

The VOICE

Nebraska State Teachers Association • October 2025

A photograph of Sarah Hardin, a woman with blonde hair and glasses, wearing a denim jacket over a leopard print top. She is smiling and holding a red apple. The background is a blurred library or classroom with bookshelves.

Sarah Hardin

2026 Nebraska Teacher of the Year

- Organizational Specialist Team Sees Changes
- Falls City Member Honored with Christa McAuliffe Prize
- Managing Privacy to Safeguard Your Career



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www.nsea.org
402-475-7611 • 1-800-742-0047
Volume 79, No. 2
ISSN Number: 1085-0783
USPS Number: 000-369

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

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

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

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Shine a Spotlight on an Exceptional Educator

Now is the time to discuss who you or your local association might nominate for one of the honors awarded at Delegate Assembly in April. Any NSEA member may nominate a member teacher, Education Support Professional (ESP) or deserving group. The 2026 Assembly will be held April 24-25 at Lincoln's Cornhusker Marriott Hotel. Members are eligible for:

- **Early Career Educator:** Honors a teacher who has excelled in their first five years of teaching.
- **Award for Teaching Excellence:** Honors a teacher who has excelled in the classroom over a period of time.
- **Education Support Professional of the Year:** Honors an ESP who has excelled in their job. Finalists will be notified in March, with winners announced at the assembly. Recipients receive a \$250 cash award.
- **Community Service:** Honors NSEA members or local associations involved in volunteer work outside of classroom hours.
- **The Tom Black Local Public Relations:** Honors local associations for outstanding internal communication.

Members can also nominate individuals or groups for these awards:

- **The Great Plains Milestone:** Honors an individual or group for promoting human and civil rights.
- **Administrator of Excellence:** Honors a public school administrator who strives every day to help students and staff be successful.
- **Friend of Education:** NSEA's highest honor is presented in recognition of an individual or organization that has made a statewide contribution to education or to Nebraska educators.
- **Outstanding Media:** Honors a newspaper, television or radio station for coverage of education issues and promotion of public education.

Nominations may be submitted online at www.nsea.org/DA or mailed to NSEA Awards, 605 S. 14 St., Lincoln, NE 68508-2742. All nomination materials must be received at the NSEA office no later than 5 p.m. on Feb. 6, 2026.

Would You Like to Write for The Voice?

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

thevoice@nsea.org

On the Cover: From banker to biology teacher, Sarah Hardin never expected a knock at her door to change everything. Now, two decades later, she's inspiring the next generation of scientists and will serve as the 2026 Nebraska's Teacher of the Year. Read her story on pages 7-8.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

TIM ROYERS

What a Difference a Year Makes

It is wild to think how much can change in just one year. This time last year, we were in the middle of a fight at the Nebraska Supreme Court to defend our ability to repeal the harmful voucher bill, LB1402. A significant portion of our time and energy last fall was spent ensuring we would get the outcome we wanted at the ballot

box, and to elect enough pro-public education state senators so we would not have to turn right around and do it again. It took two years, two successful petition drives and more than 200,000 signatures from Nebraskans to even secure the right for voters to decide this issue.

Flash forward one year, and the landscape looks completely different. Not a single voucher bill even made it out of committee last session. Instead of pouring our energy into fighting harmful legislation that would have undermined our ability to serve students, we were able to focus on progress.

When a flawed, early version of LB645 was set for a hearing in the Retirement Committee, we called on our members to have their voices heard and in a single weekend, lawmakers received hundreds of emails and phone calls. Skilled advocacy paired with member action culminated in a much more equitable LB645—a victory that will return millions of dollars to educators' pockets after we reduced the required contributions into NPERS.

What's Next

Last session, we called on members to share their deeply personal and compelling reasons for needing paid family medical leave. Their voices

made a difference—helping the legislation earn a priority designation from Sen. Ashlei Spivey.

While we haven't yet secured paid family medical leave for educators, that effort highlights a striking shift. In the final week of the 2024 legislative session, the debate centered on school vouchers. In the final week of this session, lawmakers were debating how best to support our educators. That's progress—and it shows we are moving the needle in the right direction.

Engaged Members

Our ability to keep this work moving forward comes down to you—your voices, your advocacy and your willingness to step up. This year, my focus goes beyond simply growing membership—I'm working to increase the number of members who are engaged.

This past May, we invited every member to express interest in serving on one of our many committees. These groups provide meaningful opportunities to connect with other educators, to dive into issues you care about and to play a direct role in shaping the direction of our association. They're also a great way to get your feet wet—to learn, contribute and decide if you'd like to take on an elected leadership role in the future.

I feel very strongly that one of my most important responsibilities as president is to make sure that we are building up the next generation of leaders, so that way we are thriving for years to come. My goal is that at the start of each school year, we can reflect back positively and point to concrete ways we have strengthened the profession and our support for you, not just while I am president, but for decades to come.

REFERENDUM ORDERED BY PETITION OF THE PEOPLE

Referendum Measure 435

A vote to "**RETAIN**" will keep in effect Section 1 of Legislative Bill 1402 enacted in 2024 by the Nebraska Legislature. Section 1 of Legislative Bill 1402 provides for \$10 million annually to fund education scholarships to pay all or part of the cost to educate eligible students attending nongovernmental, privately operated elementary and secondary schools in Nebraska.

A vote to "**REPEAL**" will eliminate the funding and scholarship provisions in Section 1 of Legislative Bill 1402.

Section 1 of Legislative Bill 1402, enacted by the Nebraska Legislature in 2024, provides for \$10 million annually to fund education scholarships to pay all or part of the cost to educate eligible students attending nongovernmental, privately operated elementary and secondary schools in Nebraska.

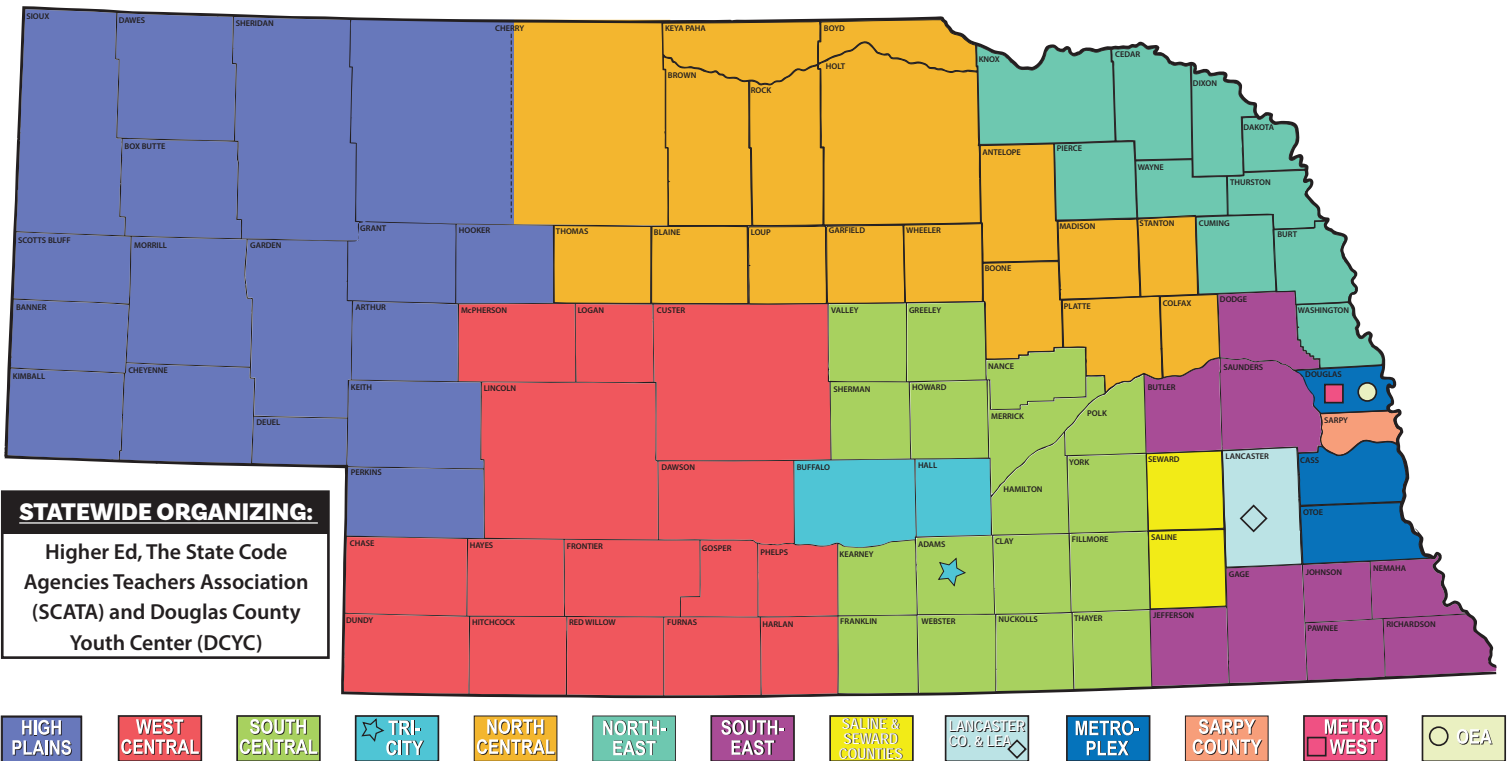
Shall Section 1 of Legislative Bill 1402 be repealed?

☐ Retain

☒ Repeal

NEXT STEP

- ✓ Paid FMLA for educators!
- ✓ Grow Membership.
- ✓ Engaged members.
- ✓ Inspire the next generation of association leadership.
- ✓ World Peace.



Updates to Organizational Specialist Units



Mike Wiesen

Omaha Education Association
402-432-9528
mike.wiesen@nsea.org



Kathie Garabrandt

North Central Unit
402-676-3245
kathie.garabrandt@nsea.org

NSEA's Organizational Specialists are dedicated to standing beside educators—whether in schools, ESUs or on college campuses. They bring years of expertise to the table, helping members resolve issues, secure fair contracts and navigate the complexities of school law.

Recent Updates

These specialists know your district, your building and often, they know you. Your September issue of *The Voice* included a detailed map of the organizational specialist assigned to each unit. Since that issue went to print, NSEA leadership has reassigned two organizational specialists to better align member needs with staff expertise.

Kathie Garabrandt will transition from Omaha to serve members in the North Central region.

Mike Wiesen, NSEA's most veteran Organizational Specialist, will now serve members in Omaha. Wiesen's extensive experience makes him an excellent match for the challenges and opportunities in the area.

All other assignments remain as listed in the color-coded map as printed in the September issue of *The Voice* and can be found online at www.nsea.org/field-staff-units.

What They Do

Your steady and experienced NSEA Organizational Specialist spends many nights on the road, meeting with individual members

and local associations, providing training and representing the members they serve. No other organization comes close to providing a service of such magnitude.

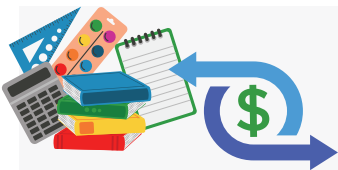
The day will come when you have a question about an evaluation, your teaching license or your contract. As a member, you can pick up the phone and call your NSEA Organizational Specialist. They can help answer these and many other questions educators face, including questions about:

- Plan time and extra duty pay;
- Salary schedule placement;
- Reduction in Force notices and contract cancellations;
- Evaluation responses;
- Teaching assignments and certificate renewal;
- District policy questions;
- Grievances;
- Personal, sick, family and medical leave; and much more!

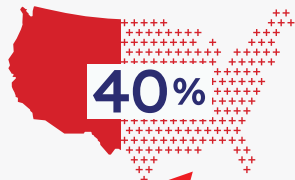
Members may also call NSEA headquarters at 402-475-7611 or toll-free at 800-742-0047 or send questions through the 'Contact Us' feature of the NSEA website at www.nsea.org/contact-us.

RANKINGS & ESTIMATES

WIDENING PAY DISPARITY



95% of pre-K-12 teachers spend their own money to meet the needs of their students.



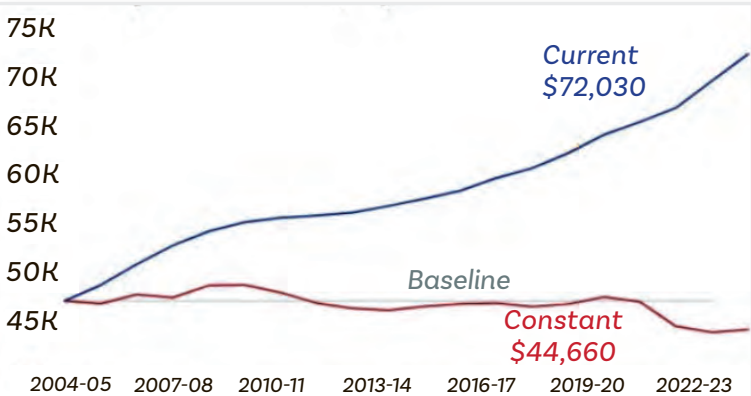
40% of pre-K-12 teachers hold more than one job.



25% of pre-K-12 teachers report they have a moderate or serious problem buying food.

The Decline in National Average Teacher Pay

Teachers make on average 5% less than 10 years ago, and 9% less than the peak in 2009-10, adjusted for inflation.



Averages are weighted by the number of teachers in each state and based on data from departments of education and estimates.
Source: Rankings & Estimates, NEA Research, April 2025

NEBRASKA

AVERAGE TEACHER SALARY

\$60,239²
#37
IN THE NATION

AVERAGE TEACHER STARTING SALARY

\$38,811¹
#50
IN THE NATION

TEACHER PAY GAP

76¢³

MIN. LIVING WAGE

\$65,822⁴

AVERAGE ESP EARNINGS

\$30,408⁵
#43
IN THE NATION

PER STUDENT SPENDING

\$15,896⁶
#26
IN THE NATION

AVERAGE HIGHER ED FACULTY SALARY

\$95,837⁷

#30
IN THE NATION

1. NEA Teacher Salary Benchmark Report, FY 2023-24, April 2025
2. State Rankings, FY 2023-24, NEA Rankings & Estimates Report, April 2025
3. Compared to other college-educated professionals with similar experience. Economic Policy Institute, September 2024
4. Income needed for family of one adult and one child to have a modest but adequate standard of living in the most affordable metro area, 2024 dollars, Economic Policy Institute
5. Average K-12 ESP Earnings, FY 2023-24, NEA Education Support Professional Earnings Report, April 2025
6. Expenditure per student in fall enrollment. State Rankings, FY 2023-24, NEA Rankings & Estimates Report, April 2025
7. Average Faculty Salary for Four-Year Public Institutions, FY 2023-24, NEA Higher Education Faculty Salary Analysis, April 2025

What makes a difference

According to the new reports, K-12 teachers earn 24% more, on average, in states with collective bargaining.

■ Collective Bargaining Law ■ No Collective Bargaining Law

Average Salary



Chart: Salary averages are weighted by the number of teachers in each state.
Source: NEA Rankings & Estimates, April 2025

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UNK ONLINE





A Leap of Faith: Mullen Education Association Member Sarah Hardin Named '26 Nebraska Teacher of the Year

Sarah Hardin never imagined she would become a teacher. The O'Neill native didn't come from a family of educators and teaching was never on her radar. But she loved science and excelled in the subject throughout school. A trip to Yellowstone National Park was the first time she remembers envisioning a future in science. Standing at Old Faithful, she listened as a park ranger explained the geyser's predictable eruptions and the science behind them.

"There was a park ranger explaining how Old Faithful worked—why it erupted at the same time and how they could predict it," said Hardin. "I just thought that was the coolest job, to watch that happen, be in the park, and then explain the science to people."

Science, Love and Opportunity

Hardin earned a bachelor's degree in biology from the University of Nebraska in Kearney and eventually moved to Mullen with her husband, Shelby.

"I had a really hard time moving to Mullen just because neither of us had family there and there weren't any science jobs that I could find. But, you know, we do crazy things for love," said Hardin.

Hardin found work as a banker and her husband, who also has a degree in biology, began a career in telecommunications. Together they made Mullen home, raising their two sons while staying heavily involved in the community. As Hardin recalls, it was about 19 years ago when opportunity—quite literally—came knocking.

"The Mullen Public Schools superintendent knocked on our door and spoke with my husband. He knew my husband had a biology degree and he said, 'I'm looking for a science teacher, and I heard you have a science degree.' My husband said, 'Well, so does my wife.'"

Following that conversation, she was offered the teaching position and took some time to consider the offer. Hardin had spent years building a successful career in banking and enjoyed her work.

"I really did some tough thinking. I remember calling my parents. My dad's a CPA, so he's very practical and entrepreneurial-minded. I could tell was thinking, 'What are you doing?'"

For Hardin, the decision ultimately rested on two passions—her deep love of science and the fulfillment she experienced working with youth groups.

"I did a lot of soul searching and just decided, you know what? I'm going to take a leap," Hardin said. "So that was it. I put my notice in at the bank and started that summer when school got out."

Transition to Teaching

Hardin began a transition to teaching program through the University of Nebraska at Kearney and jumped right in.

"I went straight into the classroom while I was taking my first class in teacher education," said Hardin.

The early years weren't easy, but Hardin found support within the Mullen Education Association and with the help of a very dear friend and mentor Scott Jones.



"I was about two years into teaching, and I was following a teacher who had been here a long time, who was very well respected. His name is Scott Jones, who works for ESU 16 now. Scott was very well respected. The kids loved him, everybody in the community loved him as a teacher and as a person. I'd been out of science and college for a few years. It was hard to live up to that, especially as somebody who had never taught, never student-taught, and I remember feeling like, 'I don't think I'm ever going to be a good teacher.'"

At one point, Hardin confided in Scott that she didn't think she'd ever measure up to him. Scott offered some much-needed advice that stuck: "He said 'If you are the best teacher you're ever going to be in this year of teaching, you shouldn't be teaching anymore,'" Hardin recalled.

That perspective changed everything. Sarah stopped trying to be perfect and instead focused on getting better every day—redoing lessons that flopped, chasing professional development opportunities and learning from mentors. Hardin even graduated with her Master's in Biology from UNK while teaching.

Slowly, the milestones began to appear: students writing back from college to say her classes had prepared them, former students majoring in science or engineering and the joy of

opening the world of science beyond her classroom.

Beyond the Classroom

For Hardin, science has never stayed inside four walls. She's spearheaded projects like a geothermal greenhouse—funded by an anonymous donation—that uses earth's natural heat to sustain plants year-round. Her students will soon be planting, observing and maintaining the ecosystem firsthand. And with colleagues, she co-founded a STEM club for fourth through sixth graders that quickly included participation of nearly every child in those grades into after-school engineering and coding projects. The STEM club eventually morphed into the annual Family STEM night, where enthusiasm from the parents sometimes outpaces the kids'.

Hardin's childhood dream of becoming park ranger has manifested into a science-backed trip to the Everglades National Park in Florida, where students explored the park alongside biologists and also had the opportunity to visit the sea turtle hospital and snorkel in coral reef.

Next year, Hardin will lead a team of students to Alaska, where glaciers, Denali National Park and coastal ecosystems adventures await.

Teacher of the Year

This fall, Hardin's quiet dedication

received a loud recognition: she was nominated for—and then named—the 2026 Nebraska Teacher of the Year.

"Somebody nominated me, and I have not figured out yet who it was. I know two people who were asked to write letters of support for my nomination but I'm still not sure," Hardin said. "I received a call from the Nebraska Department of Education explaining that I was the finalist, and he said, 'You have to be in Lincoln for your interview next Friday, and you need to make a 10- to 15-minute lesson plan for the selection committee.'"

When she stood before the selection committee, she chose to do what she does best: put science in her students' hands. In just 15 minutes, she guided the committee members through dissecting owl pellets. It wasn't glamorous, but it was authentic—and it worked.

In 2026, Hardin will begin a year of new opportunities as Nebraska's Teacher of the Year including attending space camp in Huntsville, Alabama, attending national-level leadership events, participating in Washington Recognition Week and in the National Teacher of the Year competition later this year.

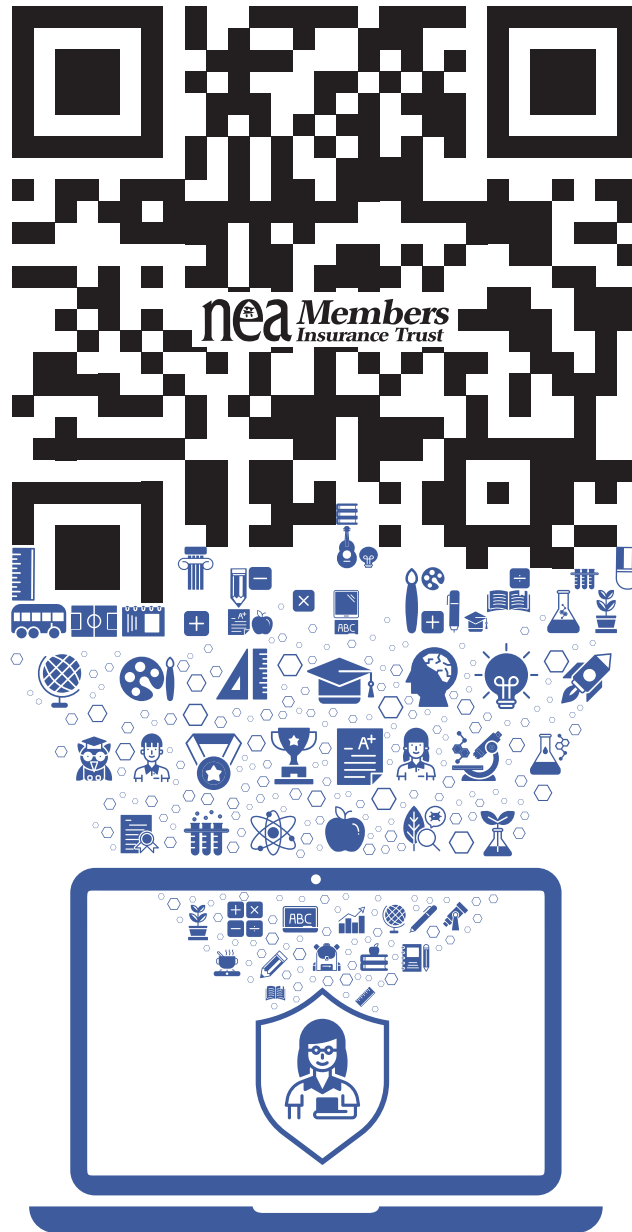
Why Teaching Matters

Looking back, Hardin is certain: she never would have dreamed of piloting new science labs or of leading marine biology projects in Florida had she not taken a leap of faith into teaching. But beyond the personal opportunities, it's the spark in her students that matters most.

"Kids have more wonder than adults," she said. "And watching them discover how something works—that's the best part."

Hardin hopes her story is a reminder that teaching is a profession that welcomes passion, curiosity and a willingness to grow. Her journey shows it is never too late to find purpose in the classroom and make a lasting difference in the lives of children.

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Lexington Education Association Vice President Named Among the 2026 Nebraska Excellence in Teaching Winners

In December, the Nebraska Department of Education, alongside educational leaders, will celebrate the achievements of two NSEA members at the Nebraska Teacher of the Year and Excellence in Teaching Awards Reception. Sarah Hardin, a member of the Mullen Education Association, received the prestigious title of the 2026 Nebraska Teacher of the Year. Additionally, Lori Pflaster of Sandoz Elementary in Lexington was a finalist and will be recognized among the three Award of Excellence winners.

Pflaster is a Special Education teacher for grades K-5 and is an active member of the Lexington Education Association.

Pflaster has always been passionate about creating a school culture where every student is celebrated and included. As a special education teacher, she makes it a priority to bring awareness to disabilities and ensure that both staff and students understand and appreciate individual differences. She has organized and led meaningful initiatives for Autism Awareness, Disability Awareness, Down Syndrome Awareness and Special Education Day—events that don't just educate, but also foster empathy, acceptance and belonging across the school community.

Her advocacy extends beyond celebrations. Pflaster is deeply committed to ensuring that inclusion is more than a talking point—it is lived practice. She works tirelessly to ensure that special education students have access to classrooms that adapt to them, rather than forcing students to conform to rigid systems. In doing so, she challenges traditional structures and calls for the resources, training and professional development necessary for all educators to feel confident and prepared to teach diverse learners.

Pflaster also reminds colleagues that true inclusion is not a program to be implemented, but a mindset to be embraced. Her ability to model this belief, while also equipping others to do the same, in part earned her recognition as an Award of Excellence winner.



Pflaster earned a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education/Special Education from UNK in 1995 and has worked her entire career in Lexington Public Schools.

In addition to her classroom leadership, Pflaster serves as vice president of the Lexington Education Association, where she continues to champion educators, students and strong public schools. She also previously served as president of the association. Her passion for education is also inspiring the next generation—her daughter, Kinsey Pflaster, is following in her footsteps as a future educator. Kinsey is currently a member of the NSEA Aspiring Educators.

"Lori is an incredible member. Her leadership role reflects the same values she brings to her teaching—collaboration, equity and a belief that every child deserves to learn in a supportive environment," said NSEA Organizational Specialist Kim Story.

The Nebraska Awards of Excellence Program, which includes selection of the Nebraska Teacher of the Year, serves to recognize the contributions of the classroom teacher.



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Protecting Your Career by Protecting Your Privacy:

Why Social Media Settings Matter

In today's world, social media is both a powerful tool and a potential risk. What you post, share or even "like" can follow you beyond your personal network—and into your professional life. Employers, colleagues and even future opportunities may be shaped by your online presence. That's why keeping your privacy settings up-to-date and being mindful about what you share isn't just about comfort—it can save your job.

Why Privacy Matters

Social media platforms default to openness. Without adjusting your settings, anyone—friends, strangers, your students, even scammers—may be able to view your posts, photos and personal information. Protecting your privacy helps you:

- **Control your audience.** Decide who sees what, from friends-only posts to fully private profiles.
- **Prevent unwanted exposure.** Stop unknown users from tagging you, messaging you or pulling your content into unwanted spaces.
- **Avoid risks like identity theft.** Reduce the chances of scams, phishing or impersonation by limiting what's visible.
- **Protect your professional reputation.** One offhand comment or unflattering photo can travel fast and cause real consequences in your career.

Key Settings to Know

Every platform has its own tools, but most offer similar privacy controls. Some of the most important include:

- **Post visibility:** Decide whether posts are public, friends-only or customized for certain audiences.
- **Tagging and mentions:** Turn on tag review so nothing appears on your profile without your approval.
- **Friend and follower requests:** Only allow people you know and trust into your network.
- **Direct messages and comments:** Limit who can contact or comment on your posts.
- **Location settings:** Turn off location sharing to protect your movements and whereabouts.
- **Private accounts:** On platforms like Instagram and TikTok, toggle your account to private so only approved followers see your content.
- **Two-factor authentication:** Add an extra layer of security against hackers and impersonators.

Beyond Settings: Smart Sharing

Even with strong privacy settings, what you post can still spread beyond your control. **Screenshots, shares and reposts mean that once something is online, it's never truly private.** Before you post, ask yourself:

- Would I be comfortable with my

employer, coworkers, students and parents seeing this?

- Could this information be used against me—or to impersonate me?
- Does this post reveal more than I want strangers to know about my personal life?

Stay Safe and In Control

Updating your settings isn't something you do once—it's an ongoing habit. Platforms frequently change their policies, so make it a routine to review your privacy controls every few months. Combine that with mindful posting, and you'll protect not only your personal information but also your professional reputation.

At the end of the day, your privacy is your power. Taking control of it is one of the simplest, most effective ways to protect your career in the digital age.

Questions or Help

If you have questions about privacy settings—or want a quick checkup on your accounts—feel free to email Kristi Capek, NSEA Assistant Director of Visual Communications & Digital Engagement, at kristi.capek@nsea.org. She can point you in the right direction and help you stay safe, professional and in control online.



Falls City Education Association member Terri Hogue (left) is the recipient of the 2025 Christa McAuliffe Prize for Courage and Excellence in Education. Christa McAuliffe (right).

Falls City Education Association Member Earns Christa McAuliffe Prize

For 35 years, Terri Hogue has stood at the front of classrooms at Falls City Middle School, teaching mathematics with the kind of steady dedication that transforms numbers into possibilities. This year, her decades of service and her commitment to her students have earned her the 2025 Christa McAuliffe Prize for Courage and Excellence in Education, presented by the University of Nebraska–Lincoln's College of Education and Human Sciences.

The award, named for Christa McAuliffe—the first teacher selected

for spaceflight who lost her life in the 1986 Challenger disaster—recognizes Nebraska teachers who embody courage, resilience and excellence in their profession. For Hogue, it is not only an honor but a reminder of what makes teaching meaningful.

"I am truly grateful... I am the person I am today because of the love and support of my family, the mentorship of past and current educators and

paras, the brave conversations with administrators... and the students who have walked through my doors," Hogue said. "This award inspires me to

keep striving for excellence."

Hogue's influence extends well beyond math lessons. At Falls City, she has shaped programs and opportunities that emphasize equity, leadership and innovation. She serves as team leader for the school's Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support program, coordinates high-ability learning, coaches robotics and mentors athletes in track & field, and volleyball. Hogue is an active member in the Falls City Education Association.

Her work has also been informed by participation in Nebraska Department of Education workshops focused on math and technology standards, ensuring her classroom is always forward-looking. Colleagues describe her as inspiring.

"Mrs. Hogue is a dedicated mathematics educator whose impact extends far beyond her classroom,"

**"This award inspires me
to keep striving
for excellence."**

— Terri Hogue
Fall City Education
Association

said Meghan Robeson, Falls City Middle School principal. “She holds students to high academic and behavioral standards, while creating an environment rooted in mutual respect, clarity and purpose... Perhaps most importantly, Mrs. Hogue inspires. Her belief in the power of education, her resilience in the face of challenge and her ability to elevate those around her make her a beacon in our school community.”

Hogue was formally recognized during Administrators’ Days, hosted by the Nebraska Council of School Administrators in July.

Recipients of the Christa McAuliffe Prize for Courage and Excellence in Education receive a \$1,000 stipend and a plaque.

Nominate a Teacher

The Christa McAuliffe Prize for Courage and Excellence in Education is awarded annually to a Nebraska teacher. Nominations can be submitted by completing the online form at: <https://cehs.unl.edu/courage/nominate-teacher/>

Unlike traditional “Teacher of the Year” awards, the McAuliffe Prize seeks to honor educators who go beyond excellence by showing courage in their work. Courage can take many forms—challenging injustice, advocating for students, trying innovative methods or standing firm in difficult times—but the common thread among all recipients is the lasting, positive effect they have on their students and peers.

As Dr. Gregg Wright, creator of the prize, explained: “Rewarding courage selects out a slightly different kind of teacher. The teachers who are recognized are all excellent educators, but they go beyond excellence by showing courage.”

By nominating a teacher, Nebraskans can help shine a light on the everyday acts of bravery that take place in classrooms across the state—and ensure that teachers like Christa McAuliffe, and now Terri Hogue, are honored for their profound impact.

The Legacy of Christa McAuliffe: A Timeline of Inspiration and Loss

1983

Christa McAuliffe began teaching American history and social studies at Concord High School in Concord, New Hampshire.

Aug. 27, 1984

President Ronald Reagan announces the Teacher in Space project as part of NASA’s Space Flight Participant Program to expand the space shuttle experience to a wider set of private citizens.



July 19, 1985

Vice President George H.W. Bush announced the Teacher in Space winners, Christa McAuliffe, a high school social studies teacher from Concord, New Hampshire, and her backup, Barbara R. Morgan, a second-grade teacher from McCall, Idaho.

Sept. 9, 1985

McAuliffe and Morgan begin training at NASA’s Johnson Space Center. Their first week, McAuliffe and Morgan received basic orientation, including fitting for their flight suits and tasting space food. For the next four months, they trained with the rest of the crew on shuttle systems, emergency evacuation drills and completed flights aboard T-38 jets and the KC-135 weightless aircraft.



Jan. 28, 1986

The Space Shuttle Challenger, mission STS-51-L, lifts off at 11:38 a.m. EST. 73 seconds later, the shuttle breaks apart, killing all seven crew members, including McAuliffe.



February–March 1986

Recovery operations begin. The crew compartment and debris are located; remains are recovered.

April 1986

Funeral services are held. McAuliffe is buried in her hometown, Concord, New Hampshire.

April 1986- Present

In memory of McAuliffe, numerous schools, institutions and memorials are named after her; her legacy as a symbol of educational courage and inspiration continues.

1. NASA, “35 Years Ago: Remembering Challenger and Her Crew,” Jan. 28, 2021.
2. Education Week, “Teachers in Space: A Chronology,” Jan. 1998.



Now more than ever, strong local associations depend on member input to secure better pay, safe working conditions and the resources students deserve. Educators have strength in numbers—and that strength is never more powerful than at the bargaining table.

Accurate Information Matters

Up-to-date data on employees represented by the local association is essential to building an effective bargaining team. Accurate lists allow organizers to prioritize outreach, focus on hard-to-reach educators and direct resources wisely.

While districts may ask associations for information, sharing isn't always mutual. In fact, NSEA Collective Bargaining Specialist Jen Dubas warns that administrators sometimes request membership lists.

"There are certainly concerns about how sharing this could result in potential misuse for both members and non-members," Dubas said. "If your administration or school board asks for a list of members—or how many members you have—you do not have to share that information. You can simply tell them that is information you do not have permission to share."

The Bargaining Calendar

October is a crucial month for preparation. Local associations should have teams ready to begin bargaining by Nov. 1 for K-12 and community college locals. State law sets a firm bargaining schedule, so it's important to stay on track.

Dubas encourages leaders to stay in touch with their NSEA Organizational Specialist about upcoming bargaining opportunities and available tools, including the bargaining calendar and sample agreements.

At the Table

Collective bargaining gives educators a voice in their workplace, helping secure fair wages, benefits and working conditions. These agreements not only improve teacher recruitment and retention, but also directly impact students.

After all, teachers' working conditions are students' learning conditions. Key topics on the table may include:

- Salaries
- Health insurance
- Class size
- Plan time
- Retirement benefits

To negotiate, local associations must either be recognized each year by the employer or certified as the permanent bargaining agent.

As bargaining season begins, Dubas offers these steps for success:

1. Stay in touch with your NSEA Organizational Specialist about opportunities and resources.
2. Submit recognition requests now. K-12 and community college locals should send their 2027–28 recognition letter so boards can act promptly. (Certified locals: prepare your notification letter.)
3. Survey members to identify issues and priorities before bargaining begins.
4. Use NSEA's microsearch database of agreements at nsea.org/collective-bargaining.
5. Organize your team and clearly assign roles and responsibilities.
6. Be ready to bargain by Nov. 1 for K-12/community colleges.
7. Lean on your organizational specialist for guidance on the bargaining calendar, area settlements and trending language proposals.

Educators are strongest together. Collective bargaining ensures your voice is heard, your working conditions are protected and your students benefit from the resources they need to succeed.

Key Dates in October

October Observances and Celebrations!
Plan now to incorporate relevant content into your October slate.



OCT. 1-31	LGBTQ+ HISTORY MONTH 🏳️‍🌈
OCT. 1-31	🎓 HIGHER EDUCATION MONTH
OCT. 5-11	BANNED BOOKS WEEK 📚
OCT. 5-11	💚 MENTAL ILLNESS AWARENESS WEEK
OCT. 5	WORLD TEACHER DAY 🖋️
OCT. 11	🏳️‍🌈 NATIONAL COMING OUT DAY
OCT. 13	INDIGENOUS PEOPLES DAY 💎
OCT. 19-25	✅ INVISIBLE DISABILITIES WEEK
OCT. 19-25	NATIONAL SAFE SCHOOLS WEEK 📌

THE DURHAM MUSEUM

Teachers' Night: Oct. 3, 2025



The Durham Museum in Omaha is set to host its highly anticipated annual Teachers' Night on Oct. 3. This special event invites educators to engage in a resource fair designed to support and enrich their teaching experience. During the evening, representatives from various regional cultural and educational institutions will be on hand, offering a wealth of free classroom-ready materials. They will also provide information about field trips and educational programs available in their respective areas. NSEA proudly sponsors this event.

Teachers will have the opportunity to enjoy a range of complimentary food and prizes while exploring the museum's exhibits. This evening is offered free of charge to educators across all grade levels and subjects. For additional details and to register for the event, please visit the museum's website at durhammuseum.org/teachers-night.

Have a student teacher?

Sign them up for NSEA Aspiring Educators!

A semester of student teaching is a unique time for an educator, and it's the perfect time to surround oneself with support from other new and seasoned educators.

If you have a student teacher in your classroom this year, encourage them to become a member of the NSEA Aspiring Educators. You may even set aside some time to walk them through the process and help them understand the myriad of benefits they'll receive as a member of the Association.

Feeling especially generous? Pay their Aspiring Educators dues—just \$40 for the year!

Benefits of membership for Aspiring Educators include student loan forgiveness workshops, access to year-round professional development opportunities, big savings through the NEA Discount Marketplace, the \$1 million Educators Employment Liability insurance policy and much more.

First-year educators will also benefit from involvement in NewGEN, NSEA's New Generation of Educators in Nebraska. The organization is comprised of early career educators in their first seven years of teaching who network and support each other through the challenges of a new teaching career.

For more information or to help a new member register, go to www.nsea.org/JoinNow, or contact the NSEA Membership Department by calling 1-800-742-0047 or emailing membership@nsea.org.



Anton Goodwin in an NSEA Aspiring Educator currently attending Midland University.



NEBRASKA ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS OF SCIENCE

Enhancing Science Education for All Nebraskans



NATS Fall Conference at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln (UNL): October 16-18, 2025



www.nebscinats.org



Thursday, October 16th

5:30-7:30 PM

Science Trivia Social @
Embassy Suites
Networking w/ UNL Depts,
Prizes, Hors d'Oeuvres, Drink
Tickets, Cash Bar

Friday, October 17th

8:00 AM - 4:45 PM

Keynote, Breakout Sessions, Vendors,
Lunch, Poster Sessions, Ice Cream
Social & More!
@ UNL Carolyn Pope Edwards Hall

Keynote Speaker: Bertha Vazquez
The Teacher Institute for Evolutionary
Science & The Center for Inquiry

6:00 - 8:30 PM

Past Presidents Present
"A Night at the Museum @ Morrill Hall"
EPSCoR Interactive Tables, Planetarium
Shows, Hors d'Oeuvres, Cash Bar

Saturday, October 18th

8:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Workshops & Breakout
Sessions
@ UNL Carolyn Pope
Edwards Hall



College of Education and Human Sciences
TEACHING, LEARNING & TEACHER EDUCATION

Activate Learning®



UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA
STATE MUSEUM

Calculate Your Savings



NSEA Advocacy Saves Members Thousands

Thanks to the strong financial health of the NPERS School Retirement Plan—which is now funded at an impressive 99.91%—most educators across Nebraska will see meaningful savings in their paychecks starting next year.

Effective July 1, 2025, the employee contribution rate to the NPERS School Retirement Plan was reduced from 9.78% to 8.00%. This change, made possible through the passage of LB645, represents a significant win for educators and their long-term financial well-being. It also reflects the collaborative work between NSEA staff, elected leaders and state policymakers to ensure that your retirement system remains both strong and fair.

To help members understand what this reduction means for their personal finances, NSEA has created an easy-to-use Dues Savings Calculator. By simply entering your gross annual salary, you can see how much you'll save in retirement contributions—both annually and per paycheck.

Here's a quick example: A teacher earning \$50,000 per year will see an annual savings of approximately \$890—or roughly \$74 per month—before taxes. That's money that stays in your pocket, helping offset other expenses, including your NSEA dues.

Whether you're a new teacher just starting out or a veteran educator planning for retirement, this reduction in contributions provides welcome relief while maintaining the long-term strength of the retirement system.

To see how much this change benefits you directly, visit www.nsea.org/add and try the calculator for yourself. It's quick, secure and designed with your paycheck in mind.

For questions about retirement contributions or how to maximize your savings, don't hesitate to contact your local association leaders.



For the 16th year, the Ag Sack Lunch Program will educate fourth grade students across Nebraska. With both in-person and virtual options available for the program, the reach of students continues to grow from Omaha to Scottsbluff while spreading education and awareness about Nebraska agriculture.

The in-person program provides students with a free lunch along with a 25-minute lesson regarding Nebraska agriculture. As many fourth-grade classrooms visit the Nebraska State Capitol, this is an essential opportunity to educate students about where their food comes from and gain an appreciation for the meals they eat each day. While students enjoy their lunches, they will hear a presentation about the important role agriculture plays in Nebraska's economy, as well as the crops and livestock species that are raised in the state. The sack lunches consist of Nebraska-produced food items to emphasize the direct connection to Nebraska farms. Students also receive a deck of cards containing agriculture facts.

For classrooms that do not plan to visit the State Capitol, virtual presentations are available and include the same interactive presentation and deck of cards.

Reservations can be made online by visiting agsacklunchprogram.com.



Take a closer look

Our *insurance and retirement solutions* help educators protect what they have today and prepare for a successful tomorrow.

**We think you'll like
what you see.**

Learn more



Horace Mann Service Corporation and certain of its affiliates (Horace Mann) enter into agreements with educational associations where Horace Mann pays the association to provide services aimed at familiarizing association members with the Horace Mann brand, products or services. For more information, email your inquiry to association.relations@horacemann.com.

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horacemann.com



How the Children's Fund Brings Students' Needs Into Focus



Every day, teachers notice the small details that can make a big difference for students. Sometimes it's a child squinting at the whiteboard, holding a book too close or struggling to keep up in class. Often, the problem isn't effort, it's vision. And while educators are quick to step in, buying supplies or lending a hand from their own wallets, they cannot meet every need alone.

Since 1994, the Children's Fund has provided hundreds of thousands of dollars to help students with immediate needs. A common request is helping with the cost of eyeglasses.

For some children, glasses mean more than clear sight—they open doors to confidence, participation and academic growth.

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

For more than three decades, the Children's Fund has helped educators provide not only glasses, but a clear vision of what's possible for Nebraska students. With continued support, no child will have to sit in the back of the classroom, straining to see their future. For more information, visit nsea.org/childrensfund.



nea *Member Benefits*

Student Debt Navigator

In partnership with

1. NEA-vetted student loan forgiveness tool for teachers provides trusted sources that give you legitimate options.
2. Calculate how much money you can save through this tool that's easy to use on your desktop or mobile device.
3. As an NEA member, you can run your numbers at no cost to see if you qualify for student loan repayment or forgiveness programs.
4. If you need additional help, you can access student loan forgiveness experts via telephone or chat.
5. Receive a complete list of relevant debt-relief programs based on your situation.
6. Prevent errors and improve your odds of qualifying for student loan forgiveness programs by e-filing your paperwork.

To learn more about NEA Student Debt Navigator, visit www.neamb.com.



Make the most of your new **MEMBERSHIP!**

Find out how NEA Member Benefits can help you:

- Reduce student debt
- Save on travel and everyday items
- Get insurance that fits your schedule
- Sign up for free life insurance
- Plan ahead for retirement

And so much more!

Scan below
to learn more



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Benefits*



TRISH GUINAN

Message from the Executive Director

Life Hands You Tweezers

It's not every day, in my role as executive director, that I find myself dissecting an owl pellet - but when duty calls, sometimes it hands you tweezers and the regurgitated remains of an owl's meal.

For those who may not know, owl pellets are the compact masses of indigestible material—bones, teeth, fur and feathers—that owls regurgitate after digesting their prey. Science teachers use them as a hands-on way to help students learn about food chains, ecosystems and animal anatomy. As a member of the selection committee for the Nebraska Teacher of the Year, I found myself in Sarah Hardin's classroom lesson doing just that—poking through the pellet to find delicate little bones.

A Spotlight on Teachers

To be part of this process is both humbling and inspiring. NSEA, along with the Nebraska Association of School Boards (NASB) and the Nebraska Council of School Administrators (NCSA), participates each year as part of the selection committee for this prestigious recognition. Sitting in Sarah's lesson, I was reminded of the creativity and skill our educators bring to their classrooms every day.

Sarah's presentation impressed our committee and her enthusiasm was truly contagious.

Investment in Education

The Nebraska Teacher of the Year program doesn't just recognize a passion for education—it shines a spotlight on it. It reminds us all why public education matters and why supporting teachers is one of the most important investments we can make. No one knows that better than the Mullen Public Schools superintendent who once knocked on the Hardin family's door, searching for someone with a science degree to teach in their rural community. Sarah's decision to

take that leap of faith and embrace a nontraditional path into teaching has now led to her being named the 2026 Nebraska Teacher of the Year. These investments opened the door to a career that has inspired countless students ever since.

It's Never Too Late

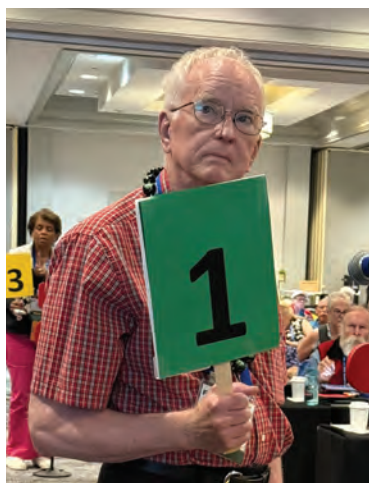
My hope is that Sarah's journey serves as an inspiration to individuals who may feel unchallenged or unfulfilled in their current professions to consider a career in education. Her experience demonstrates that it is never too late to redirect one's talents and pursue a career that rekindles passion. At the same time, her story underscores a broader truth: addressing Nebraska's teacher shortage will require both creativity and sustained support. Community leaders and local districts must be willing to think differently and maybe even knock on a few doors.

Listen to Educators

If creativity alone were enough to solve the teacher shortage, Nebraska's educators would have already found a way. But to truly recruit and retain exceptional teachers, we must pair that creativity with meaningful investment from the state. That means ensuring competitive compensation through the collective bargaining process, protecting educators' ability to negotiate fair contracts and respecting the expertise they bring to conversations about what our schools need.

Lawmakers have an important role in listening to educators—on class sizes, mental health supports or paid family leave—and ensuring they have the resources and respect to help students succeed. Sarah's path shows what's possible when talent, opportunity and support come together, and it challenges us to provide that same foundation for the next generation of teachers.

“
The Nebraska Teacher of the Year program doesn't just recognize a passion for education—it shines a spotlight on it. It reminds us all why public education matters and why supporting teachers is one of the most important investments we can make.
”



Delegates Gather at the NEA Retired Annual Meeting

The Nebraska delegation played a prominent role at the Retired Annual Meeting (RAM) and Representative Assembly (RA) in July, contributing to debates, fundraising efforts and networking opportunities that shaped discussions on the future of education.

Nebraska delegates engaged in policy debates and resolutions at the RAM, drawing on years of classroom experience to influence national decision-making. Their participation was highlighted by the election of John Heineman to the National Education Association Board of Directors. Colleagues praised Heineman's dedication to education and advocacy, calling him a strong representative for Nebraska on the national stage.

The event also featured keynote addresses from NEA leadership. Their remarks underscored a collective commitment to public education and inspired attendees to continue advocating for students and educators.

The final day of the RA marked a shift in format as delegates observed the first-ever Learning Day. Instead of debating new business, participants spent the day developing campaign strategies, tools and resources to strengthen and protect public education in communities nationwide.

Learning Day began with remarks from Hardy Merriman, former president of the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict. Merriman spoke about challenges facing U.S. democracy and the important role educators play in preserving it. His address urged educators to take active roles in their communities and reinforced the broader mission of the assembly.

NSEA-Retired leaders noted the impact of Nebraska's active involvement and praised members for their ongoing commitment to education. More than 6,000 retired delegates from across the country participated in the RAM and RA, making the annual gathering one of the largest voices for retired educators.

Championing the Arts



Stronger Certification Standards in Speech and Theatre

NSEA-Retired Board of Directors member Patsy Koch Johns spoke to the Nebraska Council on Teacher Education (NCTE) in June, urging council members to advance language to support arts education. Specifically, Koch Johns asked the board to advance a proposal to reinstate teacher certificates for speech and theatre. For the past dozen years or so, under state rules, Nebraska colleges and universities have been allowed to offer only supplemental certification in speech and theatre, requiring a minimum of 18 hours of college preparation. Koch Johns asked for an upgrade to a subject certification for both disciplines, requiring 45 or more hours.

The NCTE, an advisory board to the State Board of Education, will consider the request and forward a recommendation to the state board.

Koch Johns, the 2006 Nebraska Teacher of the Year, taught at Cozad High School and Lincoln High School.

Educators' Medicare Supplement Offers Unique Benefits



You need to sign up for Medicare when you turn 65 and regardless of whether or not you are still working and still covered by an employer-sponsored health insurance plan. Medicare coverage starts on the first of the month in which you turn 65 unless your birthday is on the first of the month – in that case, your Medicare coverage begins on the first of the month prior to your birthday month. But Medicare coverage is not automatic! You need to complete the enrollment process for Medicare BEFORE your coverage will begin!

There is a seven-month window of opportunity to sign up for Medicare without losing coverage or incurring penalties. The window starts three months prior to your birthday month, includes the month you turn 65 and closes three months after your birthday month. If you miss this window of opportunity, you will need to wait until the General Enrollment period – which starts Jan. 1 of each year and closes March 31. You will not have insurance coverage until you complete the enrollment process, and you will be subject to lifetime premium surcharge penalties for late enrollment.

Navigating the complexities of Medicare when you reach age 65 can be a daunting task. Fortunately, NSEA-Retired members and former subscribers to the Educators' Health Alliance (EHA) Blue Cross insurance plans when they were employed have access to Educators' Medicare Supplement.

Medicare is an 80/20 insurance plan, meaning that Medicare will pay 80% of covered charges and you are responsible for the other 20%. Most retirees purchase a Medicare supplement to pay the charges that Medicare does not cover. As an NSEA-Retired member (or subscriber to EHA insurance prior to your retirement), you and your spouse are eligible to enroll in Educators' Medicare Supplement, a Medicare supplement that is underwritten by Blue Cross of Nebraska and endorsed by NSEA-Retired. More than 5,000 retired educators and their spouses are enrolled in the plan. Educators' Medicare

Supplement is not available to the general public, and it offers benefits that other Medicare supplements are not allowed to offer.

Among the unique benefits of Educators' Medicare Supplement are the option to purchase either a Plan F or Plan G supplement. Plan F supplements are no longer available to individual consumers. The only difference between Plan F and Plan G supplements is that Plan F covers the Medicare Part B deductible amount (\$257 in 2025); Plan G does not. If you have a Plan F supplement, the only thing you will pay when you go to a provider that accepts Medicare is your insurance premium: Plan F pays for the deductible and any coinsurance that may be required. In addition, with Educators' Medicare Supplement you have access to a very competitive dental plan made available because of the relationship with the EHA school plans. The premiums for the supplement are rated in age bands rather than individual ages. The age bands are: through age 66; 67-69; 70-74; 75-79; 80-84; 85+. So long as you are in the same age band, you will only see one rate increase per year – on the policy anniversary. With other supplements, you see two rate increases each year: one on your birthday (because you are a year older) and the second on the policy anniversary. An additional benefit of Educators' Medicare Supplement is a very stable rate history. Over the past 10 years, the general premium increase has averaged about 3%. For 2026, the rates are projected to increase by about 2.7%

More detailed information about Medicare can be found on the Medicare website, www.medicare.gov. Information about Educators' Medicare Supplement can be found on the EHA website, www.chaplan.org. Click on the "RETIREES" tab and look for "Educators' Medicare Supplement Plan" for the video description of the supplement.

Speaking of Education

"Liberty has never come from the government. Liberty has always come from the subjects of it. The history of liberty is a history of resistance."

— Woodrow Wilson

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

NSEA 150th Presents Family of Teachers

Every legacy has a beginning. For the Huerta family of educators, it started in the 1950s with J. (Joseph) Conrad Huerta—whose dedication to teaching planted the seeds for three generations of educators to follow.

Huerta is the uncle of Omaha Education Association member and NSEA Board Member Sarah Dragon.

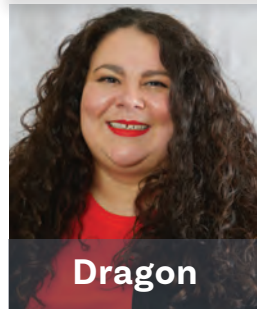
"I am sure that in the 1950's my Uncle Conrad had no idea that he would inspire three generations of educators in our Huerta family," Dragon said. "My grandmother's side of the family, the Huerta family, lived in Mitchell, Neb. They were a large family, 13 children in total. Growing up my grandmother and her siblings worked in the sugar beet fields."

Huerta (pictured) was the first student of Mexican/American descent to attend Chadron State College and was enrolled in the first graduate classes offered at Chadron in 1956. He encouraged his siblings to follow in his footsteps. Philip Huerta, Pascual Huerta Jr., Patrick Huerta and Pasculita Huerta also went on to become teachers. Many of the Huerta spouses were also career educators including: Laura Clark Huerta and Judy Huerta.

Moving down the family tree to



Huerta



Dragon

the second generation of educators included the following: Kathy Huerta Simpson (retired, taught in several schools across the state, from Scottsbluff to Millard), Vickie Huerta Gilbert (Cozad), Tim Huerta (Lexington), Leanne Blanchard (wife of Aaron Blanchard, Boone City Schools), Mary Rose Ramirez (retired), as well as Maria McDowell DiBiasio (retired).

Dragon is the third generation of educators inspired by her Uncle Conrad, but she's not alone. Jason Huerta (Southern Valley in Beaver City), Alycia Gilbert Jurgens (Lincoln), Hope Huerta, Theresa Lane (retired), Alexis Sickenger (retired) and Avery Carpenter (substitute teacher) were also inspired by Huerta's legacy.

From the sugar beet fields of Nebraska to classrooms across the state, the Huerta family proves that one person's passion for education can echo through generations. Today, three generations later, Conrad's legacy still shapes the lives of students and communities across Nebraska.

Does teaching run in your family? Submit your story today and be featured in Family of Teachers: www.nsea.org/Family.nsea.org/Family.

MOVED?



Have Your Contact Details Changed?

Have you moved? Have you changed your name by marriage? Are you planning to move? If so, you can update your NSEA membership information online.

How? Log on to the NSEA website and click on the 'For Members' on the top right side of the home page.

Then click on the blue 'Member Update' button in the center of the next screen, and follow directions.

Keep your issue of *The Voice* near, as the mailing label includes your membership number, used to access your information. The NSEA website is at: www.nsea.org.

SCAN ME

