

# The VOICE

Nebraska State Education Association • February 2020

A photograph of three people smiling at a conference. On the left is Paul Schulte, a man with glasses and a beard, wearing a dark suit and a blue patterned tie. He has a red name tag that reads "PAUL SCHULTE" and "VICE PRESIDENT". In the center is a woman with blonde hair wearing a grey turtleneck. On the right is a woman with short brown hair and glasses, wearing a dark grey cardigan over a patterned top. They are standing in a room with stone walls and other people in the background.

## SAFETY BILL TAKES CENTER STAGE

- **INTERNET SENSATION TO LEAD OFF AT DA**  
*Sydney Jensen Keys Professional Development*
- **An Opportunity for Nebraska**  
*'The Young People in My Charge ... Renew My Hope'*
- **A Trio of Keynotes Tabbed for NSEA U**  
*Robinson, Dintersmith, Owens-Nauslar*



# THE VOICE

Nebraska State Education Association  
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## A Great Public School for Every Child.

# Read Across America: Limitless Opportunity

## Learning to Read Well Gives Lifetime Opportunity

There is no doubt about this fact: the limitless opportunities available for involvement in children's reading throughout the year will in turn provide limitless benefits for the child who learns to read well.

Launched in 1998, the National Education Association's Read Across America event has morphed into a year-round program to motivate children and teens to read. It all begins anew each March, and kicks off this year on March 2 during National Reading Month.

NSEA President Jenni Benson reads to children in classrooms during her travels across the state.

"Every teacher knows the value of good reading skills," said Benson. "I

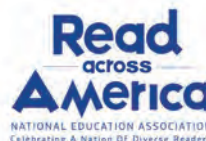
hope everyone celebrates the value of reading by observing Read Across America in some way this year."

The NEA has a variety of resources to assist educators in that effort. The NEA website offers lists of recommended books, a resource for finding free books for kids and the classroom, ways that parents can raise active readers, text excerpts for close reading and summer reading ideas.

If you are searching for a Read Across America event that will engage students, parents and the community, you can find those ideas on the NEA website as well.

The site also provides tips for guest readers in your classroom, as well as a promotional kit for your Read Across America event.

To learn more about Read Across America, go to the NEA website at: [www.readacrossamerica.org](http://www.readacrossamerica.org)



## Consider Filing for NSEA Office: Deadline is Feb. 9

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

Starting Friday, Feb. 21, NSEA members will vote for candidates to fill nearly three dozen district leadership posts, as well as openings on the NSEA's Board of Directors. Electees will assume roles in determining the Association's future. But first, those candidates must file.

The window for filing opened on Wednesday, Jan. 1, and closes Sunday, Feb. 9. Voting takes place online, and will begin at 12:01 a.m. on Friday, Feb. 21. It will close at midnight on Sunday, March 15.

To view the vacancies, and to file, go to the NSEA website and click on the '2020 District Elections' link. Select your district, and then select the office of interest. Candidates will need their 10-digit NSEA membership number. That number can be found above your name on the mailing label of *The Voice*, or on the email that delivers the digital edition of *The Voice*. Call NSEA for details 1-800-742-0047. The NSEA website is at:

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

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

**On the Cover:** When LBI 47 came up for debate on one of the first days of the Nebraska Legislature, NSEA was there, urging support from state senators. Pictured from left are NSEA Vice President and Millard Education Association President Paul Schulte, Fremont Sen. Lynne Walz, and Lincoln Education Association President Rita Bennett. Learn more on Page 7.

# Fall Down Once, Get Up Twice



**NSEA President  
Jenni Benson**

“  
*Some of us fall  
with frequency.  
The important  
thing is that  
we get up,  
sometimes  
through our own  
hope and  
perseverance,  
sometimes with  
the help  
of others.*  
”

Near the end of a wonderful holiday break, I fell flat on my face. Literally, I was flat on my face on the sidewalk in front of a Lincoln restaurant.

My knee and the palm of my right hand caught some of the force of the fall. But there I was, two days after Christmas, flat on the sidewalk looking at a beautiful day from a new and different perspective.

There had been no ice, no debris. I just fell.

Though I wanted to take my pain and embarrassment and dissolve into the concrete, I had little choice but to get up, gather myself, and enter the restaurant for lunch. “Grin and bear it. Be tough,” I thought.

After lunch, I went to the doctor and found I had cracked the radial head – the top of the radius bone in my lower arm. With my right, dominant arm in a sling, it has been a tough month.

### Hope Moves Us Forward

A Japanese proverb says, “Fall down seven times, stand up eight.”

Those seven words inspire to always strive for more, to choose to persevere and refuse to give up hope. I’ve kept those words in mind since my little trip down Painful Lane.

My reflection on those words has led me to think about what they mean for the long term. I’ve come to believe they mean you must choose to remain ever hopeful. Hope keeps us moving forward, puts the focus not on the moment, and not on the reality in front of us, but on the possibilities in our unseen futures.

### Hope and Perseverance

I’m an optimistic person and consider myself hardy and a hard worker with a full tank of energy. But my fall slowed me down. On one hand, it may not have been a bad thing. On the other hand, it felt lousy. Fortunately, I am blessed to be surrounded with people who help me get right back up when I fall.

And the fact is that we all fall on occasion. Some of us fall with frequency. The important thing is that we get up, sometimes through our own hope and perseverance, sometimes with the help of others.

In this job, I hear each and every day from members who need help. Last evening one of NSEA’s organizational specialists called with a kindergarten teacher who was really struggling and was unsure of who and how to ask for help. She needed a hand up and I was glad to assist when she reached out.

That is one of the things that NSEA does well and

in so many ways. To illustrate, I asked for a few examples of how our NSEA staff have helped members in recent days. Here are some of their responses:

■ **NSEA Organizational Specialist Rich Wergin** met with a member who felt she was being mistreated by her administrator. The member said, “I am so glad you took the time to meet me here today! This is the first time I felt that I had really been heard!”

■ **Scottsbluff High School Educators Rising Chapter Advisor Jamie Batterman** asked about hosting a Praxis Core Academic Skills for Educators test seminar in February. Recruiting the next generation of teachers is a priority for NSEA, and those entering Nebraska colleges of education must pass the Praxis Core for admittance. **NSEA Organizational Specialists Matt Pittman** and **Carol Hicks** worked with Chadron State Academic Support Center Coordinator Kathy Peters, and more than a dozen high schoolers will get the Praxis prep and preview they need before college (the test grade is good for five years!).

■ **Organizational Specialist Jen Dubas** assisted two local associations as each faced requests from superintendents to make major changes to negotiated contract language. In each case, after Dubas spoke with the local association teams, those teams returned to the table and stood together against the changes. In each case, the administration then dropped the requests. “All it took was a little encouragement to

let the negotiators know that it’s ok to say ‘No,’” said Dubas.

■ **Organizational Specialist Kristen Sedlacek** is working with a young teacher to build a relationship with her teaching partner. “We’ve talked about clear communication and how she needs to advocate for her students while maintaining a collegial relationship and navigating

the delicate balance between the two,” said Sedlacek. “We talk almost weekly as I provide advice on how to approach certain situations to ensure she maintains a positive working relationship with her colleague.” This effort may save a career and will strengthen staff relationships at a local school building.

### Every Day, All Year

These are five small examples. NSEA staff deal with such questions and issues every day of the week.

There is much value in getting up when you fall – or when you’ve been knocked down. Sometimes it requires assistance. NSEA is there when it does.



**On the Air: NET News Director Brandon McDermott, left, interviewed Amy Burns, Kearney; NSEA President Jenni Benson, center; and Deb Rasmussen, Lincoln, right; about school and classroom safety legislation.**

# Learn about consolidating your debt

*This article was printed in the First Nebraska Credit Union newsletter, January 2020 issue.*

## What is a debt consolidation loan?

A loan – a second mortgage, a home equity line of credit, or a personal loan – that has a lower interest rate than your current credit could be considered a debt consolidation loan if you are using it to pay off several bills, such as high-rate credit cards or other loans you may have.

## Typical benefits you can gain from getting a debt consolidation loan are:

- Lower monthly payments
- Paying less overall, due to a lower interest rate
- Better credit score if loans are paid off in time

## Who should get a debt consolidation loan?

If you have high-rate credit card debt or high-rate personal loans, a debt consolidation loan might be right for you.

A home equity loan is one type of loan you could use for debt consolidation. If you own your home, you may have equity built up, which means you can borrow money against your home. This type of loan is a secure loan, because it uses your home

as collateral. Using collateral to get a loan earns you a lower rate than an unsecured loan.

You may not have collateral to secure a loan, but that doesn't mean you can't get a loan. An unsecured personal loan will have a higher interest rate than a secured loan, but it may still be a lower interest rate than your other credit/loans.

## How do I know which loan is right for me?

There is plenty of information online, but finding good advice takes a lot of time. A credit union loan specialist can look at your financial situation and discuss what would work best for you. A quick phone call or visit to the credit union is all it takes. The loan specialist will take an application and run your credit to get the big picture, then determine what type of loan, interest rate and payment plan you would be eligible for. Our loan specialists are experts who will have your best interests in mind.

## What if I'm already behind on my bills?

Now is the perfect time to call and talk to a Credit Union loan specialist. The sooner you discuss it, the sooner you can find out what it will take to turn your situation around. Our loan specialists will provide you with solutions that best fit your situation.



Is your debt giving you a  
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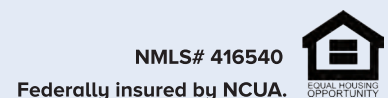
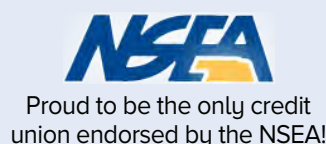
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# 'Why Isn't Anyone Doing Anything?'

## 'This Cannot Continue' Say Educators Supporting Passage of LB147

In early January, Tricia Rhodes stood before 30 of her teaching peers, six television cameras and three print reporters and explained in certain terms why the Nebraska Legislature must pass LB147, the School Environment and Classroom Safety Act.

She simply recalled the day last fall that "everything changed."

A student with a history of violence had spent a relatively quiet morning before starting to act unusual. In a well-rehearsed procedure, Rhodes had her paraprofessionals remove other students from the room and call for help. The student went into the calming room and Rhodes stood in the door to calm the student.

"The student turned towards me and without warning started punching me in the head and face. I was beaten back, which allowed the student to get into the main room. The student continued hitting me as I yelled for help. The student picked up a trash can and threw it at me," said Rhodes.

"I don't remember screaming or hearing the student yelling. I have only heard about it from the paraprofessionals that were forced to helplessly stay outside of the room since they were not restraint trained," said Rhodes. "I was trapped and all I remember clearly is wanting to make sure neither the student nor I got hurt. I also remember with crystal clarity the look on the student's face and the fear I had of what this student would do next."

### Broken Nose, PTSD

The 5-10 minutes before help arrived seemed like hours, she said. Once help arrived, the student was safely restrained and calmed.

Yet when building administration left to contact the student's parents, the student attacked Rhodes a second time, punching her in the head and face again, before being restrained a second time.

"I have never fully recovered from this attack; the effects having gone far beyond a concussion and being out of school for a few weeks," she said.

Her nose was broken in the attack. She suffered from breathing problems and severe, daily headaches and required surgery to repair the damage. She is faster to anger and sometimes struggles to recall simple words and names. She has been diagnosed with PTSD and has panic attacks and nightmares.

And in her metro-area classroom, she continues to deal with aggressive students.

Her message to state policymakers was simple: "This cannot continue. We need help to make changes in handling student violence against staff and other students."

### 'I Almost Quit the Profession'

Nikole Kasperbauer and Tracy Hartman-Bradley also spoke about the need for passage of LB147 at the Jan. 2 news conference announcing NSEA's support for the bill.

NSEA President Jenni Benson opened the news conference,



**Their Stories Told:** NSEA members Tricia Rhodes, left, and Nikole Kasperbauer shared their encounters with classroom violence at a January 2 news conference at NSEA Headquarters.

telling of the 160-plus member responses to an NSEA email, each response outlining details of classroom violence aimed at teachers, staff and sometimes putting other students in danger.

"As a special education teacher for 32 years, I was hit, kicked, bitten, punched, spit on, attacked and physically assaulted dozens of times," said Benson. "This is a common occurrence for many teachers and school staff."

"LB147 provides specific direction to help deal with a very complex issue that our schools, students and educators face," said Benson. "LB147 will help to ensure a safe and positive learning and teaching environment for all students and staff."

Fifth-year teacher Kasperbauer dealt with a violence-prone student from her first day in the classroom until the last week of her first year when the student was finally placed in another program.

"The student threatened us, screamed at us, cussed at us, threw things. This went on for the entire year. My administration did what they could to support us, but it went on the entire year," she said. "I almost quit the profession."

"Why isn't anyone doing anything?" she said. "We need more mental health professionals in schools. We need counselors who are available for staff and for students, training for all staff, for paraprofessionals and everyone that deals with students."

"We don't have just one or two students in our classrooms coming to us with a trauma. We have five or six, and when we have to deal with that trauma, learning is lost," she said.

### Standardized Policies

Hartman-Bradley pointed out that many teachers and education support personnel are uncertain about the state discipline parameters.

"There are different policies and varied levels of administrative support from district to district," she said. "We need to standardize what school employees can and cannot do to protect their students and themselves."

Said Benson: "Our goal in LB147 is to keep all children safe, to keep all school personnel safe and to also provide a learning environment that all students need and all students deserve."

# CHADRON STATE COLLEGE *Online*

“The professors shared stories from their own teaching experiences, which helped me prepare for unexpected events in public school. They also taught other valuable tools like managing a classroom and differentiated instruction.”



Jonn McLain  
Math Teacher & Coach,  
Chadron High School

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CSC has also designated an individual to coordinate the college's efforts to comply with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Inquiries regarding Title IX may be directed to: Ted Tewahade, Title IX Coordinator, Chadron State College, 1000 Main St. Chadron, NE 69337, Telephone: 308-430-0980, Email: [titleixcoordinator@csc.edu](mailto:titleixcoordinator@csc.edu).



**Working with Wishart:** During legislative floor debate on LB147, NSEA members and staff were in the State Capitol Rotunda talking to senators. From left, NSEA Field and Special Projects Manager Michelle Raphael; Lincoln Sen. Anna Wishart; and NSEA-Retired member Arlene Rea.

# Safety Bill Takes Center Stage

## LB147 Gets Early Session Debate, Awaits Vote Tally for More Discussion

The first of NSEA’s legislative priorities took center stage as the opening act on the fourth day of the 2020 Nebraska Legislature.

After three hours in the spotlight, LB147 then effectively went to intermission as debate ended and the process of firming up the supporting cast for a second act began to draw attention.

LB147 would set into state statute the parameters by which school personnel can safely manage disruptive and violent students who might injure themselves, school staff or other students. LB147’s foundation is case law, *Daily vs. Morrill Board of Education*, successfully argued by NSEA attorneys before the Nebraska Supreme Court and decided in 1999.

“Too many teachers have been injured, too much instructional time has been lost because of disruptive and violent students,” said NSEA President Jenni Benson. “LB147 begins to move our classrooms back to normalcy.”

North Platte Sen. Mike Groene proposed LB147 a year ago, but the original version has essentially been rewritten by education stakeholders – including the NSEA, the Nebraska Council of School Administrators and the Nebraska Association of School Boards. As a result, LB147 now exists anew in the form of amendments. It will allow school personnel to use reasonable physical intervention to safely manage the behavior of a student to protect the student, other students and/or staff from physical injury.

LB147 also requires districts to develop a public policy on how and when a student can be removed – at the teacher’s request – from a classroom. The policy would include discipline that is proactive, instructive and restorative, among other requirements.

### Vivid Illustrations

From school district to school district, there exists a patchwork of policies and lack of understanding regarding what educators can or

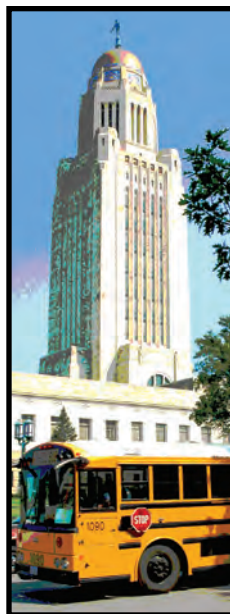
cannot do to safely keep students from harming themselves or others.

“There is no consistency in policy,” NSEA Executive Director Maddie Fennell told a reporter during the debate. “We’ve only got a case law from the 1990s that people rely on. We really need consistency, which will come through the statute and through this language.”

Underneath that patchwork there has been a growing wave of students who lash out at other students or school staff, threatening and committing assaults. Nebraska educators responded in December to an NSEA survey with a disturbing list of instances in which teachers have been attacked and harmed (see page 8). Those reports vividly illustrate the need for LB147.

“NSEA’s goal is to ensure that all students and staff can learn and teach in a safe and supportive environment,” said Benson.

While initial debate on LB147 was limited to three hours, further debate relies on proof that the bill has 33 votes to end debate and move it to the next stage of consideration. Sponsors are confident those votes are in the fold.



**Nebraska Legislature ‘20**

### Training, De-Escalation

Meanwhile, five related pieces have been placed on the legislative docket. An amendment, by Lincoln Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks, limits and further defines restraint school personnel can use to safely manage students involved in violent disruptions. It also bars prone restraint and mechanical restraint.

Sen. Lynne Walz, Fremont, has offered another amendment which limits physical restraint to use after “every reasonable effort has been made to de-escalate a potentially harmful situation.”

LB998, by Groene, provides training in approved de-escalation and restraint techniques for all school personnel, beginning as early as next fall.

Funding for that training using state lottery dollars is a part of another bill, LB920, introduced in January (see page 9).

A bill proposed by NSEA has been offered by Sen. Mike Hilgers of Lincoln. LB1186 states that injury to a school employee on school

property or on duty for the school district, and caused by the violent behavior of another individual, does not accrue sick leave.

LB1217 offered by Sen. Justin Wayne, Omaha, requires schools to develop a response plan for students who have been involved in violent incidents, to avoid future incidents. Further, it requires school districts to annually report these events to the Nebraska Department of Education.

### Student Relationships

NSEA is watching dozens of other carryover and new bills for this short, 60-day session. Here are some of the most important of those bills.

#### ■ Student Relationships:

Several bills further define penalties for authority figures who engage in sexual misconduct with students. Among them are LB1048 (Sen. Quick), and LB1080 (Sen. Lathrop). A work group of education stakeholders is assessing the student relationship bills to see which might be best suited for Nebraska.

■ **Lottery funds:** LB920 would re-allocate 8 percent of lottery proceeds to loan



**Friendly Persuasion:** Bellevue Sen. Carol Blood, center, met at the State Capitol with NSEA Vice President and Millard Education Association President Paul Schulte, left, and Lincoln Education Association President Rita Bennett, right, to discuss her concerns about LB147.

forgiveness, with 60 percent of that amount to undergraduates and 40 percent to teachers working on master's degrees. It would also provide partial funding to teachers seeking National Board Certification; would pay the cost for the Praxis Subject Assessments for teachers seeking state certification; and would provide funds for proper behavior awareness and intervention, as mentioned earlier.

## Purported Property Tax Reform Would Hamstring Public Schools

### LB974 Provisions Include Drastic Budget Lids

NSEA opposes the Revenue Committee's bill that would purportedly provide long-term property tax relief in Nebraska.

The problem to those who take a long-lens look at the world is this: LB974 uses the current, one-time state revenue surplus to provide property tax reform, with no guarantee that state revenues will be able to sustain that level of relief when difficult economic times arrive.

Meanwhile, LB974 further tightens already strict budget lids on Nebraska school districts. When those hard times hit and the state's property tax relief fund shrinks or dries up, those draconian budget lids will remain in place. The combination of shrinking state funding and strict budget lids will cripple public school budgets and the educational opportunity for all students — and for the future of our state.

No one believes that the state's business incentive program would be cut or limited in hard times. Sadly, it's unlikely the state would choose a kindergarten's future over a business deal.

Here is what LB974 would do:

■ It would impose strict Consumer Price Index-based budget lids on Ne-

braska school districts. However, the CPI does not measure construction costs, the cost of a new school bus, health care costs, energy or other school-related expenses. However, the CPI could limit budget growth to as little as zero percent. The current cap on school budget growth is 2 percent — less than the 2.9 percent growth in state government last year and the same rate Gov. Ricketts has pledged to meet for next year.

■ The bill would provide “foundational aid” to every school district, in an effort to provide property tax relief, a provision that will create state aid winners and losers.

School districts already operate within taxing and spending limits. LB974 would take funding from the schools that most need it and make it more difficult for school officials to plan for the future and provide a quality education to all students.

“The goal for state lawmakers must be to provide property tax relief with a plan that does not hurt our students and schools and that does not rely on an unreliable, projected one-time surplus,” said NSEA President Jenni Benson.

NSEA members are asked to contact their state senators to ask them to vote against LB974. Email your senator through a link on NSEA's site at:

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

## Teachers Tell of Violent Encounters

### Survey Responses Relate Harrowing Encounters

More than 160 educators answered an NSEA survey to chronicle the violence and disturbances they've encountered in their schools. Most educators asked that identifying remarks be kept confidential. Here are some of the highlights, which were shared with state senators.

*A student began kicking and throwing school items. I escorted student into hallway using Mandt certified training. The student bit me and began punching me and hitting me in the face. The student also made several more attempts to bite me. Even with certified Mandt restraint I was bitten and punched. After 1.5 hours of this, I made the decision to call the parent to send the student home.*

*Student threw three chairs across the room, almost hitting several other students and my co-worker.*

*Student was asked to go to hallway to cool down, per behavior plan. Upon trying to process with student after cool down time was complete, the student swung at me and the para. He then threw a recycle can at my head, cutting it open. Student also slammed my head into a brick wall, concussing me. This student was returned to my classroom the next day.*

*A student took a laptop computer and hit me in the face deliberately and with force, injuring my left eye and nose — I had a black eye and was in pain for two days. The student was put up for long-term suspension and reassignment — both of which were denied. Student is set to report back to my classroom.*

*A student poked me in the chest and said I should look out as I was weak, little and small.*

*Last spring I was stabbed in the back of the neck with a pencil.*

*Violent student behavior is an almost daily occurrence in our building. It's becoming more unusual to have a day without it.*

*A kindergarten student was upset about not getting a break and became violent. While trying to prevent her from throwing objects at other children she repeatedly kicked me in my legs and knees. My right knee was dislocated.*

*The student did not want to do what he was asked to do. I reached for him so he couldn't run out of the building into the road. He bit my left forearm and drew blood.*



# To Support LB147, Pass LB920

## Companion Bill Would Fund Training, Enhance Loan Forgiveness

### Would Help with Cost of Praxis Assessment

In order to ensure Nebraska's public schools are safe havens of teaching and learning for all, NSEA is in full support of the provisions and intent of the amended version of LB147.

But for LB147 to be most effective, it requires passage of other supportive measures, which is why NSEA President Jenni Benson and NSEA Executive Director Maddie Fennell each testified before the Legislature's Education Committee in favor of LB920.

LB920 is a multi-faceted bill offered by Sen. Mike Groene of North Platte. As it affects Groene's LB147, LB920 would provide the funding for expedited de-escalation and violence intervention training to school staff across the state.

However, the bill also proposes something more for Nebraska teachers: increased funding for the state's loan forgiveness programs and funding for those teachers who seek National Board Certification.

Benson testified to the need for funding the Behavior Awareness and Intervention Training for educators across Nebraska.

"While each school district would continue to exercise local control in terms of training offered, best practices would be promoted statewide by requiring school districts to provide evidence-based training on a continuum of interventions," said Benson.

That would include training to recognize detrimental factors affecting student behavior, including students affected by trauma; positive behavior support and proactive teaching strategies; and verbal intervention and de-escalation techniques.

### Last for a Reason

Last on the list – for a reason – is physical intervention for safety. "Please notice that physical intervention is the last part of the con-

tinuum – that is because professional educators seek to use preventative and de-escalating techniques first," Benson told senators.

"Teachers need the tools to assist not only our special education students, but the rising number of students we serve who come to school with many experiences of trauma that deeply affect them," she said. "We want to give all children the opportunity to succeed. For that to happen, all teachers and school staff must have adequate and appropriate training."



**Capitol Bound:** NSEA President Jenni Benson, left, and Executive Director Maddie Fennell head to the State Capitol to testify in favor of LB920.

### Loan Forgiveness

Fennell voiced NSEA's support for the aspects of LB920 that expand the ability to support both pre-service and current educators.

Provisions of LB920 would alter the allotment of lottery dollars assigned to the state's teacher loan forgiveness program. Under the proposal, 60 percent of the allotment would go to the Attracting Excellence to Teaching Program – pre-service educators – and the remaining 40 percent would go to the Enhancing Excellence in Teaching Program.

### Praxis Payment

NSEA also backs adding National Board Certification Training grants to the

Enhancing Excellence in Teaching Program, she said.

"Multiple studies have shown that National Board Certification does more to improve student achievement than does obtaining a master's degree," said Fennell, who holds National Board credentials and a master's degree.

Fennell also noted support for the provision that would assist pre-service teachers with the cost of the Praxis subject area assessment required to gain teacher certification in Nebraska.

"We have heard from many students that payment for these tests, on top of student loans, is a hardship. We support easing this burden on future educators by assisting with payment for the subject area Praxis," said Fennell.

LB920 remained in committee at press time.

## Follow the Legislature with the Help of NSEA!

Senators need to know teachers are interested and watching. They also need to hear from teachers in order to know what is going on in schools so that they can make fact-based decisions. It's easy to do.

Keeping on top of issues is also easy — almost imperative — as state law touches nearly every action a teacher takes in the classroom. Here are some simple methods for staying on top of the issues:

- Add your name to NSEA's e-mail list to receive NSEA's weekly Capitol Update emails. To get the Update via email, subscribe at:

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

- Call the NSEA. Call toll-free at 1-800-742-0047. An experienced team of NSEA staffers watch the legislative process closely.

- Read NSEA's *The Voice* magazine to stay abreast of the latest

news and latest happenings.

- Scan the Internet: Follow progress of any legislative bill at: [nebraskalegislature.gov](http://nebraskalegislature.gov)

- Call the Legislature's 24-Hour request line for the weekly Unicameral Update. Dial 1-402- 471-2877.

- Write your senator: Simply address the envelope with the senator's name and district number, and complete the address with State Capitol, P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509-4604.

You can also email your senator via the Legislature's website at: [nebraskalegislature.gov](http://nebraskalegislature.gov)

Or you can email your senator through a link on NSEA's site at: [www.nsea.org/legislature](http://www.nsea.org/legislature)



**Meeting with the OS:** Fillmore Central Education Association members Kris Nun, left, and Melissa Myers meeting with their NSEA Organizational Specialist, Jen Dubas, at the NSEA booth at York MLK Conference 2020.



**Understanding Bias:** NSEA Organizational Specialist Isau Metes, at right, in blue, presented a session at the York MLK Conference 2020 on Implicit and Explicit Bias. Metes' session was one of dozens offered through the day.

## At York, Necessity Created Regional Professional Growth

A day-long professional development opportunity created out of necessity for teachers at York has grown into a regional phenomenon that now draws more than 600 educators each Martin Luther King Day.

The York MLK Conference 2020 featured national speakers, regional experts and educators from across east central Nebraska. NSEA was a sponsor this year, providing funding that helped deliver Rubén Pérez as the keynote. Pérez is a behavior specialist and wrote *Welcome to U.S. Schools: A Guide for Spanish-Speaking Immigrant Parents*.

Nationally recognized speakers like Pérez are exactly the reason behind the success of the York conference. A dozen years ago, the district was in a tough financial situation, and could not afford to send teachers to the professional development programming that teachers need to keep their skills sharp.

“Dr. (Mike) Lucas, our superintendent

at the time, was a ‘find a way’ problem solver,” said York Public Schools District Administrator Beth Ericson. “We knew we couldn’t send our teachers to national or regional conferences, so the decision was made to grow this.”

The first conferences were York-only affairs that provided differentiated professional development with one or two keynote speakers. But word of those small, York-only affairs soon spread. Educators at Shelby-Rising City were interested – so interested that “their district was one of the first to close school on that day and give teachers a full day of professional development,” said Ericson.

The rest, as they say, is history. Over the years, educators from a dozen or more school districts have attended. This year’s focus was emotional health and featured breakouts around that topic. For instance, Pérez spoke on Emotional Poverty in All Demographics. NSEA Organizational Spe-

cialist Isau Metes hosted a breakout session on Implicit and Explicit Bias.

Other topics were Narrowing the Gap with Flexible Grouping, Special Education Through the Eyes of the Family and Creating an Equitable Education Experience.

Ericson said attendees are charged a minimal fee to assist with costs and said NSEA’s financial support which helped to deliver Pérez, was appreciated.

“NSEA has been awesome in supporting the conference,” she said.

NSEA President Jenni Benson said it was another way to support teachers and students – a core portion of NSEA’s strategic plan.

“Teachers and students and success: that’s what NSEA is all about,” she said.

## Don’t Forget Your Deduction for Supplies!

Teachers and education support professionals can claim an above-the-line federal tax deduction for the first \$250 of “out-of-pocket” spending on student supplies. The above-the-line deduction is important because an eligible school employee does not have to itemize deductions to qualify.

Further, if both spouses are educators, they can deduct up to \$500.

Because of federal tax law changes, however, Association members will not receive an email from NSEA with their 2019 union dues amount for tax purposes.

Changes to the federal tax code have meant that educators will no longer be allowed to deduct dues to professional associations as a miscellaneous itemized deduction.

Prior to 2018, individuals could potentially deduct dues to professional associations, subject to the 2 percent of adjusted gross income. However, the tax code was changed in 2018 and miscellaneous itemized deductions are no longer allowed.

For more details, and for the best advice, contact your professional tax preparer.

**Elect  
Jordan Koch**



**NSEA Vice President**  
[facebook.com/koch4vp](https://facebook.com/koch4vp)

# 'We Needed a Question Answered in a Hurry'

## In Midst of Evening Negotiations, Tekamah-Herman EA Needed Information and NSEA Answered the Call

When members of the Tekamah-Herman Education Association's negotiations team were in the middle of contract talks one evening in early December, they had a question about reduction-in-force policies. They needed an answer in a hurry.

A quick answer might lead to a tentative settlement yet that evening. An unanswered question would mean the stress of scheduling and meeting for another bargaining session, perhaps after the start of the new year.

The team weighed options, considered consequences and made the late-evening call to NSEA. THEA President Jane Walford related the story in an email to NSEA.

### Confirmation of the Recollection

"We needed a question answered in a hurry and once again, NSEA had us covered," said Walford.

"We came to the table last week with an initial proposal that included the following: increasing base salary by \$800; increasing (classroom) cover pay for teachers giving up their only plan time; payment for ticket taking – we were doing it for free; and including the extra duty schedule in the negotiated agreement," said Walford.

The school board representative responded with an offer for \$650 on base, no change in cover pay, \$10 per session on ticket-taking, including the extra duty schedule in the negotiated agreement. The board offer also removed the district's Reduction-in-Force policy from the negotiated agreement.

Walford said the board had proposed eliminating the RIF policy a few years ago, so THEA negotiators had asked about that option at an NSEA bargaining workshop. Walford said the recollection was that NSEA experts indicated reduction in force is adequately covered in state statute, so RIF language is not essential to a good contract.

In fact, they recalled, because a RIF policy in contract language is not prevalent among similar-sized school districts, its presence might eventually be harmful if the school district-THEA negotiations ever reached the Commission on Industrial Relations stage. The THEA team wanted to confirm that recollection before moving forward.

"We called the NSEA's toll-free 800 number last night to confirm whether what we remembered from the workshop was true," wrote Walford. "We were given a number for (NSEA Director of Advocacy) Trish Guinan as an emergency contact. We called Trish and got our answer. Trish advised us to use the RIF policy as a bargaining chip and we did."

The THEA team caucused, considered all options, and decided that building the salary base was the best option for this round of negotiations.

"We went back to the table with a \$700 addition to the base and agreed to the rest of the board's offer," she said. "They agreed."

So in addition to the \$700 on base, THEA members will now be paid for taking tickets and the extra duty schedule is now safely ensconced in contract language.

### 'A Tremendous Asset'

"Having an expert 'on call' to answer our question at that moment made the difference between being finished with negotiations last night and having to meet one more time so we could research the question before agreeing," she said. "NSEA came through in a pinch. It saved us time and stress."

NSEA Executive Director Maddie Fennell said it was typical for Guinan to respond.

"I'm not surprised that Trish was such a tremendous asset. She is 100 percent member-centered and lives with a phone in her hand," said Fennell.

NSEA Organizational Specialist Carol Hicks works with Walford and THEA members. Hicks assured Walford that NSEA would give all support needed regarding state statutes and RIF procedures, if required.

"We appreciate the support THEA gives to NSEA and to other THEA members by attending events and conferences hosted by NSEA. It does indeed make a difference," she said.



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# Internet Sensation to Keynote Assembly

## '19 Teacher of the Year Jensen Leads Professional Development

A recent internet sensation has been secured as the keynote speaker for the 2020 NSEA Delegate Assembly.

Sydney Jensen, Nebraska's 2019 Teacher of the Year, will headline the April 24-25 meeting at Lincoln's Marriott Cornhusker Hotel. Jensen will address delegates and members on Friday evening, prior to two rounds of professional development breakout sessions for delegates and members.

A Georgia native, Jensen teaches freshman English at Lincoln High School. She was named 2019 Nebraska Teacher of the Year and in October 2019 was featured as a TED Master-class speaker asking, "How Can We Support the Emotional Well-Being of Teachers?" Her 11-plus minute talk explores how teachers are at risk of secondary trauma. Her video has been viewed more than 1.3 million times.

Jensen will also provide one of the many professional development sessions that are now a staple of NSEA's Delegate Assembly over the past two years. Session topics in the past have included trauma, social emotional learning, compassion fatigue, school safety and security, and creating discussions that teach thinking.

Jensen is an instructional coach, and a certified trainer of trainers for the Classroom That Works model. She has a bachelor's degree in English education from the University of Georgia and a master's in educational leadership from Doane University.

The Assembly is NSEA's annual business meeting. Any member in good standing can seek election to attend and participate in Delegate Assembly, which includes the Friday night professional development and Jensen's address, and Saturday's day of action. Any member can attend the Friday professional development sessions.

On Saturday, April 25, delegates will get down to business. They will consider proposed changes to Association Bylaws and Resolu-



**To Headline Delegate Assembly: Nebraska 2019 Teacher of the Year Sydney Jensen will be the keynote speaker at NSEA's 159th Delegate Assembly on April 24.**

tions, will elect a president, vice president and a member of the NEA Board of Directors, and will approve dues for the 2020-21 Association year. A handful of awards honoring members and those who have contributed to the betterment of public education will be presented.

Delegates will also enjoy opportunities to network with 300 delegate/colleagues from across the state.

The 2020 event will be NSEA's 159th Assembly since the Association's founding in 1867. Members have met for the Assembly every year since – except 1918 due to the flu epidemic – and sometimes twice each year.

To make your interest in serving as a delegate known, contact your local association president, your local association building representative, or your NSEA organizational specialist at 1-800-742-0047. All delegates must be elected. Learn more at:

[nsea.org/delegateassembly](https://nsea.org/delegateassembly)

## Nominate a Co-worker for NSEA Recognition

Now is a good time to begin discussing who you or your association would like to nominate for one of the honors to be given at NSEA's 159th Delegate Assembly in April.

For the awards, any NSEA member may nominate a member teacher, ESP or deserving group. Mailed nominations must be postmarked by Friday, Feb. 14, 2020, and should be sent to NSEA Awards, 605 S. 14th St., Lincoln, NE 68508-2742. Nominations may also be submitted online, with required supporting material mailed to the NSEA. Online nomination forms are found under the 'Call for Nominations' link at:

[nsea.org/delegateassembly](https://nsea.org/delegateassembly)

The 2020 Delegate Assembly will be held at Lincoln's Marriott Cornhusker Hotel on Friday evening and Saturday, April 24-25. NSEA members are eligible for:

- **Rookie of the Year:** Honors a first-year teacher who excelled in the 2018-19 school year.
- **Award for Teaching Excellence:** Honors a teacher who has excelled over time.
- **Education Support Professional of the Year:** Honors an ESP who has excelled in his or her job.

Finalists will be notified in March, with winners revealed at Delegate Assembly. Recipients receive a \$250 cash award. NSEA members are also eligible for:

- **The Great Plains Milestone Award:** Honors an individual/group for promoting human and civil rights.

- **Community Service:** Honors NSEA members and/or local associations involved in volunteer work outside of classroom hours.
- **Local Public Relations:** Honors local associations for outstanding communication within the association. Also to be presented:
- **Friend of Education:** Honors an individual or organization that has made a statewide contribution to education.

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# An Opportunity for Nebraska



**Teacher  
Mark Gudgel**

*Note: The author is an English, humanities and world religions teacher at Omaha North High School. He gave these remarks at the 2020 Teacher of the Year luncheon at NSEA in November, where he was a finalist and where Burwell Public Schools English teacher Megan Helberg was formally inducted as 2020 Nebraska Teacher of the Year. In his opening remarks, Gudgel thanked “the 278 young people in my charge whose idealism and effort renew my hope in the future of this nation on a daily basis.”*

## By Mark Gudgel

Over the past 16 years I’ve worked in some capacity in four high schools, three middle schools, and two colleges in the state of Nebraska. I know that our teachers are among the best in the nation, a legion of the most dedicated, passionate, and talented professionals anywhere, and while today there are four of us being honored, there could easily be 40 or 400. To the teachers of the state of Nebraska, I am grateful, and I am proud to call you my colleagues. Thank you.

One colleague in particular stands out today. Ironically, I think Megan Helberg and I met in Washington, D.C. I’ve known Megan for many, many years and she is truly extraordinary. I know that Nebraska will be very well represented by her as our 2020 Teacher of the Year. Congratulations, my friend!

I mentioned that Megan and I met in Washington, D.C., — Washington isn’t where leadership comes from in this country. Leadership emanates from the states that make up the union, and from the people who make up those states — people like the teachers and students I mentioned before.

When states lead, amazing things happen. In 1980, for example, Nebraska was the first state to divest from South Africa. And when the other 49 states followed, America had played a meaningful role in helping bring an end to Apartheid.

## A Human Right

Nebraska is also able to lead in education. From the onset we have rejected the Common Core for the foolishness that it is — yet another weak attempt to quantify human intellect, because Nebraska values and common sense remind us that the things that count most can rarely be counted.

Further, Nebraska leads by being one of the few states that refuses to allow charter schools to corrupt and contaminate our system. Our state motto, *Equality Before the Law*, reminds us in no uncertain terms that education is a human right, and that charging money for literacy, numeracy, and the knowledge of scientific principles needed to sustain life in the long term is no less evil than charging money for the oxygen needed to sustain life in the short term.

Today, as we prepare to transition into the third decade of the 21st century, Nebraska again has an opportunity to lead in education. Across our nation, hundreds of the best universities and colleges have declared themselves “test optional”, openly rejecting the ACT and SAT in favor of more meaningful application criteria. And across our nation, from Los Angeles through Chicago to West Virginia, a shortage of teachers and resources has pushed tens of thousands of my colleagues past their collective breaking point, driving them to strike.

## Imagine ...

Today, Nebraska can address the issues that are playing out on a national stage and once again lead at the statewide level. Imagine a state in which children were assessed not with arbitrary and anxiety-causing multiple guess assessments concocted for the primary purpose of making money for a corporation, but instead by asking students what they know, who they are, who they want to become, what they believe in — and then adding to that foundation.

Imagine a state full of teachers neither overworked nor underpaid, regarded as the dedicated guides to a brighter future that they are. And imagine our entire nation taking note of what that state was doing, and then following suit as they have in the past, paving the way for all students, regardless of race, gender, or how much money their parents have — to chart their own pathways to success.

That’s my vision for Nebraska, and if it wasn’t already, I hope that today perhaps it can become your vision as well. Nebraska has led, and Nebraska must continue to lead in education if our nation is to have a future worthy of the precious young people who my colleagues and I in the public schools are preparing to inherit it. Thank you.

“  
...Nebraska must  
continue to lead  
in education  
if our nation is  
to have a future  
worthy of the  
precious young  
people who my  
colleagues  
and I in  
the public  
schools  
are preparing  
to inherit it.”



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# Three Keynotes Locked In as NSEA U Plans Take Shape



## Four-Star Speakers Set for July Conference

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln football team signed a lot of talent on national signing day in early January. But those signatures may have been overshadowed by the trio of all-star talents who signed to appear at NSEA University in July.

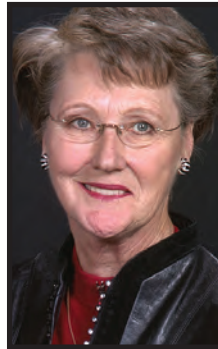
Keynotes at the July 14-16 edition of NSEA University will be:

■ **Ted Dintersmith**, who spent two decades in venture capital, including four years as the Business 2.0's top-performing U.S. venture capitalist. Dintersmith has a Ph.D. in engineering from Stanford University. Today, he is one of America's leading advocates for education policies that foster creativity, innovation, motivation and purpose.

■ **Dr. JoAnne Owens-Nauslar**, a Lincoln resident, has spent more than 40 years promoting the benefits of healthy, active living. She is considered one of the nation's most vocal personalities on the issues of physical activity and the need for physical education. She has been described as "past president of nearly everything," which includes the National Association for Sport and Physical Education; the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance; and The Husker Athletic Fund.



Dintersmith



Owens-Nauslar



Robinson

■ **Rodney Robinson** is the 2020 U.S. Teacher of the Year who began his career in middle and high schools in Richmond, VA, and now teaches in a juvenile detention center. His classroom at the detention center is decorated with college banners for Ivy League, Virginia and historically black colleges and universities. Robinson focuses on the whole child: "You encourage social, emotional growth before you get to academic growth. Showing the kid that you care about them, you care about their well-being, and you want them to be a better person, when they see that, they tend to buy into whatever teaching strategy or methods you engage them with."

Each keynote will speak on a different day, and then contribute sessions as part of more than 150 professional development sessions during that week.

The goal of NSEA U is to provide professional development that will improve the skills of Nebraska educators.

The event will feature tracks for Leadership Institute invitees, for early-in-their-career educators, as well as members of any kind. Other tracks will offer topics under the five provisions of NSEA's strategic plan: bargaining, membership, politics, governance and social justice.

More details and information about registration will be available in the March edition of *The Voice*, and at:

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

**Proposals Sought for NSEA U**

There will be up to 180 breakout sessions available at NSEA University in Lincoln in July.

If you have a proposal for a professional development session that would be useful to your Association colleagues, please fill out the Request for Proposal form at: [www.nsea.org/PDRFP](http://www.nsea.org/PDRFP)

## Beat Back Winter's Blues with These Tips from EHA Wellness

Do the gray, chilly days get you down this time of year?

Winter in Nebraska can seem endless at the start the new year. With spring break in the distant future, we may start feeling more than just cold. Sometimes the winter blues set in and we just want to curl up on the couch to wait for warmer weather.

If you find yourself feeling a little down, lethargic or sad...don't worry. There are several things you can do to not just survive the rest of winter, but actually enjoy it!

■ **Exercise:** Bundle up for a walk outside, do an exercise DVD or dance with your kids. Getting movement in your day will help increase your energy levels.

■ **Eat Smarter:** Choose whole, unprocessed foods like whole grains, fruits and vegetables to help improve mood and promote overall health.

■ **Nurture Your Spirit:** Embrace the slower pace of winter by curling up with a good book or writing in your journal.

■ **Check Your Vitamin D:** Since we get most of our Vitamin D from the sun, it's a good idea to check your levels in the winter as

low levels can make us feel fatigued. Your doctor will help figure out what's best for you.

■ **Try Something New:** Take advantage of time indoors to learn a new hobby, play a challenging game or cook something new for dinner. Keeping our brain active is a great way to improve our mental well-being.


■ **Start a Project:** Stuck inside? Now's the time to clean out that closet or drawer and reduce clutter. Just 15 minutes a day can relieve stress and you'll get a jump on spring cleaning.

■ **Embrace the Season:** If you really dislike winter, it can help to learn to appreciate the elements rather than cursing them. Try finding the beauty in the crisp cold morning, the joy of children playing in the snow or even the feel of the warm house when you come inside.

■ **Hang with Positive People:** If negativity gets too thick with the people you are spending a lot of time with, it's not good for our well-being. The people around us influence us more than we think – if you are feeling down, choose your companions wisely!

*Provided by the Educators Health Alliance Wellness Program. Learn more about the EHA Wellness Program at [ehawellness.org](http://ehawellness.org)*





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# Feeling Burned Out? Join NSEA's Webinar

## February Edition of NSEA's Monthly Series Will Help to Cope with Burnout Issues

It has been a long school year — and February is just getting started. Add to that, remember that February has a 29th day this year!



Jensen

If such statements make your shoulders sag a little bit more, cheer up, help is on the way!

The February edition of the NSEA professional development webinar series will look at another topic every teacher can appreciate, especially at this time of year: Preventing Burnout.

Presenting will be Sydney Jensen, the 2019 Nebraska Teacher of the Year and an instructional coach and certified trainer of trainers for the Classroom That Works model at Lincoln High School.

Jensen's presentation will take place on Thursday, Feb. 13, at 6:30

p.m.

Jensen gained national recognition for her 2019 TED Talk Masterclass feature that asked "How Can We Support the Emotional Well-Being of Teachers?" She will also keynote NSEA's 2020 Delegate Assembly (see page 12).

Her NSEA webinar presentation will provide ideas and methods teachers can use to reduce stress and avoid burnout — an important consideration at this or any time of year.

Any NSEA member interested may participate in the webinar program, which uses the Zoom platform. Members can register at this link:

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

NSEA's professional development offerings are a component of the Association's plan to provide professional growth in the profession. Utilizing the Zoom platform allows NSEA to reach teachers across the state, wherever they are most comfortable learning.

Future monthly webinar topics include:

- Trauma-Informed Classrooms, Thursday, March 12.

- Restorative Practices, Thursday, April 9.

All programs begin at 6:30 p.m., CST.



## WEBINAR SERIES

REGISTER ONLINE AT:  
[WWW.NSEA.ORG/WEBINARS](http://WWW.NSEA.ORG/WEBINARS)

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

[cindy.copich@nsea.org](mailto:cindy.copich@nsea.org)

For those who may wish to check out recordings of past webinars, note that those sessions are available at the webinar registration page listed above, along with many other resources.

Past sessions available on the website include:

- Getting a Good Start: Setting Clear Expectations, Classroom Procedures & Routines.

- Building a Positive Learning Environment.

- The Importance of Social-Emotional Learning.

- Building Student Accountability: An Alternative to Punishment.

## Tri-State Offers PD at Sioux City

Educators in northeast Nebraska take note: there is a new professional development opportunity ahead.

The 2020 Tri-State Summit is set for Saturday, March 7, and is sponsored by NSEA, the Iowa State Education Association, the South Dakota Education Association and the Iowa Northwest Area Education Agency.

The theme is **Creating Thriving Learning Environments for ALL Students**. The conference will focus on assisting students to learn the social emotional skills of self-awareness, self-management, decision making, and relationship management.

Keynote will be Dr. Palma Strand,

director of Creighton University's 2040 Initiative. Her topic will be Naming and Connecting Through Race and Other Differences to Grow a Culture of Belonging.

Nebraska educators will receive details about a certificate for continuing education hours. There is also an opportunity for graduate credit through the University of Sioux Falls.

Registration opens at 8:30 a.m., the program at 9 a.m. It will conclude at 3 p.m. The Summit will be held at the Iowa Northwest Area Education Agency at 1520 Morningside Ave., Sioux City, IA.

Cost is \$25 for association members, \$50 for non-members. To register, go to:

<http://www.cvent.com/d/xhqhhr>

## Elect Robert Miller



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## Let NEAMB Work to Save You Cash This Winter!

We're in the heart of winter, but it isn't too late to make some resolutions for the remainder of the year.

How about considering some of these offers as you sort out plans for the rest of the year? In every case, NEA Member Benefits has you covered!

■ Make a resolution to travel more this year and save with Hertz! NEA members save up to 25 percent off base rates on Hertz's best fleet ever. Plus, skip the counter and save time when you sign up for Hertz Gold Plus Rewards®. It's free to join. Terms apply. Learn more at: [www.neamb.com/hertz](http://www.neamb.com/hertz)

■ Learn more about health and fitness through the NEA Magazine Service. The offerings through this service will get you inspired by others' achievements and provide new tips for getting in tip-top shape! The NEA Magazine Service offers dozens of titles covering exercise, nutrition, and your favorite sports. Plus save up to 85 percent off newsstand prices. To view complete lists of titles and to place your order, please visit [www.neamag.com](http://www.neamag.com)

■ If you're in the market for a new or used car, the NEA Auto Buying Program through TrueCar is the first place to look! NEA members and their families enjoy preferred pricing year-round, save an average of \$3,402 off MSRP on new cars, plus get these benefits: used car discounts with savings in the hundreds off list price (in most states); a 'see what others paid' option that allows you to see what others paid for the same car so you know you're getting a good or great price; up front pricing that lets you see pricing, price rankings and lets you lock in savings on the car you want before you leave home.

Visit the NEA Auto Buying Program today to see how much you save! Go to: [www.neamb.com/buyacar](http://www.neamb.com/buyacar)

# The Six Smartest Ways to Spend Your Tax Refund

## Should You Save or Spend?

### By NEA Member Benefits

So you got a nice, big tax refund this year. Now comes the hard part: How to spend it?

It's a decision that many Americans will have to make this year. For last year's 2018 tax-filing season, the Internal Revenue Service issued about 111 million refunds, with the average refund last year topping \$2,781.

Obviously, we're talking about a lot of money. And it's tempting to blow it all on an exotic vacation, designer clothes or a state-of-the-art home entertainment center. But you probably want to think twice about such plans.

To help provide some guidance, we've spoken to several personal-finance professionals who offered these six ways to spend your refund:

**1 Pay down that credit card balance.** Financial experts universally rank paying down expensive debt at the top of the list of "smart tax-refund spending ideas." And guess where you're likely keeping your most costly debt? That's right: It's generated by that tiny piece of plastic in your wallet.

"By using proceeds from your tax refund to pay off that debt, you're reducing your interest," says Ryan S. Himmel, a CPA and president/CEO of BIDA WIZ Inc. "If you think it's smarter to put money into the stock market, you'll need to earn 15 to 20 percent annually [equal to your card's interest rate] on those investments for that choice to make more sense."

**2 Invest for a comfy retirement.** Let's say you pay off your credit card bill every month. You can opt to invest all or part of your tax refund into your retirement portfolio, and you'll avoid even more taxes in the process.

"You can sock it away into an IRA—or make additional contributions to your work-based retirement plan—and reap the rewards of tax-deferred investing," Himmel says. "For many, a Roth IRA is very attractive. The principal grows tax-free, and there's no required minimum distribution during your lifetime as there is with a traditional IRA and work retirement plan."

**3 Build a "rainy day" cushion.** Personal-finance experts recommend that you keep three to six months' worth of expenses as an emergency fund that's readily accessible, such as a savings account. Building that cushion isn't exactly fun, but it's necessary in an unpredictable economy.

"No one likes to have an emergency fund —

until you have an emergency," says Chris Reining, founder of MrEverydayDollar.com. "Establishing this will help you when there's a job loss, medical issue or an unexpected home or car repair. Ultimately, you'll thank yourself."

**4 Keep it "in house."** If you own your home, consider making an extra mortgage principal payment, which will lower your overall mortgage debt. However, there are downsides to this idea, especially if you have significant credit card debt, which typically has a higher interest rate than a mortgage. (See suggestion No. 1.)

**5 Give it away.** Donating all or part of the donation to charity isn't just the right thing to do; it's also a smart move. Depending on your personal situation, it could lower your tax bill.

**6 Have fun!** OK, we don't want to be total buzz killers here. It's perfectly reasonable to enjoy spending a big refund. But maybe you should consider a tech toy or nice dinner as opposed to a cruise or a down payment on a new car.

"I have a little trick you can use here," Reining says. "I call it the 90/10 rule. Take 90 percent of your return and commit it to a 'responsible' choice. Then, take what's left over and enjoy that new gadget, fancy dinner or weekend getaway."

Should you get a big refund each year? Receiving a big check from Uncle Sam can be viewed as a bad thing. Why? Because it represents an interest-free loan you've made to the U.S. government. Instead of withholding all of that cash from your paycheck, you could have been putting it to work by building your emergency fund, paying off debt and investing.

To avoid excessive withholding throughout the year, first discuss your W-4 form with a human-resources representative and/or a certified tax professional.

However, you don't want to cut the withholdings too close. In fact, some consider fretting over the "giving the government an interest-free loan" thing to be overstated.

At today's interest rates, you're giving up a few dollars a year. However, the tax penalties for under-withholding are severe. They also can result in having to file quarterly tax estimates for years. Given that, obsessing about withholding too much simply isn't worth the potential hassle.

*Learn more about tax preparation for educators and find helpful tips about budgeting, credit, managing debt and other financial topics at [neamb.com/personal-finance](http://neamb.com/personal-finance).*



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# No One Easy Answer



**Executive Director  
Maddie Fennell**

“

**That education system is a web of interdependency that cannot be made stronger by only addressing one strand of the web.**

”

A lot has been said about LB147, much of it by people who haven't even read the bill. Sadder, much has been misrepresented by people who HAVE read the bill. I want to set the record straight.

NSEA supports LB147 with Amendment 1803, currently on General File status with the Nebraska Legislature. The Nebraska Association of School Boards and the Nebraska Council of School Administrators are also in support.

The first provision allows teachers and other school personnel to use reasonable physical intervention to safely manage the behavior of a student to: (a) Protect such student, another student, a teacher or other school personnel, or another person from physical injury; or (b) Secure property in the possession of such student if the possession of such property by such student poses a threat of physical injury to such student, another student, a teacher or other school personnel, or another person. Following the use of physical intervention, the parent or guardian must be notified.

Much has been said about the word "reasonable." A common legal standard, "reasonable" is used in these situations because these situations are incredibly diverse and fact specific. That language was crafted after examining language from laws in other states. That examination found that being too specific comes with a risk: the risk of not being able to address a unique and exigent situation.

If someone hits you with a towel, "reasonable" force to stop it might be to push them away. If someone were to hit you with a baseball bat, then "reasonable" force would likely be much more than a push.

How does this relate to "reasonable" as applied in a jury trial? If jurors find your action to be reasonable, they will not find you liable for resulting harm. However, if your actions were not deemed reasonable – a jury determines you used excessive force – you would be held liable. This bill does **NOT** provide blanket immunity.

### **They Remain Opposed**

The second provision requires school districts to have a publicly available policy that outlines the process for removing and returning a student to class, noting that IDEA/Special Education laws must be followed. The policy shall: (a) describe how and when a student may be removed from a class and returned to a class; (b) use a discipline process that is proactive, instructive, and restorative; (c) require appropriate communication between administrators, teachers or other school personnel, students, and parents or guardians.

It also states that an administrator or administrator's designee shall immediately remove a student from a class upon request, if the teacher or other school personnel has followed school policy in requesting the removal of such student.

This means that a teacher who follows school policy in asking for a student to be removed must be supported by the administrator regarding both the removal and return of the student to class.

NSEA met with stakeholders from ARC, ACLU, Voices for Children and others to work out details of Amendment 1803. Many of the concerns of these groups were met in Amendment 1750, which we also agreed to support. However, we were told that even if we accepted all the amendments proposed by these organizations, they would remain opposed to the bill.

### **Supporting Legislation**

LB147 isn't by itself the final answer to all the issues facing educators. That is why we support numerous other pieces of legislation that touch this area:

■ LB920 (Groene) which provides funding from state lottery money for teacher professional development and the support of pre-service teachers;

■ LB998 (Murman) which would require behavioral awareness and intervention training and points of contact at each school;

■ LB1023 (DeBoer) to assist school districts with special education expenses;

■ LB1186 (Hilgers) requiring school districts to have injury leave for employees who are attacked at school, rather than have the employee use sick leave;

■ LB1217 (Wayne) requires individualized response plans following violent behavior of students and requires schools to document and report such incidents each year to the Department of Education;

■ And multiple pieces of legislation to address the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center issues at Kearney and Geneva.

### **One Strand of the Web...**

In addition, NSEA has partnered with the National Education Association to continue to provide:

■ Trauma-Informed Classroom professional development;

■ Social justice retreats and professional development, including *Challenging Racism: Learning How through Stories and Conversation* classes and alumni network support;

■ Resources for Educators Rising chapters in high schools across the state, seeking to encourage students – especially students of color – to consider teaching as a career;

■ Mentoring and instructional coaching for new teachers, focusing on rural areas;

■ Group and one-on-one Praxis tutoring for those seeking to become teachers;

■ Expansion of our Next Generation of Educators (NGEN) committee to support teachers in their first seven years of teaching;

■ A series of community forums, beginning in late spring, to engage people across the state in strengthening our state's system of public education.

That education system is a web of interdependency that cannot be made stronger by only addressing one strand of the web.

NSEA is committed to staying at the table with those willing to listen and problem solve – not just accuse and posture. We must keep the interests of all students at the center of our decision-making.



**Avid Readers:** Lincoln retired members meet monthly, September through June, but they also have small groups that meet between these times. Shown are members of the book club after a discussion of “The Alice Network,” a mix of historical fiction, a war and spy story. From left are Karla Bachman, Bev Sovey, Norma Daberkow, Cheryl Svoboda, Diane Knapp, Jan Stamper, Arlene Rea, Bill Hayes, Barb Hetcko and Sara Ewerth.

# Speed Traveling, Yoga on Spring Agenda

## Spring Conference Date and Location Now Set

The date is set and the location has been announced for NSEA-Retireds 2020 Spring Conference.

The conference is set for the Country Inn and Suites on North 27th Street in Lincoln on Thursday, April 23.

The morning session will allow participants to choose from up to three breakout sessions. Those sessions tentatively include How to Improve Your Sleep, Medicare Insurance Information, Using Yoga to Improve Behavior in School Children, Speed Traveling Through Several Countries, and the work of NE Loves Public Schools, featuring the documentary “The Mind Inside.”

The afternoon session will entertain with stories and song. Registration will be

online in March at:

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

### Elections Ahead!

Don’t forget that the filing deadline for elective office within the NSEA-Retired organization is Friday, Feb. 7.

Ballots will be mailed to NSEA-Retired members later in the month, and must be returned by the date specified on the ballot. Learn more at:

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

### Bishop Honored

NSEA-Retired member Sharon Bishop, Henderson, has received the Mildred Bennett Award as “an individual who has made a significant contribution to the fostering of the literary tradition in Nebraska.”

Bennett devoted her adult life to preserving the heritage of renowned author Willa Cather in Red Cloud.

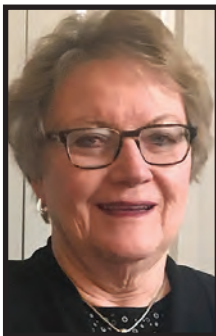
Henderson was cited for her 32 years of teaching Nebraska literature in her sophomore English class at Heartland Community Schools; for “exceptional support and a long-time commitment to the Nebraska Center for the Book,” where she served on the advisory board 2006-14, including a term as president; and for her many years of working with the Nebraska Writing Project, serving as a co-director as well as a co-facilitator of summer writing in-services for teachers across the state.

### Oops.

A photo last month that showed retired members working on the Lincoln Education Association’s Harvest of Books misidentified Margaret Rasmussen, who assisted with labeling the books donated to every Lincoln first and second grader.

— *De Tonack*,  
NSEA-Retired President

## Elect Arlene Rea



**I would appreciate your vote for DA and RA. Thanks, Arlene Rea**

## Re-Elect Roger Rea



**NSEA-Retired Vice President, NSEA Delegate Assembly & NEA Representative Assembly**

## Re-Elect Pat Etherton



**NSEA-R Capitol District Director Repr. & Delegate Assembly**

## Association Roundup

# Harvard Earns Two Years; North Platte to Vote on Safety

## HEA Bargains \$1,400 on Base for 2020-21

**Harvard Education Association** members signed off on a two-year contract that gives a \$1,400 increase on base for 2020-21, and a \$650 increase the following year. The deal also gives a 2 percent increase every five years for longevity, said NSEA Collective Bargaining Specialist Randy Gordon.

Longtime Grand Island teacher and former NSEA Organizational Specialist **Maureen Nickels** has a new assignment:

she was elected in January to a one-year term as president of the State Board of Education.

Serving as State Board vice president for the next year will be retired NSEA member and 2006 Nebraska Teacher of the Year **Patsy Koch Johns**.

Nickels graduated from Anselmo-Merna High School and the University of Nebraska-Kearney. She taught at the elementary level in Grand Island before beginning a 15-year-career as an organizational specialist for NSEA. In that role, she was assigned to an 18-county unit in central and south central Nebraska, working with members in about 40 local associations.

Nickels was elected to the state board in 2014 and was re-elected in 2018.

Koch Johns began her teaching career in Nebraska at Cozad in 1976. She joined the Lincoln High School faculty in 2000. Koch Johns was elected to the State Board in 2016 and is seeking re-election this year.

**North Platte** citizens will vote by mail in March whether to approve a levy override that will fund safety and security improvements at three school sites and air quality improvements at three sites.

The override, dubbed the Safety and Security Initiative, would add 4.5 cents on the tax levy for each of the next five years. However, because a bond for the high school in North Platte will expire this

year, taxpayers will not see a change in the existing levy.

Security and safety would be enhanced at the high school and at Jefferson and Buffalo elementary schools. Air quality would be improved at Eisenhower, Jefferson and McDonald elementary schools.

Most local association negotiators – unsung heroes in many cases – have wrapped up or are nearing the end of negotiations with your local board of education for your 2020-21 contract.

The contract that results from those negotiations set your salary and benefits for the coming school year. State statute requires negotiations to be completed on a schedule, with contracts finalized in early February.

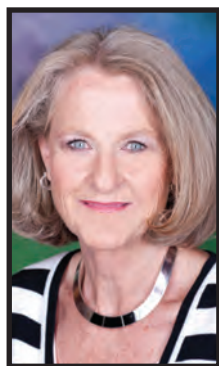
The foundation for that bargaining process is a solid set of facts – reliable information that negotiators can use in the discussion with school board representatives.

NSEA assists local associations in the development of that informational foundation, in part through the NSEA-owned and licensed Navigator software program. Navigator software allows local associations to conduct comparability studies that will show how their total compensation package compares to their peer school districts. The information from such studies is not only useful internally but is also quite helpful during contract talks with the school board.

This year, representatives from nearly 30 local associations took part in training on NSEA's Navigator program at various locations around the state. As bargaining winds down, perhaps it is time to thank those who take part in contract discussions.

These local associations sent representatives to Navigator trainings across the state in recent months: **East Butler, Emerson-Hubbard, Hayes Center, Arlington, Louisville, Springfield-Platteview, Scottsbluff, ESU No. 7 and Logan View.**

If your local would like to learn more, contact your NSEA organizational specialist at 1-800-742-0047.



**Nickels**



**Koch Johns**

## Dr. Stanley Urwiler

Dr. Stanley L. Urwiler, 83, Grand Island died on Jan. 6, 2020, at Grand Island.

He graduated from Ravenna High in 1954 and earned a bachelor's degree from Kearney State Teachers College in 1958. He began a 38-year career teaching math at Grand Island Senior High, serving as department chair and later earning master's and doctoral degrees.

He was a past president and secretary of the Grand Island Education Association and served as president of NSEA's Tri-Valley District.

He was a member of the Platte Valley Retired Education Association, the Grand Island Area Retired School Personnel and was active in the Nebraska Association for Teachers of Mathematics and the National Council of Teacher of Mathematics.

## Stephen Davis

Stephen Davis, 72, died Jan. 11, 2020, at Kearney. He taught history at Marion, KS, High School for five years before joining the staff at Kearney High School in 1975, retiring in 2007. He began at Kearney as a history teacher and librarian and later became the director of library services for the district. He was a lifetime member of the NSEA and NEA.

Davis was a past president of the Nebraska Library Association, and worked to convince public and school libraries to work together to better promote education and research. He was active in the Kearney Education Association.

He was active in the community, including in the Kiwanis Club.

Davis is survived by his wife, Patricia, a son and two grandchildren.

## Robert Jones

Robert "Bob" E. Jones, 77, Grand Island died Dec. 5, 2019, at Grand Island.

He graduated from Neligh High School in 1960 and served in the U.S. Air Force before continuing his education at Kearney State College, where he earned bachelor's and master's degrees.

Jones taught math at Grand Island Senior High for 36 years and was a substitute teacher for another 14 years, retiring in 2004. Jones was a life-long member and active in the Association.

He is survived by his wife, Judy, three children and seven grandchildren.

# Safe Driving Contest Seeks Student Entries

Impact Teen Drivers and California Casualty, the NEA Auto & Home Insurance program, are once again challenging students to develop artistic ideas to combat reckless and distracted driving. Their creative solutions could net them part of \$15,000 in educational grants available in the 2020 Spring Create Real Impact contest.

The 2020 Spring Create Real Impact Contest will provide \$1,500 grand prizes in these categories: video, music, art, creative writing, Spanish language and sports team video.

There will also be awards for the entries receiving the most online votes.

Administrators, teachers and education support professionals are urged to motivate students to enter the contest. Three schools with the most entries will each receive a \$1,000 educational grant.

Students ages 14-22 can enter at:

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

The deadline for entry is March 19.

## Speaking of Education

“Being a champion for all students means just that: all students. Not just the ones who are likeable and want help, but also the ones who might resist your efforts.”

— Jimmy Casas,  
School administrator, author

## YRTC Teachers Work Through NSEA

Representatives of the West Kearney Education Association – representing teachers at the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center at Kearney, were in Lincoln last month to talk with state managers about issues at the YRTC.

The YRTC is managed through the Department of Administrative Services and the Department of Health and Human Services.

WKEA members are state employees and belong to the statewide State Code Agency Teachers Association — SCATA.

Among primary topics of discussion were concerns about changes to the work environment caused by a new staggered education plan at the Kearney site. That plan was the result of closure of the all-female Geneva YRTC site, and the move of those clients to the all-male Kearney site.

Discussions also affected changes at Geneva and a Lincoln site that houses juveniles.

Since the meeting, more than half of the Legislature’s 49 members signed on to LB1150, which would require the state to reopen the Geneva site.

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

## Keeping a Germ-Free Classroom

From Lynn Cashel, a teacher in Springfield, PA:

“I keep a pump bottle of hand sanitizer next to every computer, so students may use it before they begin working. I also keep a bottle next to every box of tissues and remind the kids to use it after blowing their noses. I do encourage hand washing as well, but the sanitizer is convenient.

“While our housekeeping staff wipes down the desks weekly, I hand out Lysol or Clorox wipes every Friday, so the kids can clean their desks. They actually love it and are always surprised at how dirty they become. The wipes are conveniently located under my sink, so kids often take it upon themselves to do some cleaning.

“One thing I do to protect myself is to always use my own pen or pencil when revising and editing with my students. Those of you who teach elementary school know just where your students’ pencils – not to mention their little hands – usually end up!”



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



**Talks with Management:** This quartet gathered at NSEA Headquarters in January before a session of labor-management discussions focusing on the Youth Rehabilitation and Training Centers in Kearney and Geneva. Teachers at those sites are members of the State Code Agency Teachers Association (SCATA). From left are SCATA President Melissa Buss, a teacher for the Nebraska Department of Corrections; SCATA Vice President Lisa Irwin, past president of the West Kearney Education Association; SCATA Treasurer Rex Bavousett, president of the WKEA; and NSEA Organizational Specialist Rich Wergin.