the secret cure that keeps me from walking away? Simply this: Get involved in the existing fun of your job. If there is no such fun, create your own “comfortable fun.”

Craziness, Anxiety

There will be a time when you no longer want to risk injury as a part of the intramural dodgeball competition.

Perhaps you’re not extroverted enough to be drawn into a *Jackson 5* look-alike outfit, with four of your peers and choreographed moves to the tune of “A-B-C” for a motivational assembly. I have clear memories of hysterical laughter as we waited backstage, trapped in the fumes of the spray paint I used to cover the only fake hair coverage I could find for the occasion (red clown wigs) complete with thrift store blue corduroy bell bottoms and a “pleather” jacket.

Most such “fun” always comes from acting like a fool in front of the student body. Such craziness can bring more anxiety and embarrassment than happiness to your psyche.

I have great memories of laughing so hard my stomach and cheeks hurt from team or department meetings, as we shared a funny story from that day or week. One year, my middle school team collected emailed “Kids-Say-the-Darndest-Things” stories. The middle school material was endless, and it only took two minutes to compose and send a contribution. A colleague would compile those contributions into a single document and read a couple out loud to our group each week. We laughed. All. The. Time.

A memorable story from that ritual was of a seventh grade girl who had earlier been at the park with her family. She repeatedly asked her teacher, “What are those two birds DOING?” My colleague maintained a blank, innocent shoulder-shrug response, suggesting the girl ask her parents that question after school.

Inject More Fun

At this point, you’ve been in your building, district, or profession long enough that it’s time to be that colleague-your-peers-can-count-on to lead in maintaining a positive environment. There are years where I am the Queen of Assisting with Staff Morale by redecorating the staff lounge or organizing a potluck – honestly, this is so easy: send a potluck email, teachers will cook, come and eat. There were also years I let get away from me and I was not a sunshine-stand-out. It was no coincidence that those were years mentioned earlier during which my mood wasn’t stellar.

The bottom line is this: as this school year ends in a quite unexpected manner, contemplate in coming summer months how you might inject more fun in your work environment next year. Fun days have been days where it didn’t feel like “work” and I was able to witness the power of play — without ever pulling a muscle.

Election Offers Sense of Normalcy

Primary is Chance to Support Candidates Who Believe in Public Education

It's an often-ignored or little-known fact that the short session of the Nebraska Legislature occurs in even-numbered years for a reason: to allow incumbent senators at least a few open weeks to campaign for re-election before the May Primary Election.

This year, the Legislature left early, closing operations in March in the face of the global coronavirus pandemic, with the hope of reconvening to finish vital business later this year.

The pandemic also changed campaigning and, ultimately, voting. Candidates turned largely to phone calls, social media and mailers rather than face-to-face campaigning. And for the first time, every Nebraskan can vote by mail, thanks to the governor's call to send vote-by-mail requests to every registered voter not already on the vote-by-mail list (Note: your ballot

must be received in your county election office by 8 p.m. on election day, Tuesday, May 12).

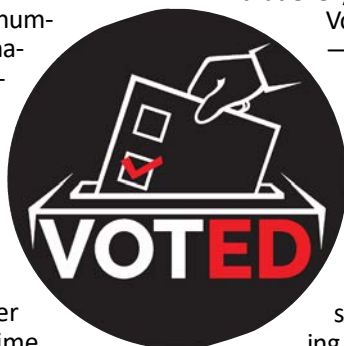
What does all this upset of the usual routine mean? It means that **every single ballot returned and counted will matter.**

Voting in the May 12 Primary — in person or by mail — can also help to maintain a sense of normalcy.

As has long been tradition, bipartisan teams of NSEA members from every legislative district interviewed willing candidates and made recommendations based *solely* on each candidate's view on education issues. A candidate's stance on federal defense spending or flood management does not enter into consideration. **It's about education.**

What *does* count is a candidate's view on class size, early childhood education, adequate state funding for K-12 and post-secondary education

So with the May 12 Primary Election just ahead, please review these NSEA-recommended candidates, and remember to vote for public education!



Nebraska Legislature

Janet Palmtag, District 1

Otoe, Johnson, Nemaha, Pawnee, Richardson counties

"My first priority will be to fully fund the state aid to education formula."

That is Janet Palmtag's response to the first question on NSEA's candidate questionnaire, "If elected, what is your primary initiative to ensure that all Nebraska students have access to a well-funded, quality public school?"

Palmtag said higher teacher pay is key to attracting and retaining high-quality teachers. She supports collective bargaining and due process; opposes charter schools; and would seek a seat on the Education Committee.

NSEA members from Nebraska City, Syracuse, Auburn, Peru and Salem said she is "well-respected, sincere, open, down-to-earth" and "would work well with both parties."

Palmtag, Nebraska City, has significant small business experience. She began in insurance in 1984 and now owns a multi-office agency operating in Nebraska, Iowa and Missouri.

A graduate of the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, she serves on the university president's advisory committee and is past chair of the state's Economic Development Commission.

Sen. Carol Blood, District 3

A section of north central Sarpy County that includes parts of Bellevue and Papillion

Sen. Blood is a "farm girl" and is from a family of educators and has been supportive of teachers and public education during her first four years as a senator. The interview team that reviewed her candidacy four years ago called her "honest, passionate, organized, research-based and relatable." She has been all of that and more.

Blood has a long civic affairs resume. She served on the Bellevue

City Council for eight years before joining the Legislature. Blood understands the needs of businesses large and small — she formerly served as CEO of the LaVista Chamber of Commerce. She introduced and saw passage of LB15, requiring insurance plans to provide children in need with a hearing aid. This year, she carried LB751, which seeks a mental health exception to compulsory education requirements, acknowledging mental illness as equivalent to physical and behavioral issues affecting student attendance. NSEA supports both.

Sen. Tony Vargas, District 7

Omaha, south of I-480, East of Highway 75 and south to the Sarpy County line

A former public school teacher in his native New York City, Sen. Vargas has interests of children at heart. He is a former member of the Omaha Board of Education.

In 2018, he was named a Presidential Leadership Scholar by the Presidential Libraries of Presidents Johnson, Bush, Clinton and Bush.

His education focus is on equity in education, technology and innovation and college affordability. On the Appropriations Committee, he led efforts to prioritize state funding to support the most vulnerable Nebraskans, especially those from low-income backgrounds.

This year, he offered a bill to create the offense of sexual exploitation of a student (LB1210); a bill to provide panic buttons in classrooms statewide (LB1156); and a bill for a state food insecurity nutrition incentive grant program (LB1040). NSEA supported each bill.

Sen. Justin Wayne, District 13

Northeast Omaha and Douglas County

Sen. Wayne was recommended four years ago and has gained NSEA's support again. A past member and president of Omaha's Board of Education, he is a Creighton University



Leg. Dist. 1
Janet Palmtag



Leg. Dist. 3
Sen. Carol Blood



Leg. Dist 7
Sen. Tony Vargas

School of Law grad and is CEO of Trailblazers Constructors LLC. He is past president of the Midwest Trailblazers Youth Program.

This year, Wayne offered a bill on NSEA's behalf to require school districts to devise individualized response plans following report of certain violent incidents involving students (LB1217). The bill requires administrators and staff to develop an individual response plan in an effort to mitigate future incidents.

Wayne also has a bill awaiting action that would adopt the Healthy Kids Act and require tests for lead-based hazards in housing (LB653).

Sen. Lynne Walz, District 15 *Dodge County, including Fremont*

Sen. Walz is a former Fremont elementary school teacher and seeks a second term. She received high marks by an NSEA interview team four years ago, and her continued support earned another nod. The team said Walz is "enthusiastic, open-minded" and "stupendous" in support of public education. She is a valued member of the Education Committee.

Walz has raised awareness of the need for more mental health services in schools. She offered and passed a bill to improve protections and quality of life for people with disabilities. She earned the 2017 Legislator of the Year Award from the Fraternal Order of Police for work to protect first responders in the line of duty.

Walz this year offered LB251, to create the Child Hunger and Workforce Readiness Act; LB725, to reimburse school districts and educational service units for mental health expenditures; and LB727 which would designate a "point person" in each school district with respect to mental health services.

Ex-Sen. Mike Flood, District 19 *Madison County and the northeast corner of Stanton County*

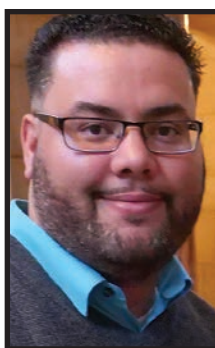
Former Sen. Flood served two terms in the Legislature starting in 2004. He announced a run for governor in 2014, but withdrew after his wife's breast cancer diagnosis. Last year, he announced he would seek to regain his old seat in the Legislature (term limits prohibit more than two consecutive terms).

He served six years as Speaker, and was generally described as a friend to public education and a consensus builder. He has supported formula-directed state aid to education, and believes education is important to the state's future. He is an attorney who parlayed an interest in radio to ownership of several radio stations and the News Channel Nebraska operation that airs across most of the state.

Brodey Weber, District 21 *Northeast Lancaster County*

The team that interviewed three candidates for District 21 said Brodey Weber's "knowledge and understanding of the issues and policy will serve him well." Members were impressed with his passion for public education and his fierce advocacy for educators.

Weber serves on the board for Community Action and on the board of his neighborhood association. He hopes to champion early childhood education and understands the importance of Head Start



Leg. Dist. 13
Sen. Justin
Wayne



Leg. Dist. 15
Sen. Lynne Walz



Leg. Dist. 19
Former Senator
Mike Flood



Leg. Dist. 21
Brodey Weber



Leg. Dist. 23
Helen Raikes



Leg. Dist. 27
Sen. Anna
Wishart

and Early Head Start and similar programs. He opposes charter and voucher proposals, and says that "while working to deliver on property taxes, education would never be on the chopping block."

Helen Raikes, District 23 *Saunders, Butler and Colfax counties*

Helen Raikes is a past executive policy fellow for the Society for Research in Child Development and served with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in the mid-1990s. In that role, she led a 15-university consortium, directed contracts and grants to carry out a multi-million-dollar study, led congressional and press briefings and oversaw multiple reports produced to create a field on the development of low-income infants and toddlers. She retired from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln as an early childhood education professor.

Raikes believes legislators must step forward to solve the structural tax inequity that hampers agriculture.

She pledged to listen, collaborate, and as an independent, to work across aisles. She believes public funding is inadequate and that "Schools are at the heart of communities and productive and skilled graduates create businesses and general vitality – economic and otherwise."

The interview team of members said Raikes "has a genuine vested interest in the communities that she'll serve and figuring out what their needs are."

Sen. Anna Wishart, District 27 *Parts of southeast Lincoln*

Sen. Wishart had an excellent understanding of the Legislature long before she was recommended by NSEA for her first term as a senator: she had worked for six years as a legislative staffer, giving her a giant head start in institutional and operational knowledge.

As a senator, she has proven an ardent, articulate supporter of public schools. She sits on the Appropriations Committee and is vice chair of the State-Tribal Relations Committee. Her commitment to children is exemplified beyond the

legislature. She is director of partnerships for Beyond School Bells, a coalition with a mission to improve access to quality after-school and summer school programs, especially in rural and under-served communities.

Wishart and husband are licensed foster parents. She has served on the board of the Nebraska Foster and Adoptive Parent Association and as spokeswoman for Let's Move Lincoln, an initiative to reduce childhood obesity. NSEA supports Wishart's LB346, which would raise the state's special education reimbursement rates to local school districts from 40 percent to 80 percent by 2023-24.

Neal Clayburn, District 29 *South central Lincoln*

Neal Clayburn has vast experience with the Legislature. A veteran of the U.S. Navy, he coached and taught government and history at Gering and Grand Island before becoming an organizational specialist for NSEA. He later served as executive director of the Lincoln

Education Association and associate executive director of NSEA before retiring. In the last two roles, he frequently worked with legislators.

Clayburn and wife Shelley have two sons who attended Lincoln Public Schools and became teachers. Shelley teaches at Lincoln's Rousseau Elementary.

He is active in the Boy Scouts of America and is a TeamMates mentor. He has the support of five current members of the Lincoln Board of Education and former District 29 Sen. DiAnna Schimek. He says adequate funding for education from pre-school to college, is vital.

"Our schools help build citizens of the future by teaching them the value of community service and preparing them for the jobs of the future. I will work to make sure our public schools – from Pre-K through our higher education system – have what they need to provide a great education for all our children."

Tim Royers, District 31 *Parts of Omaha and Millard in the Zorinsky Lake area*

That Tim Royers is a dynamic and articulate advocate for public education is unquestioned. He has taught for 13 years at Millard West High School, has coached the school's debate team to multiple state titles, was twice the state's Debate Coach of the Year. In 2016, he was Nebraska's Teacher of the Year,

He spent a decade on the Millard Education Association's negotiations team, including as chief negotiator, where he has worked with colleagues and district negotiators to resolve contracts totaling more than \$1 billion.

Royers will focus on increasing state funding so schools are less reliant on property taxes, while ensuring more equitable funding across the state. "We are overly-reliant on property taxes and there is no safety valve protecting schools if equalization dollars are reduced in the appropriations process (to) below needed levels," he said.

He seeks to provide "excellence" aid separately from equalization to reward districts for best practices like low K-2 class sizes. He would also seek to expand funding for mental health services in public schools.

Sen. Dan Quick, District 35 *The City of Grand Island*

Sen. Quick received NSEA's support four years ago and has reliably supported public schools. The team of members that interviewed Quick called him "genuine, very honest, and down-to-earth."

Quick brings a broad perspective to the debate. He is a power plant maintenance mechanic and has worked as a heavy equipment operator, a farm hand and a grain elevator employee. He is president and business manager of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers No. 1597. He is past president of the Nebraska State Utility Workers and the Central Nebraska Labor Council.

This year, he offered LB1048, to create the offense of sexual assault by a school employee and to provide automatic notification of the crime to the Commissioner of Education. NSEA supports LB1048.

In 2019, he offered and saw LB160 passed. The bill amended existing economic development statutes to include early childhood infrastructure development for cities and villages. NSEA supported passage. He also offered LB226, with nearly \$4 million to hire and train staff at the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment



Leg. Dist. 29
Neal Clayburn



Leg. Dist. 31
Tim Royers



Leg. Dist. 35
Sen. Dan Quick



Leg. Dist. 39
Allison Heimes



Leg. Dist. 43
Sen. Tom Brewer

Centers program to maintain a youth-to-staff ratio of 8-to-1.

Allison Heimes, District 39 *Douglas County, mostly west of 180th St.*

Allison Heimes has the degrees and work experience to do well in the Legislature.

She has a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Nebraska at Omaha, and a master's degree in government organization and leadership and a law degree from Creighton University. She is an attorney specializing in immigration and criminal law.

Heimes and husband have two sons, and the oldest attends pre-school at Elkhorn. "My heart soars when he comes home having learned a new word or concept. His teachers work so hard to provide him with the tools he needs to succeed," she said.

As with many state issues, Heimes knows it takes money to run government. She supports finding new revenue sources, such as renewable energy. She would oppose legislation that wastes taxpayer dollars and would seek and eliminate tax expenditures that are not functioning as desired. She would work to increase state funding to public schools, with part of those monies used for mental health professionals in schools at every level. She opposes charter schools and vouchers.

Members from Millard, Elkhorn, Logan View and the Douglas County Youth Center interviewed candidates.

Sen. Tom Brewer, District 43 *Dawes, Sheridan, Cherry, Keya Paha, Brown, Loup, Blaine, Logan, Thomas, McPherson, Hooker, Grant counties and a slice of Box Butte County including Alliance.*

"We believe he will be an advocate for schools in the district." That was the assessment of Sen. Tom Brewer by the team of NSEA members who interviewed the two candidates for Legislative District 43. Team members cited Brewer's legislative experience, his success at getting legislation introduced and passed, and his knowledge of the

district as assets. The team said Brewer "looks not only at education but at the entire district, including economic development and keeping high school graduates in the district."

Brewer, a military veteran, chairs the Legislature's Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee, and serves on the Education Committee because, he wrote in his NSEA questionnaire, "I have a sincere desire to ensure a good education is one of the important functions local and state government provides to Nebraskans."

Susan Hester, District 45 *Eastern Sarpy County, most of Bellevue*

Susan Hester is a retired teacher seeking the seat held by term-limited Sen. Sue Crawford and is a worthy replacement.

Her career included teaching at-risk students and night school at Bellevue West High School. She served as the district's high-ability learner facilitator for the last nine years of her career. Today, she is the Nebraska director of Science Olympiad, is on the board of the Bellevue Public Schools Foundation, and on the board of the eastern Nebraska Community Action Partnership.

She said the legislature is responsible for funding so that schools

may succeed in meeting needs of students. The legislature must re-evaluate and rebalance the tax system to provide certainty to school districts and property tax relief to patrons.

The interview team said she “believes teachers deserve due process. She strongly opposes charter and private schools and vouchers. Hester understands the shortfalls of school finance and state aid. She supports eliminating the budget lid.” Members from Omaha, Bellevue and Peru State College interviewed candidates.

Jen Day, District 49

Northeast Sarpy County, Gretna and LaVista

Jen Day is “very pro-public education, pro-teacher, against state funding for charter schools and against vouchers,” said the interview team. She has a bachelor’s degree in political science from the Uni-



Leg. Dist. 45
Susan Hester



Leg. Dist. 49
Jen Day

versity of Nebraska at Omaha and is co-founder and owner of a strength and fitness business.

“I believe that my experience as a business owner, my formal education in politics and government, along with my passion for public policy, proficiency at diplomacy, and commitment to making educated, informed decisions make me a great candidate for the nonpartisan body of the Nebraska Legislature,” Day wrote in her NSEA questionnaire.

Her primary initiative as a state senator will be to “ensure that all Nebraska students have access to a well-funded, quality public school” and to ward off attempts at allowing vouchers and charter schools into Nebraska. Day sup-

ports adequate funding of public schools in order to improve teacher pay and teacher retention.

NSEA members from Louisville, Papillion-LaVista and Omaha interviewed candidates.

Nebraska State Board of Education

Patsy Koch Johns, District 1

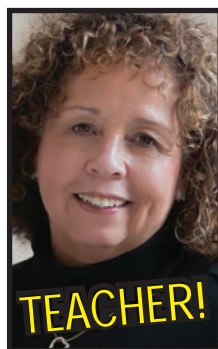
City of Lincoln and eastern Lancaster County and large portions of the Crete, Norris, Waverly and Palmyra school districts.

Patsy Koch Johns has been an ardent supporter of students and public schools during her first four years on the State Board of Education. That should be no surprise to those who know that Koch Johns spent her career teaching at Cozad and then Lincoln High School, where she chaired the English and theatre departments. Among many accolades, Koch Johns was Nebraska’s 2006 Teacher of the Year.

Koch Johns has support of all of her current state board colleagues, as well as backing of all seven members of the Lincoln Board of Education. She has a passion for developing equitable policies and programs and chairs the state board’s Student Equity and Access Committee, which developed the board’s Equity Statement and Equity Lens. She also serves on the Nebraska board’s



State Board
Dist. 1 Member
Patsy Koch Johns



State Board
Dist. 2 Member
Lisa Fricke

legislative and strategic planning committees.

Lisa Fricke, District 2


Sarpy County, and a section of south central Douglas County mainly in the Millard school district.

Lisa Fricke is a retired teacher of 36 years, a longtime Association member and a tireless advocate for students and public education in Nebraska. She is well-versed in the needs of public schools and the students who attend those schools.

During her career, she served as a master teacher mentor for the Intergenerational Mentoring Program and helped develop state assessments for reading, writing, and special education math. She was also a gubernatorial appointee to the Special Education Accountability Commission, and a mentor for Coach Tom and Nancy Osborne’s Teammates Program. Fricke has also served on several School Improvement External Visitation Teams.

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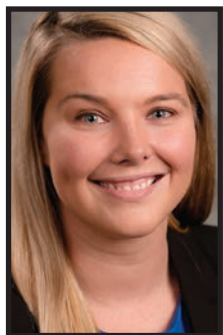
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Webinar Plan Intensifies to Help Members

True Colors, Self Care, Family Resources are Topics on Busy May Schedule

From September through March, NSEA staff and members conducted seven monthly webinars aimed at helping teachers improve or hone skills.



Jensen

In April, the schedule of webinars ramped up, with one, two and even three webinars a week.

Webinars will continue well into May, featuring NSEA members from across the state, including 2019 Nebraska Teacher of the Year Sydney Jensen, Lincoln, who will talk about self-care for teachers on Thursday, May 14.

Jensen gained national fame with a TED Talk on the emotional well-being of teachers. That talk has reached nearly 1.9 million YouTube views.

Check nsea.org to register and for updates. These topics had been set by late April (times are CDT):

■ Tuesday, May 5, at 8 p.m.: **Family Resources for Crisis and Recovery**, with Keryl Mines, social worker for the Plattsmouth Community Schools.

■ Thursday, May 7, at 8 p.m.: **Using True Colors to Create a Positive and Engaging Learning Environment**, with Jake Barry, Elkhorn; Leah Borer, Grand Island; and Rachel Scheet, Lincoln.



■ Tuesday, May 12, at 7 p.m.: **Local Association Treasurer Training**, with NSEA Comptroller Sheri Jablonski. For NSEA members only.

■ Thursday, May 14, at 8 p.m.: **Self-Care During Challenging Times**, with 2019 Nebraska Teacher of the Year Sydney Jensen, Lincoln.

■ Tuesday, May 19, at 8 p.m.: **Supporting Grief and Recovery from Loss for Students and Staff** with Nicole Heller, Elkhorn; Keryl Mines, Plattsmouth; and Dawn Bickford, Weeping Water.

For more details, call NSEA Teaching and Learning Specialist Dr. Cindy Copich at 1-800-742-0047, or reach her at:

cindy.copich@nsea.org

For those who wish to check out recordings of past webinars, note past sessions are available at the NSEA webinar registration site at nsea.org. Past sessions available on the website include:

- Building a Positive Learning Environment.
- The Importance of Social-Emotional Learning.
- Trauma-Informed Classrooms.

'Teachers' Fountain' Campaign Now Underway

NSEA and NSEA-Retired Support Drive

The NSEA and the NSEA-Retired have joined other statewide education organizations to support an effort by the Lincoln Parks Foundation to restore Cascade Fountain, affectionately known as "Teachers Fountain" in Lincoln.



Found at South 27th St. and Capitol Parkway, Cascade Fountain is the result of a five-year planning and fundraising effort by the Lincoln Area Retired Teachers Association in 1973 to commemorate America's Bicentennial and to honor teachers.

Campaign leaders included retired teachers Hazel Smith, Helen Miller, Francis Beechner and Julius Humann of Lincoln and Mildred Moore of

Grand Island. Appeals and activities took place across the state. More than 1,000 people gave, with 60 giving \$1,000 or more.

Retired teachers celebrated when the fountain was built in 1978. Designed by Larry Group in the style of well-known landscape architect Lawrence Halprin, it quickly became a popular Lincoln icon.

Now, the fountain is in dire need of repairs. Maintenance issues exist, and outdated electrical and mechanical systems must be replaced. The \$1.6 million campaign will provide for refurbishment and site improvements, a new plaza with seating and picnic areas, donor and teacher recognition. The plan includes an endowment for maintenance.

Along with NSEA and NSEA-Retired, the foundation is working with Nebraska Association of Retired School Personnel, Lincoln Area Retired School Personnel, Lincoln Education Association, Lincoln Public Schools Foundation and Nebraska Council of School Administra-



Fluid Memorial: The Cascade Fountain just north of the Folsom Children's Zoo in Lincoln, will be renovated thanks to a drive assisted by NSEA and NSEA-Retired.

tors. All are committed to creating greater awareness about the project.

"We want to restore Cascade Fountain and improve the surrounding plaza area for everyone and future generations to enjoy. We need private support to bring it back to its former glory and to add popular amenities to the area," said Maggie Stuckey, executive director of Lincoln Parks Foundation.

Donors of \$1,000 or more will be recognized at the fountain. The foundation is also developing an "honor your favorite teacher" program to be announced this summer. For details and a video, go to:

LincolnParks.org/cascade

Setting Up Remote Teaching Success

This List Can Help You Select the Right Laptop, Set Up a Home Base

By NEA Member Benefits

As schools across the country have closed due to coronavirus concerns, teachers are getting their home offices set up so they can successfully deliver remote lessons to their students. However, they're realizing their computer systems need to be updated to meet the challenge.

Many members have contacted us to find out how to use their membership benefits to get discounts on laptops. We're helping teachers with that urgent request now with discounts through our Limited-Time Offers and NEA Click & Save discount shopping programs, as well as our brand-new NEA Office Depot/OfficeMax Discount Program.

But you also need to decide what to buy to set up your new remote classroom command center at home.

There is no "best laptop for teachers," because you have to select one based on your own needs, which will depend on your familiarity with technology, what programs you feel comfortable using, and how interconnected your instruction resources need to be. Dell, Apple, Microsoft, Lenovo and others offer high-quality laptops that are popular with teachers.

Laptop Specs

Here are some suggestions on what to look for as you decide which laptop to buy to support your teaching needs now:

- A lightweight laptop with at least a 12-inch screen.
- At least 8GB of RAM memory to support stronger system performance.
- An i5 processor or better to optimize computer speed and graphics.
- A hard drive with at least 250GB so you have room to store large files.
- A built-in camera/microphone for video calls.

eo calls.

- A graphics card that's at least 512MB to support video calls.

A Full Evaluation

You need to evaluate your setup to make sure you have the optimal configuration:

- The fastest WiFi access available from your internet provider.
- A web browser program such as Safari, Chrome or Firefox.
- A video service, such as Skype, MS Teams or Zoom.
- A word processor, such as Microsoft Word or Google Docs.
- A spreadsheet tool, such as Microsoft Excel or Google Sheets.
- A presentation tool, such as Microsoft Power Point or Google Slides.
- Cloud-based storage – such as on Google, Dropbox or Microsoft OneDrive—so you don't have to store all your documents on your hard drive. Cloud storage is backed up, handles large files and is easily sharable.
- A PDF creator, like Adobe Acrobat.
- A good set of headphones to help you focus, especially if you're self-quarantined at home with other people.
- An all-in-one printer/scanner to scan documents to send to students and parents, or if you prefer printing documents to read, grade papers, plan lessons and more.
- Enough ink and paper to handle the amount of documents you're printing.

Find Deals with NEAMB

Look for deals through Limited-Time Offers and NEA Click & Save, either directly from the manufacturer (such as Dell and Apple) or through third-party retailers (such as Best Buy and PC Mall).

You also can sign up with the NEA Office Depot/OfficeMax Discount Program for laptops, printers, ink cartridges, paper and more.

Be sure to check out NEA's new resources on lesson planning and remote instruction to put your new equipment to work.

Always watch the NEA Member Benefits site for updated details. That site is at:

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

Are You Looking for a Financial Edge?

Sign Up for the NEA Member Benefits Financial Whiteboard

A four-part email series offered by NEA Member Benefits is designed to give you the financial edge on important money matters. You'll find tips, tools and videos to make sense of your finances on topics like student debt relief, managing credit and saving for the future.

Sign up for the free series today at the NEA Member Benefits website at:

<https://www.bit.ly/neambfinancialedge>

You May Be Nebraska's 2021 Teacher of the Year

Step to the fore as a recognized leader in the teaching profession. The mantle of responsibility that rests on the shoulders of a Teacher of the Year could be yours.

Application forms for the 2021 Nebraska Teacher of the Year are now available through your administration or at the website listed below. Teachers may nominate a colleague for the honor, but candidates may also self-nominate.

Applications must be submitted or postmarked by midnight (CST), July 15, 2020. A panel will review applications, and up to five finalists will be selected. Finalists will be interviewed in August, and the 2021 recipient will be selected from those finalists. An awards luncheon will be held on Thursday, Nov. 12, in the NSEA boardroom.

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

The classroom video requirement has been suspended for the 2021 application process, although a two-minute public speaking video is required. Questions on the application seek information on educational background and personal development; community involvement; philosophy of teaching and learning; and commentary on the teaching profession.

The NSEA, Nebraska Council of School Administrators, Nebraska Association of School Boards, and corporate partners Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska and Data Recognition Corporation (DRC) present cash awards to the Teacher of the Year. All finalists receive a cash award from sponsoring corporate friends and education associations. The State Board of Education provides a \$1,000 grant to the finalists and the Teacher of the Year to be used for a project of the teacher's choice in his/her school.

Go to the Department of Education website for details:

www.education.ne.gov/toy/

For more, reach program Coordinator Lora Sypal at 402-471-5059 or:

lora.sypal@nebraska.gov

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Find the Silver Lining



**Executive
Director
Maddie Fennell**

“

**Across our state
— and the
country —
people began
to see how
important
schools were
to meeting the
most basic needs
of our students.**

”

Sometimes my husband gets frustrated, exclaiming “I get tired of your Pollyanna attitude!”

There is good reason why I maintain a positive outlook on life. Several years ago I woke up in intensive care following surgery. Still groggy from sedatives, I was intubated and taking blood transfusions. But I was awake! Experiences like that can alter how you look at life; it made me VERY grateful.

Today, I figure that every day I’m looking at daisies instead of pushing them up is a good day!

That doesn’t mean that life is always rosy. I received some very unsettling health news late last month about someone I love (not COVID-19 related). Honestly, it hasn’t been easy.

But if it wasn’t for COVID-19, I wouldn’t be around to help this loved one – to accompany on doctor visits, discuss lab reports, provide meals.

So, in the midst of the angst, I decided to think about where so much good has blossomed.

Educators Stepped Up

The education establishment was completely upended overnight when the governor and commissioner of education jointly announced that, to prevent the spread of COVID-19, students would not be allowed in schools – but school wasn’t over.

I tell folks that educators turned the Titanic not on a dime, but on a grain of rice. Teachers and support staff quickly and completely changed their methods and mode of instruction to develop “Continuous Learning Plans” as requested by the Nebraska Department of Education.

In a poll of 282 local associations taken by NSEA in early April, 95 percent of our educators said they were working virtually with students. Only three percent were working from their schools. The remainder split their time between home (29 percent) or could choose to work from home or school (68 percent).

In a national survey conducted in April, parents said that the biggest challenge during the pandemic was balancing work and the needs of their kids. But they gave an 88 percent approval rating of the job their child’s teacher was doing to provide instruction; and 54 percent strongly approved of the work of educators!

This is why we need highly qualified professionals in every classroom. They know how to put their skills to work in service to their students regardless of circumstances!

I have never been more proud to be a teacher.

Maslow before Bloom

When we first realized that students could not and would not be at school, the first questions we

heard from educators weren’t about academics or grades. It was this: “How will our kids get fed?”

Throughout the crisis NSEA has heard “Yes, we are grateful that teachers will be paid, but what about our support staff – our paras, bus drivers, secretaries, janitors – who are crucial members of our school and community?”

Across our state – and the country – people began to see how important schools were to meeting the most basic needs of our students. Food, emotional health and safety were put front and center. As educators, we know that Maslow comes before Bloom. That hierarchy was brought into sharp focus.

Our members stepped up for their non-certified colleagues, encouraging school boards to extend the same pay protection that teachers maintained to the rest of the staff community. School boards listened. The NSEA survey included responses from only two school districts that indicated support staff weren’t being paid.

Again: I’ve never been so proud to be a teacher.

People You Can Count On

The NSEA has long had a strong relationship with the Nebraska Department of Education and Commissioner Matt Blomstedt since he worked for the late Sen. Ron Raikes in the Unicameral.

As this crisis unfolded, Blomstedt reached out and engaged us immediately in dialogue to help answer the myriad of questions that were being created. He not only said “Yes, of course,” each time we asked him to talk, he offered to do more Facebook Live events so that teachers could hear directly from him, as the state’s top educator.

One of the more pleasurable aspects of the NSEA president’s role is to select the NSEA Friend of Education, awarded each year at Delegate Assembly. Months before COVID-19 was even on the radar, NSEA President Jenni Benson was giving serious consideration to recognizing Blomstedt with what is our Association’s most prestigious honor. He has worked not just with NSEA, but with Benson directly, to address several pressing issues. Blomstedt’s transparency, collaboration, and willingness to tackle “the tough stuff” were some of the traits that led to Benson’s selection.

Blomstedt’s leadership since then has reaffirmed that choice. On Saturday, April 25, at our virtual Delegate Assembly, he was announced as the 2020 NSEA Friend of Education.

We value the partnership we have with the NDE and the commissioner. We look forward to celebrating this honor with him in person when we can safely do so!

It will be a rosy, grateful day when we do!

COVID-19 Won't Affect Retirement Benefits

Nebraska school pension plan system administrators have reacted vigorously to COVID-19 to protect plan members and retirees while ensuring continuity of operations in the face of school closings and the state's Directed Health Measures.

Managers at the Nebraska Public Employees Retirement System (NPERS) and the Omaha School Employees Retirement System (OSERS) report they implemented monthly benefits payments with no delay.

Financial markets have been on a rollercoaster and lost more than 25 percent in value since all-time highs in February. The largest risk facing school plans is investment volatility, as demonstrated by market declines starting in 2000 and 2008. Most of the money in state and local retirement plans comes from investment earnings.

Such instability will not affect monthly benefits. For the NPERS statewide school plan, the Nebraska Public Employees Retirement Board (PERB) requires an annual valuation of the plan by a consulting actuary. By law, based on this valuation, the state contributes an amount sufficient to cover any actuarial required contribution. The Omaha plan has similar provisions.

In November 2019, the state's actuary said the plan could absorb a 3.5 percent investment loss in 2020 without additional state funding. This reflects an actual decrease of 11 percent as the plan assumes an annual 7.5 percent rate of return. Longer term, the plan could absorb two years of an annual 1.75 percent rate of return, and three years of an annual 3.5 percent return. In 2019, the actual investment return for the state school plan was 6.7 percent.

Finally, the school defined benefit plans not only provide income for school retirees, but also have a substantial effect on local



The Mentees: These University of Nebraska at Omaha students were among participants in an Intergenerational Mentoring program with NSEA-Retired. From left are Tiffany Bukacek, Sierra Beacom, Kelsey Larsen, Katie Zimmerer and Dani Glinski.

UNO Students Benefit from Mentoring

In March, several Omaha area retirees plus one active Omaha Education Association member met with Student Education Association of Nebraska (SEAN) chapter members at the University of Nebraska at Omaha for an intergenerational mentoring experience. The morning was spent exchanging advice and experiences from classroom scenarios and a discussion of classroom management ideas. The students were provided with material from ASCD publications on classroom management plus "gift baskets" of classroom materials.

economies. These plans act as financial engines, using employer and employee contributions to generate investment income that, when paid as retirement benefits, bolster local economies. School retirees purchase a wide range of goods and services with their income, which help stabilize the economy during a financial crisis. In the 2019 Annual Report, NPERS reported that the state's defined benefit plans along with the OSERS' plan provided a total of \$63.8 million in annual benefit payments to retirees.

For more details, go to:

nsea.org/covid19-faq-retirement

Fall Conference Details

There is no report on the NSEA-Retired Spring Conference, as it was canceled by

the COVID-19 pandemic. The April 23 meet was to feature topics such as Speed Traveling Through Four Countries and Improving Your Sleep, among other sessions.

However, every good teacher knows "lesson plans sometimes need to be changed." Those topics will be kept in reserve for the future, and perhaps will appear on the agenda at the 2020 Fall Conference, set for October 16 in Grand Island.

One item that will be on the Fall Conference agenda: a thank-you to retiring NSEA-Retired Board of Directors members Dee Gillham of Bartlett and Francis Rohrich of Norfolk. Both will complete three-year terms on the board in August.

— De Tonack,
NSEA-Retired President

Black, Nickels Elected

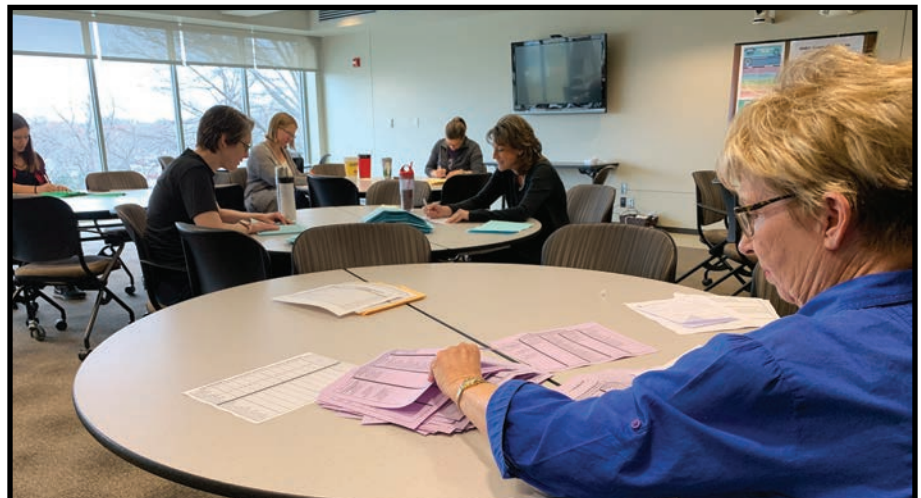
Counting more than 1,500 returned ballots (a 27 percent return rate) was a bit of a challenge this year with the coronavirus pandemic.

It usually takes volunteer retired teachers a day or two to count and report the ballots. This year, eight NSEA staff joined NSEA-Retired President De Tonack to complete the task at NSEA Headquarters.

New NSEA Retired Board members beginning August 15 are Tom Black, Elkhorn District, and Maureen (Mo) Nickels, Sandhills District. Returning to a third term as a Capitol District Board member is Pat Etherton.

A special thanks goes to NSEA's Sheri Jablonski, Jan Anderson, Megan Lyons, Michelle Raphael, Tamra Mick, Kami Beatty, Natalie Thomas and Martha Livingston for their assistance.

Other candidates who were elected as DA and RA delegates are found at nsea.org/retired.



Detail Work: NSEA-Retired President De Tonack, Lincoln, right, reviews ballot counts as NSEA staff count ballots on a district-by-district basis in the background. More than 1,500 retired members voted in the spring election.

Metro CC Delays Lab Access

NSEA Assists in Making Member Concerns Heard

In mid-March when word filtered down that administrators had set a date of March 30 to reconvene labs for several **Metropolitan Community College** in Omaha courses, instructors at that college were rightly concerned for the safety of their students and themselves, given that the coronavirus pandemic was just beginning to gain a firm foothold in Nebraska.

Instructors who belong to NSEA contacted their Association to voice those concerns and ask how to best broach the issue with administrators. While online coursework was doing well, college decision makers felt that some students would need to test out of their more hands-on courses by finishing up lab work.

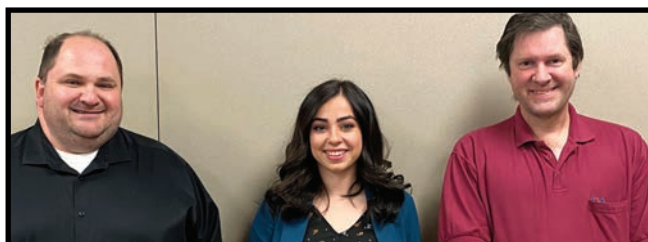
NSEA Organizational Specialist Rich Wergin, works with NSEA's Higher Education members, and urged them to contact their administrators at the college and ask who might be most affected by the decision to reconvene. He also urged them to ask whether parents of Metro students might question the wisdom of continuing class work during the pandemic.

"Communications through NSEA and the work of several of our member instructors led to another look at that decision," said Wergin.

After several email exchanges over the course of a couple of days and just days before lab classes were to reconvene, college President Randy Schmailzl responded to instructors that he would "err on the side of all our staff and students' safety" by postponing all student labs.

"Many of our Metro CCEA members are very appreciative of the work we have done on their behalf," said Wergin.

A similar incident happened at about the same time on the campus



The Scholarship: Samantha Carrillo, center, received a scholarship presented by Chadron State College Education Association President James Koehn, left, and CSCEA Executive Team member Matt Brust, right. Not pictured is recipient Mikaela Stephenson.

of **Central Community College** in Grand Island, where nursing instructors were told they would re-open clinical labs, as well.

A message to NSEA resolved that issue and delayed the opening of labs until more data becomes available, said Wergin.

Central Community College leadership later moved to virtual simulation for the rest of the semester on all three campus sites at Grand Island, Hastings and Columbus.

Two **Chadron State College** students received \$500 scholarships from the **Chadron State College Education Association**. Deemed deserving, based on achievement and financial need, among other considerations, were Samantha Carrillo and Mikaela Stephenson.

Carrillo is in the Criminal Justice program and part of the Rural Law Opportunities program. The Alliance native plans to become a lawyer and practice in rural Nebraska. Stephenson is pursuing a secondary English education degree. She graduates in May and plans to teach in rural Nebraska.

The scholarships were presented by CSCEA President James Koehn and Executive Team member Matt Brust, who also serves as the lead contact for the CSCEA membership team.

"As Scholarship Committee chair, I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to learn about the many outstanding students at CSC and am honored to award the scholarships to these students," said Brust.

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 three-year terms Aug. 1:

Capitol District

NSEA Board: Mindy Diller, Lincoln.

President: Burke Brown, Palmyra.

Treasurer: Nora Lenz, Lincoln.

Secretary: Jules Spickelmier, Lincoln.

Executive Committee: Megan Simsic, Lincoln.

Elkhorn District

NSEA Board: Denton Beacom, Logan View.

Treasurer: Jill Anderson, Walthill.

Secretary: Lanette VonSeggern, Pender.

Executive Committee: Katherine Lederer, Fremont; Sandi Cannon, South Sioux City.

Bylaws Amendment: Passed.

Cluster Delegate to NEA Representative Assembly: Raeanna Carbaugh, Niobrara.

Metro District

NSEA Board: Sasha Cervantes, Sarah Dragon, both of Omaha.

Vice President: Marsha Edquist, Millard.

Executive Committee, Subdistrict 3: Molly Davies, Omaha.

Executive Committee, Subdistrict 6: Stacy Kester-Pearson, Millard.

Executive Committee, Subdistrict 9: Sarah Davenport, Westside.

Bylaws Amendment: Passed.

Panhandle District

President: Renae Noble, Chadron.

Executive Committee, Area 2: Amanda Reilly, Bayard.

Sandhills District

Secretary: Mary Gregoski, Palmer.

Exec Comm: Tiffany Rice, Hyannis.

Cluster Delegate to NEA Representative Assembly: Kevin Pettigrew, Valentine.

Tri-Valley District

NSEA Board: Melissa Boutwell, Lexington.

Treasurer: Angela Dickey, Chase County.

Secretary: Holly Ortega, Grand Island.

Exec. Comm., East: Jade Bartunek, Hastings.

Exec. Committee, West: Janet Sheaffer, Chase County.

Exec. Committee, Central: Melissa Boutwell, Lexington.

Bylaws Amendment: Passed.

Cluster Delegate to NEA Representative Assembly: Dickey and Sheaffer.

2020 R.A. At-Large Delegates

William West, Lincoln; Devin Garcia, Diller-Odell; Molly Davies, Omaha; Allie Bastian, Raymond Central.

Speaking of Education

“We ask them (teachers) to do what we’d never ask anyone else in society to do — and for next to nothing. I can’t imagine being a first-grade teacher with a class of 35 children. And numbers are only one factor. you have to add in home life, apathetic parents, peer pressure, poverty, drugs. The challenge is to ensure that every child has real hope and is prepared for meaningful opportunity.”

— Alan Page, *NFL Hall of Fame football player and former Associate Justice, Minnesota Supreme Court*
1945 —

Mailed By: **The Nebraska State Education Association**
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LD 23: Helen Raikes

LD 27: Sen. Anna Wishart
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