

THE

VOICE

The Nebraska State Education Association ❖ September 2015



“My goal is **ALWAYS**
to protect **CHILDREN**”

North Platte Educators Fight to Defend Their Actions - and State Statute

**'Mission: Identical' as Burkhart
Takes Educators Rising Reins**

**Baseball, Brats and
Membership Efforts**

Upcoming Assignments

NSEA Advocacy Conference Sept. 11-12 & Sept. 26

■ **What:** A top-notch training for veteran and novice negotiators alike, this conference will prep all for the upcoming bargaining season. Learn about effective bargaining, and any and all updates to the bargaining process.

■ **Details:** Scheduled for Friday night, Sept. 11, and Saturday, Sept. 12, at the Holthus Convention Center in York, and again at the Gering Civic Center on Saturday, Sept. 26.

It isn't too late to register. Contact your NSEA Organizational Specialist for details, or NSEA's Jan Anderson to register at 1-800-742-0047.

Outreach to Teach Nov. 13-14

■ **What:** Hosted by the Student Education Association of Nebraska, Outreach to Teach hones in on a single school building to paint, scrub, rake, sweep, dust and otherwise spruce up.

■ **Details:** A site has yet to be confirmed, but the school to be spruced up will be in the Omaha area. Students will enjoy a speaker Friday night before they get to work on Saturday. Check *The Voice* in October for more details.

Members Step Up for NSEA Children's Fund

20/20 Vision Campaign Raises Nearly \$23,000

With the number of children in poverty trending steadily upward, The NSEA Children's Fund account balance was becoming dangerously low earlier this calendar year.

The outlook is a little bit rosier now, thanks to the generosity of NSEA members.

Children's Fund expenses in the first four months of the 2014-15 Association year surpassed \$29,400. Donations during that time were \$12,800. Over the past 20 years, annual expenses have ranged from \$50,000 to nearly \$80,000.

A campaign to boost the Children's Fund account balance was kicked off in late winter, and Association members responded in spectacular fashion. Because one of the frequent uses of the Children's Fund is new eyeglasses for a child in need, the campaign was dubbed the '20/20 Vision for the Children's Fund' drive. The goal was to raise \$10,000. By late August, the campaign raised \$22,529.

"There was a tremendous response to the call for donations. Our members have

been extremely generous," said NSEA President Nancy Fulton.

Included in the drive was more than \$1,000 in advertising revenue in the NSEA Delegate Assembly handbook and \$780 as the Fund's share of gift baskets sold at Delegate Assembly. The Lincoln Education Association hosted the basket sales to benefit the LEA's scholarship program, and donated 10 percent to the Children's Fund.

The purpose of the Children's Fund is to make certain that no child lacks the basic necessities they need to be successful in school. When an Association member identifies a child in need of new shoes, a winter coat to replace a windbreaker in frigid weather, or new eyeglasses in the classroom, the member needs only to contact NSEA with a request for

funds. There is no red tape to cut through; there are no forms to complete.

Questions? Contact Sally Bodtke at NSEA at 1-800-742-0047 or at:

sally.bodtke@nsea.org



Top 20/20 Contributors to Children's Fund

Omaha E.A.....	\$10,173
Millard E.A.....	\$3,016
Umo ⁿ Ho ⁿ Nation E.A...	\$1,420
D.A. Vendor Ads	\$1,050
Lincoln E.A.....	\$1,017
Platte Valley Retired..	\$1,000
NSEA Staff	\$864
D.A. Basket Sales	\$780
St. Edward E.A.....	\$400

Cover Story:

North Platte Education Association members Stephen Spiehs and Christie Copper reported their suspicions of child abuse or neglect to authorities in March, setting off a storm of turbulence that concluded in August. NSEA was along to assist, but NPEA members were in charge every step of the way. For details, turn to

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Start by Standing Together



**NSEA President
Nancy Fulton**

“
To those
who argue that
membership is
expensive, or
that ‘alternative’
organizations
provide
adequate
support, I would
counter that
this is a perfect
example of
why educators
should not
brush off NSEA
membership.”

As another school year gets started, the value of our work again underscores the hope and excitement that kicks off each school season.

Your school anchors your community, and both become alive with enthusiasm and activity this time of year.

Just as your work has value, so too does membership in your professional association. Educators find value in the advocacy made possible by the strength of the state’s largest and oldest professional organization. From the financial savings you can access through NEA Members Benefits to the liability support and job protection provided, membership gives a sense of security in terms of job related issues.

Whatever your reasons for joining, it is important to understand that NSEA’s legal and advocacy benefits cannot be summarized in the text of a written liability policy. That point was clearly illustrated by Stephen Spiehs during the North Platte Education Association’s all-member meeting in mid-August.

Spiehs, a middle school guidance counselor, spoke to more than 100 NPEA members and thanked them for their support during a tense and tumultuous spring.

‘Insubordination’

Along with NPEA president and middle school special education teacher Christie Copper, Spiehs and the NPEA were at odds with the school district for much of the spring and summer. Spiehs and Copper were called on the carpet for reporting a suspected case of child abuse to authorities. They did what was clearly required by state law, yet were entangled in controversy after an administrator told them to “call the parent first” before making such reports in the future. Both feared for their jobs, particularly after a meeting with five administrators in which the words “consequences” and “insubordination” were used repeatedly.

With NSEA’s assistance, and with the power of more than 250 NPEA members behind them, Copper and Spiehs stood strong. Together they pursued a course of action as advised by NSEA’s legal counsel, and ultimately were

proven to have acted correctly and in the interest of student safety. A key moment came in mid-June after the North Platte Board of Education refused to recognize two grievances filed by the NPEA on behalf of Copper and Spiehs. At that meeting, nearly every single NPEA building representative was on hand to meet with Copper, Spiehs, NSEA Director of Advocacy Trish Guinan and NSEA Attorney Scott Norby. The building representatives voted unanimously to proceed with legal action.

A Correct Course

Certainly, it was not an action taken lightly or easily. In the long run, however, it proved to be correct. The school board ultimately conceded on all points; Copper and Spiehs remain on the job; and with a new administration in place the relationship between NPEA and management is much improved.

In August, Spiehs thanked his colleagues for their support.

“For young teachers, I know membership might seem expensive,” he said. “But 18 years later, with a family and a dog, when you get in a situation like we were in...”

Then he added this important thought: “Up until this occurred, I thought the ‘union’ was in Lincoln. We, sitting here, are the union. We could not have done this without Scott and Trish. But we also could not have done it without you.”

Effective Advocacy

Your Association, your union, is only as strong as you make it. In North Platte, it is quite strong, thanks to Copper, Spiehs and their more than 250 colleagues. They have set the standard for Association strength.

To those who argue that membership is expensive, or that ‘alternative’ organizations provide adequate support, I would counter that this is a perfect example of why educators should not brush off NSEA membership. Your most valuable asset is your job. Banding together with your NSEA colleagues – as North Platte members did so well this past spring and summer – makes it easier to effectively advocate for our students and for each other.

Finding Nebraska’s Great Public Schools (GPS)



NSEA locals from around the state appear or are mentioned in this issue. Look for:
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Two-Year Pact Resolves Blue Cross, CHI Dispute

Agreement Brings CHI Back to BC Network

A 15-month contract dispute ended in July with the signing of two agreements by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska and CHI Health.

BCBS and CHI Health inked one agreement for the Omaha metro area and another for the remainder of Nebraska. Both agreements are for two years.

Blue Cross had dropped CHI as a network provider in September 2014, saying the CHI system's costs in the metro area were out of line when compared to other providers.

As a result, patients in the CHI system faced switching doctors or paying higher, out-of-network prices.

Nearly all Nebraska educators utilize Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska health care plans, as provided through the Educator's Health Alliance. The EHA, governed by NSEA, along with the Nebraska Association of School Boards and the Nebraska Council of School Administrators, stood with Blue Cross during the negotiations and the separation of services.

Among those on the EHA Board of Directors are NSEA President Nancy Fulton, NSEA Executive Director Craig R.

Christiansen and NSEA Associate Executive Director Neal Clayburn, who chairs the EHA Board.

With more than 77,000 Nebraskans covered, EHA is the single largest plan in the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska system, said EHA Advocate Greg Long.

"With Nancy, Craig and Neal, the EHA was a rock in the dispute between Blue Cross and Blue Shield and CHI," said Long. "They watched out for the interests of Nebraska's education family throughout the process."

NSEA formed the statewide health care plan in 1967. In 2000, NSEA led formation of the EHA and has six of 12 seats on the EHA board. The Nebraska Council of School Administrators and the Nebraska Association of School Boards each have three seats on the EHA board.

Pat Bourne, a Blue Cross senior vice president, said his company sought an "agreement that was fair and beneficial to our members and addressed CHI Health's higher costs in Omaha." He said Blue Cross is satisfied with the new agreements and welcome CHI Health facilities and physicians back into our Network BLUE PPO."

Members with questions should call the number on the back of their BCBSNE member ID card.

That number is 1-877-721-2583.



Educators
Health
Alliance

EHA Inflation Falls Below U.S. Average

A recent national survey of 65 insurers conducted by Wells Fargo indicates rising health care claim trends in 2015 and 2016 that will result in a surge in premium rates in 2015 and 2016

The Wells Fargo Health Care Trend Survey measures the rate of inflation in health care costs in 2015 and expected in 2016.

The survey indicates an average trend of 7.9 percent in 2015 and a projected trend of 8.7 percent for 2016, for plans similar to the Educators Health Alliance (PPO plans). These health care cost trends are the primary driver of health insurance premium increases.

By comparison, the EHA projects just a 5 percent increase in claim trends for 2015 and 2016 in the development of EHA premium rates.

Even more positive for EHA members, relative to the national numbers, is the conservative 1.9 percent premium increase for all EHA benefit plans for the 2015-16 plan year that opened on Sept. 1.

The continued favorable experience of the EHA plan is why EHA is able to have such a low premium increase and again this year provide premium rate stability for its members.

For more information, go to the EHA website at:

ehaplan.org

"We promise to continue to work on solutions to improve quality and affordability for all our members," said Bourne.

Open Sky: Nebraska in Middle of the Tax Road

Nebraska Also Very Pro-Business

The OpenSky Policy Institute has made a good case for Nebraska's standing in the never-ending debate on taxes.

In a midsummer OpEd, OpenSky Executive Director Renee Fry asserted that Nebraska's taxes and tax rates "are a lot like our geography — right in the middle."

Fry said that "According to U.S. Census Bureau data, released in 2012, Nebraska ranks 26th in terms of combined local and state taxes as a share of personal income. By the same measure, our state's personal income taxes rank 29th, sales taxes rank 26th and property taxes rank 15th.

"In other words," she wrote, "Nebraska is neither a high-tax, nor a low-tax state."

The report is a bellwether in the face of a constant stream of assertions that Nebraska is a high-tax state. If there is room to improve, she said, it is with property taxes, which are relatively high

compared to the other rankings.

Part of the issue, she said, is the state's "high reliance on property taxes to fund K-12 education, which has been mentioned in every major study of our state's tax code since 1962. Nebraska is ranked 2nd in the country for highest reliance on local sources of revenue — primarily property taxes — to fund K-12 education. This heavy reliance on property taxes to fund our public education system is driven by relatively low levels of state support for schools. We rank 49th in that regard."

Nebraska ranks well in business, as well, said Fry. CNBC ranks the state 5th in terms of business-friendly states. In 2014, Nebraska was third in the Pollina consulting firm's list of pro-business states. Forbes puts Nebraska No. 2 in terms of economic climate.

So, the next time someone says you live in a high-tax, anti-business state, remind them of the facts, and tell them that as the backbone of our democracy, public schools deserve adequate funding. And as for taxes and the state's approach to business, the state is doing just fine.

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DOING RIGHT FOR CHILDREN

How Two Teachers, Their Colleagues and NSEA Took a Stand on Student Safety

On a Tuesday morning in late March, a little boy stepped off a school bus in North Platte and kick started nearly five months of turmoil between the school district and the North Platte Education Association.

The turmoil landed squarely at the feet of two Association members: NPEA President and Resource III Teacher Christie Copper and Guidance Counselor Stephen Spiels.

The child entered Madison Middle School disheveled, dirty, hungry and acting out of character, said Copper. The “dirt” on his face, hands and under his fingernails was quickly determined to be feces. Copper and Spiels conferred and then Spiels did what state statute – and good conscience – requires of educators: he contacted Child Protective Services to report their suspicion of possible child abuse or neglect.

By mid-afternoon, an angry parent had called the principal, who soon fired off an email to Copper and Spiels. The email said it was a “mistake” to call authorities without first contacting the child’s parents. Further, the email said that in the future parents are to be contacted before making such a report unless the child is “in immediate danger.”

Because the school administration, and later the school board, refused to withdraw the email directive – going against state statute and, later, widespread public opinion – NPEA members filed two grievances and eventually three court actions seeking relief.

Ultimately, the NPEA prevailed on all counts. A prepared statement was read aloud at the board’s August meeting conceding that Copper and Spiels acted



Sticking up for Kids: North Platte educators Steve Spiels, left, and Christie Copper were the center of attention — and support — during an ordeal focused on reporting of suspected abuse.

correctly; that their actions were in concert with district policy and procedure; that administrators supported those actions; that the email directive to contact parents was withdrawn; and that no reprisals would be taken against any employee using the grievance process outlined in the negotiated contract.

“It was most important for Christie and Steve to pursue this in order to protect children,” NSEA Director of Advocacy Trish Guinan told NPEA members in August. “The fact that they stood up for this child, and the fact that the NPEA stood behind them, was a courageous, courageous effort.”

The course of action taken by Copper, Spiels and NPEA members established that student safety is, indeed, of paramount concern for educators, and where reasonable cause exists to believe possible abuse or neglect, a school employee must report that suspicion to authorities.

NSEA Attorney Scott Norby has worked with educators for 35 years.

“I have never been so proud of a group of teachers in my life,” he said. “To see, to a person, this group stand together for all the right reasons in support of their colleagues was a very rewarding experience.”

Although they were buoyed by broad support from family, friends, parents, retired educators – and even an area motorcycle club – it was a tense spring for NPEA members.

They drew on the expertise of Guinan and Norby as they stood against angry administrators, their school board’s sum-

mary dismissal of grievances, and even charges of “insubordination” and “consequences.”

Much of their strength came from within.

“I answered some questions, but they did it all themselves,” said Norby. “This was the North Platte teachers standing for what was right.”

Spiehs agreed as he spoke to more than 100 colleagues at NPEA’s back-to-school meeting in mid-August.

“Up until this occurred, I thought the ‘union’ was in Lincoln,” said Spiehs. “We, sitting here, are the union. We could not have done this without Scott and Trish. But we also could not have done this without all of you.”

After reading the principal’s emailed directive, Spiehs was in disbelief, yet knew placing a call to authorities was the right step. Copper was shocked and upset, and began to question her actions.

“I needed someone to tell me that what I had done was correct,” she said.

So Copper did what she has counseled her members to do for years and called NSEA.

Said Spiehs: “Right away, NSEA was interested. They took the case up the day it happened.”

It was with good reason that NSEA stood with Copper, Spiehs, members of the NPEA and the affiliated North Platte Para-Educators Association: educators have a statutory obligation to report suspected child abuse or neglect. Failure to report can lead to misdemeanor charges and loss of an educator’s teaching certificate.

“If we had just said ‘fine’ – that was admitting that we had done something wrong,” said Copper. “But we had followed policy, state statute and most important, we did what was right for this child.”

A week after the incident, Copper and Spiehs met with the principal and asked to have the email retracted. Their request was refused by the principal, and later by the acting superintendent. With NSEA’s assistance, the NPEA filed a grievance asking for retraction of the “call-the-parents first” condition now placed on the reporting of abuse or neglect. Copper took a call from the acting superintendent, who criticized her for involving attorneys and accused her of ignoring grievance procedure and policy.

Copper and Spiehs were then called into a meeting with five administrators. They were threatened with “consequences” and, more seriously, with insubordination – which can lead to disciplinary action up to, and including, being fired.

“It was very scary,” said Copper. “We weren’t sure we were going to have jobs.”

A few days later, the principal denied the grievance.

School Reporting of Abuse and Neglect Grows

Figures from the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services indicate that reporting of suspected child abuse and neglect by school employees is on the upswing. These numbers are from the DHHS annual Child Abuse or Neglect Annual Data Reports:

Year	Statewide Allegations of Abuse/Neglect	Reports filed by schools	School reports as % of total
2014	31,631	6,145	19.4
2013	32,029	5,832	18.2
2012	31,086	5,622	18.1
2011	30,282	4,922	16.3

In early May, Guinan and Norby traveled to the final NPEA building representative meeting of the school year. Copper and Spiehs told their story and Norby answered questions. The building reps discussed options and agreed to appeal the grievance denial to the board of education. They also backed the filing of a second grievance asking the district to address the reprisals.

In a four-minute special meeting in late May, the North Platte Board of Education denied both grievances.

That action galvanized NPEA members. On a Tuesday afternoon in early June, the NPEA executive team and all but two of 30 building reps met again with Guinan and Norby. They voted unanimously to seek a court decision.

With NSEA’s assistance, the NPEA filed two Complaints for Declaratory and Injunctive Relief with the Lincoln County District Court and an Unfair Labor Practice lawsuit with the Nebraska Commission of Industrial Relations.

“The decision to seek a court ruling was not made lightly. The issue of protecting children from abuse or neglect is of paramount importance to NPEA teacher-members,” said Copper. “Our teachers are committed to the issue of student safety.”

Norby said the CIR lawsuit sought to preserve a teacher’s ability to present grievances without fear of reprisal.

School officials soon began talking about resolving the litigation. An agreement was reached, with the district conceding on all issues. At the Board of Education’s August meeting, the board read aloud

the statement that reversed previous board and administrative actions.

“This all confirmed that, at the end of the day, Christie and Steve did the right thing. Ultimately, this was about student safety,” said Norby.

Among others supporting Copper, Spiehs and the NPEA members by attending the board meeting were leather-clad members of the Guardians of the Children Motorcycle Club.

“It’s good to see that the school district, under new leadership, wanted to resolve this,” said Guinan. “There are no longer any conditions on the teacher reporting of suspicion of abuse.”

Today, Copper and the NPEA executive committee meet regularly with new Superintendent Ron Hanson. They’ve already resolved a separate issue left over from last year, and the relationship between the Association and the district are on the mend.

For Copper and Spiehs, the issue was about their students.

“It’s always been about student safety, first and foremost,” she said. “My goal is always to protect children. In this case, it was also important to advocate and protect my colleagues and the negotiated agreement between our Association and the board. I’m pleased that the school board sees that our Association is willing to stand up for what is right for our students – and for our staff.”

“Up until this occurred, I thought the ‘union’ was in Lincoln.

“We, sitting here, are the union.”

— Stephen Spiehs, Guidance Counselor, to his colleagues in the North Platte Education Association



Papillion-LaVista on the scene: These members of the Papillion-LaVista Education Association were on the job at the NEA Representative Assembly in July. From left are Peg Alexander, Ellen Buglewicz, Maria Wallace and Andy Isaacson.

Unite! Inspire! Lead!

100 NSEA Members Assist at NEA Representative Assembly in Push for Equity, Access, High Expectations and Investment in Education

A strong contingent of Nebraskans was active among the more than 7,000 educators from across the country who made a national statement on accountability this past summer.

The 100 Nebraskans in NSEA’s delegation to NEA’s annual Representative Assembly were in the thick of discussion during debate over passage of two high-profile New Business Items that puts the focus on accountability.

“Our delegates have always taken an active role at RA,” said NSEA President Nancy Fulton, who led the state’s delegation. “They have always represented Nebraska well, and this year was no different.”

In addition to conducting an active floor strategy and intensive networking during the assembly, Fulton said Omaha member Tracy Hartman-Bradley spoke passionately to the assembly on several issues relating to the American Indian/Alaska Native Caucus, of which she is a member.

The Representative Assembly (RA) in Orlando was NEA’s 94th such gathering. The RA is the top decision-making body for the nearly 3 million-member NEA, and sets Association policy for the coming year.

Delegates embraced the meeting’s theme – “NEA: Unite. Inspire. Lead.” – and tackled complex issues with far-reaching implications for the profession.

tions for the profession.

The pair of high-profile New Business Items (NBIs) supported the recommendations of an NEA Task Force on Accountability and passed easily — with one gaining unanimous support. The recent task force report, “A New Vision for Student Success,” addressed issues that the current narrow focus on testing overlooks, including equity and access. The report explains how shared responsibility for America’s education system will best serve students.

“By passing this New Business Item, the delegates recognized that we can’t do this important work alone,” said NEA Vice President Becky Pringle. “We must partner with other education, parent and community stakeholders; we must work shoulder to shoulder or we won’t be successful in realizing our vision.”

Delegates also approved an NBI that addresses issues of institutional racism. The measure calls for a coalition of partners to work together to eradicate policies that perpetuate institutional racism in education and expand educator-led professional development in areas of cultural competence, diversity and social justice.



At the RA Arena: Representing teachers from NSEA’s Capitol District, above, were Sarah Brown, Wilber-Clatonia, left; and Susan Stake, Waverly. Below, Bellevue’s Brad Wellmann, left, and Deb Lyons, Hastings, smile for the camera.



All Stakeholders

Among other recommendations, the task

force calls for all education stakeholders to have high expectations of all schools, educators and students. The recommendations also make clear that the level of investment must mirror increased expectations. The report stresses that for too long, minority students have been underserved by America's education system.

"Responsibility for equity has never been more important," says Pringle. "More than half of the students in our public schools are living in poverty and the public school population now has more students from minority backgrounds than ever."

Damaging Legacy

First, delegates passed a measure directing the Association to convene a panel of public education stakeholders to begin implementing the task force recommendations.

As a signal of the Association's commitment to serve low-income and minor-

ity students, the delegates also voted to pass an NBI that addresses issues of institutional racism. This damaging legacy continues to grip our country and prevents large populations of students from having access to a quality public education, qualified teachers, and great public

schools. This second measure also calls for a coalition of partners to work together to eradicate policies that perpetuate institutional racism in education and expand educator-led professional development in areas of cultural competence, diversity, and social justice.



At the Hall: During floor action at Orlando, these NSEA members paused for a photo. They are Janet Sheaffer and Dennis Batterman, both of Imperial; and Jules Spicklemier and Julie Colby, both of Lincoln. All the RA photos were taken again this year by Lincoln retiree Pat Etherton.

Stocks: Teachers a 'Pivotal Part' of Emerging New American Majority Education 'Reform' Movement is Collapsing, Says NEA Exec

In a speech to the 2015 NEA Representative Assembly on July 4, NEA Executive Director John Stocks said a "grand alliance" of Americans is coming together to demand action on social, racial, economic, and environmental justice.

"I believe the conditions are ripe for a movement of a new American majority," Stocks told the 7,000 delegates gathered in Orlando. "This movement is fueled by growing income inequality, the scourge of racial injustice, attacks on our voting rights, a political system rigged to benefit the wealthy and powerful, the corporate takeover of our public school system, and the threat of global climate change."

We have much to celebrate on July 4, Stocks said, but "we do so with our eyes wide-open, for we know that all is not well in our country."

But every educator has a unique contribution to make to the new American Majority Movement, Stocks said.

The test, label, and punish regime of the so-called education

"reform" movement is collapsing. But what will replace it? A different set of equally narrow and destructive policies or a vision of public education that is created and cultivated by educators?

It is a vision, Stocks said, rooted in serving the needs, wants

and desires of the whole child, that models and fosters equity and justice, that cultivates life-long learning for college and career in a prosperous and fair economy.

"We demand that all of our students have an opportunity to learn! We want all of our students, regardless of their zip code, to receive the support, tools and time necessary to learn!" Stocks said.

The three million members of the NEA are pivotal to this effort, Stocks said. "Our union ought to be indispensable to our members' success... in their practice... in their professional de-

velopment...and in their careers."

Educators know what must be done for every student to succeed and there is no one else more qualified to lead public education into the future and be an indispensable part of the new American Majority Movement.



All Smiles: Dave Witt, Hastings, at left — attired in a bow tie made by his mother! — and Gretna's Blaine Christen smile for the camera during NEA's Representative Assembly in Orlando.

MISSION:
(NEARLY)
IDENTICAL

Nancy Burkhart Takes Charge of EDUCATORS RISING

**Goal is to Build Chapters
Across the State. But Not to Worry:
She has Chapter Building Experience.**

As the new state advisor for the Future Educators of America, Nancy Burkhart has a big job ahead.

But it's not like she hasn't done this before. You might even call her new gig "Mission: (Nearly) Identical."

One could say the same for the FEA, which was rebranded and relaunched last month as Educators Rising. The goal of both Burkhart and Educators Rising is simple: support high school students who want to be teachers.

Burkhart retired this spring after 29 years with the Omaha Public Schools, the last 24 years at Burke High School. There she taught family and consumer science, Intro to Education and, 15 years ago, started an FEA chapter.

"I saw a need at Burke to get kids who wanted to be teachers headed in that direction," she said. "We needed to get something started to give them that support, that encouragement to go into the teaching profession."

Burkhart also started a dual enrollment program with the University of Nebraska-Omaha that gave her high school students college credit and field experience.

"They were working four days



On the Job: Retired Omaha teacher Nancy Burkhart is the new state advisor for Educators Rising, formerly the Future Educators Association.

a week, side-by-side with a teacher, under the supervision of a teacher," she said. "The best part of that class was getting them out into the classrooms."

Today, Burkhart's mission with Educators Rising is to spread and share her knowledge and skills across the state, rather than in one building. She hopes to grow Educators Rising from a few high school chapters in the Omaha area to chapters across the state.

"We definitely want to branch out, to reach out across the state," she said. "There are opportunities for Educators Rising to give support to new chapters in fundraising, service projects and more."



Start a Chapter in Your School!

Are you interested in starting an Educators Rising chapter at your high school?

All that is needed is an advisor or two willing to meet with high school students interested in teaching. Through Educators Rising, those advisors facilitating a high school program have access to a private Teacher Leader Community featuring curricular materials, discussion spaces, and experts. Learn more at the Nebraska chapter website at:

educatorsrisingnebraska.org

For details, contact Nebraska Educators Rising State Advisor Nancy Burkhart. She can be reached at 402-740-1343, or:

nancy.burkhart@nebraska.gov

Virtual Campus Opportunities

The reorganization of Educators Rising should help. Burkhart said that along with reorganization comes more support from the national office. That includes elimination of the national dues structure – there is no longer a fee to join or participate at the national level – and the addition of a virtual campus on the Educators Rising website.

Burkhart is quite pleased with the virtual campus opportunities.

"On the website, students can participate in competitions; can earn 'badges' for their portfolios;

can find lesson plans; and can view videos and podcasts that are constantly updated,” she said.

The video library features National Board Certified teachers in action. The website includes teacher-leader resources and online discussions.

“If a student is interested in a teaching career, and their school doesn’t have an Intro to Education class, this is just one more resource they can use,” she said.

The website also offers students help in finding a college or university that fits their needs.

NSEA Invests

Those interested in organizing new chapters will discover “excellent support” from Educators Rising, said Burkhart, particularly in the areas of fundraising, service and other projects. That will make growing the organization easier.

“FEA has been going for 75 years or longer. They took a look at where things are going, and wanted more,” she said.

The former FEA, rebranded as Educators Rising in early August, is supported by the organization’s main benefactor, Phi Delta Kappa International (see sidebar). A host of other supporters include the NEA.

At the state level, a new advisory board has been appointed to guide the program forward. NSEA has invested \$5,000 in Nebraska’s Educators Rising effort again this year.

“This is one of the best investments we, as educators, can make in our profession,” said NSEA President Nancy Fulton. “We need to give all the support we can to students interested in teaching.”

Growing Pains

Burkhart says this next year may see some growing pains, but she foresees good things down the road. First on the schedule is an educator’s expo at the University of Nebraska-Omaha later this fall.

“We’ll have kids sitting in on college classes to see some dynamic and interesting teachers, followed by breakout sessions,” said Burkhart.

The state conference will be held in February in Lincoln, and will include competitions and breakouts. Burkhart hopes to expand the conference to two days next year.

“I feel like they go to these conferences not just to compete, but also to learn,”

Educators Rising Regroups with PDK, NEA Support

Future Educators of America has reorganized, rebranded as Educators Rising, and launched an effort to make sure teachers have the experience and skills they need.

Sixty percent of teachers work within 20 miles of where they went to high school, says Educators Rising’s Dan Brown.

“Right now — today — in every community, the next generation of educators is sitting on the student side of the desks,” he said. “We’re all counting on homegrown teachers to be highly skilled, well-prepared professionals, and our existing pipeline isn’t doing the job well enough.”

The Educators Rising goal is to make certain that, starting with high school students, young people passionate about teaching have the hands-on experience and skills they need to be successful educators. The program has eliminated national dues and has:

- Invested in technology to provide cutting-edge opportunities;
- Formed partnerships with top teaching organizations to offer valuable professional learning resources.

Educators Rising has 14,500 students and teachers in more than 750 U.S. schools. It is powered by Phi Delta Kappa International, with support from NEA and a host of other education organizations. For more information, go to:

educatorsrising.org

Nebraska has a Legacy with Educators Rising

Educators Rising traces its roots to the Future Educators Association, which was founded as Future Teachers of America in 1937. Nebraska native Joy E. Morgan is credited as an FEA co-founder.

According to E.A. Kral’s 2012 book, *Nationally Distinguished Nebraskans*, Morgan was born in 1899 in Cal-laway and lived in Upland and Peru. He was an administrator at Bloomington and Guide Rock before earning a library science degree from Columbia in 1920, and then joining NEA, where he founded the NEA Journal in 1921. He led the NEA publications department until 1954.

The current chair of the Phi Delta Kappa International Board of Directors is Doug Christensen, former Nebraska Commissioner of Education and a professor of graduate education at Doane College. Christensen received NSEA’s highest honor, the Friend of Education, in 2006.

Also on the PDK Board of Directors is David Hemphill, assistant principal at Millard’s Kiewit Middle School.



Christensen



Hemphill

she said.

Burkhart admits that some veteran educators may discourage students from entering the profession. Instead, Burkhart believes students interested in teaching need

to know there are plenty of people who support their dreams to join the profession.

“They’ll find they love what they do, and they’ll make a difference in student lives,” she said. “Where else are you going to find that?”



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YOU ARE NOT ALONE

These Tips are Aimed at Beginning Teachers, But Should Benefit Classroom Veterans, Too.

By Karen Zauber

If you're a beginning teacher, you probably worry about classroom management. You're not alone. Classroom management — managing both student behavior and the physical learning environment — is an ongoing concern of all teachers. And a topic you'll continue to read and learn about.

Begin by considering these four areas of classroom management:

- **Classroom Climate:** the look and feel of your room.
- **Conducting Class Efficiently:** managing time and students.
- **Reaching All Students:** delivery, encouragement, teaching techniques.
- **Establishing Discipline:** creating an atmosphere of consistency and mutual respect.

Classroom Climate

To create the climate you want for your classroom, you must first decide the look and feel of the room. Think about the types of activities that will go on in your classroom as you answer the following questions:

- Can you tolerate noise? Must the room always be quiet? Or can you put up with a mix of noise and quiet, depending on the learning activity? It's easier to start out more controlled and gradually open up to activity and noise than the other way around.
- Must your classroom be neat (orderly rows, clean boards, limited clutter) or can you stand it messy?
- What do you want your desk and surroundings to say about you? I'm neat and efficient. I don't worry about clutter, but I like some order. I like flowers and color. I value students' work and enjoy displaying it.

■ How do you want students to turn in work? Do you want them to put it into your hands, into baskets, or e-mail it to you? Let them know.

Tell students how you feel about class climate and how everyone can help keep a pleasant, productive learning environment.

Conducting Class Efficiently

When you streamline classroom procedures, you make things clearer for everyone and you make more time for teaching and

learning. An efficiently run classroom enables students to focus on their work, which, in turn, helps reduce discipline problems. To streamline classroom procedures, use these approaches:

- Set long-term goals and keep them in mind as you do your daily planning.
- Quickly learn and use student names.
- Gain students' attention before beginning a new activity. Don't try to talk over student noise.
- Give students their next assignment before you collect or return papers.
- Don't interrupt students while they are on task.
- Edit any materials you write for students. On tests be sure to avoid using poorly worded, ambiguous questions.
- Don't introduce too many topics simultaneously. Think through the delivery of content before you get to the classroom.
- Think through directions you will give students (write them



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down, if that helps, before giving them verbally). Directions should be brief, and as the word implies, direct.

- Don't stretch out the time for an activity.
- Be consistent in what you say and do.

Reaching All Students

Three strategies will help you teach and reach all students. Vary your delivery to keep students awake and interested in learning. Encourage all students to do their best and let them know that you believe they can succeed. Apply proven teaching techniques to keep student interest and monitor whether they are learning.

1: Vary Your Delivery

- Modulate your voice. Avoid speaking too fast or in a high-pitched tone.
- Use a voice level that can be heard easily in the back of the room.
- Be animated. Using facial expressions and body language can be very effective in teaching.
- Move around. Don't stand or sit too long in one place.

2: Encourage All Students

- Accentuate the positive.
- Be serious about getting work accomplished, but add some humor and fun to

Submit Lesson Plan for a Chance at \$500!

Interested in winning \$500 for your classroom? SaveOnEnergy.com seeks the best lesson plans for teaching about energy or sustainability. Plans may vary in scope or topic, but among other things, must:

- Encompass energy and/or sustainability knowledge.
- Be appropriate for a grade level from kindergarten through eighth grade.
- Include goals and how you plan to measure students' understanding.
- Include a fully detailed description of the lesson plan, handouts, etc., including a list of all materials needed.

Winners must teach their and then submit the lesson plan (with notes or adjustments based on experience) along with photographs.

SaveOnEnergy.com will give six \$500 grants, in the form of Visa Reward Cards, to be used for class materials and activities. Winning plans will be featured on SaveOnEnergy.com for other teachers to use.

Winnings must be used toward materials needed to successfully teach the lesson plan and provide new educational materials. Entry deadline is 5 p.m. Friday, Sept. 18. For details, and to enter, go to:

www.saveonenergy.com/teacher-grant/

class each day.

- Let students know that you expect them to succeed.
- Talk to and interact with as many students as possible, not just favorite students.

3. Apply Proven Teaching Techniques

- Vary your teaching strategies or combination of strategies during the week.
- Use three or more seconds of "wait-time" after asking a content question.
- Balance the time you spend with one student or group and monitoring the entire class
- Do appropriate comprehension checks — as you are teaching — to see if students understand the content.
- Praise students appropriately. If you praise them all the time — especially when they're doing what's expected and no more, they won't strive to do more. Interim reinforcement is the most powerful way to reinforce positive behavior. Be selective in your praise. Be honest. Tell them when they've excelled and how they can improve.
- Read student papers for correct answers and for process and student thinking.

Establishing Discipline

When you establish an atmosphere of consistency and mutual respect, you will

eliminate some discipline problems and facilitate the solving of others. Here are some techniques to use:

- Be consistent in what you say and what you do.
- Quickly learn and use student names.
- Find an effective means of quieting students. Instead of saying "Shhh," consider using a subtle strategy such as dimming the lights, playing classical or other soothing music, or putting on the board a problem, a brainteaser, or an intriguing question relating to the lesson of the day.
- Avoid using threats to control the class. If you do use a threat, be prepared to carry it out.
- Nip behavior problems in the bud. Intervene quickly when students are behaving inappropriately.
- Whenever possible, reprimand a student one-on-one instead of across the room, in front of the whole class.
- Don't permit students to be inattentive to an educationally useful media presentation.
- Use appropriate punishment for classroom misbehavior.

About the author: Karen Zauber taught elementary school in Oxon Hill, MD, and Denver, CO. She has worked for the National Education Association for 12 years.

BINGO!

Educators: This new two-in-one BINGO! card game teaches second- through fifth-graders in a fun way about the many useful items made from pig and soybean by-products – wasting virtually nothing. The “Pork” game is on one side of the card, the “Soy” game on the other. The BINGO! kit includes game tokens, worksheets, call-out cards, and a classroom poster.

Quantities are limited so order yours today! Go to www.nebraskaporkbingo.com

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Legislative Session Labeled ‘Satisfying’

Master Teacher Act Funded — Finally!

The 2015 Nebraska’s Legislature is long concluded, but after a whirlwind summer and now with a new school year under way, a recap is in order.

Broadly speaking, the session was a success. For instance:

- State aid was increased.
- Major tax initiatives that would have adversely affected public schools were voted down.
- The Master Teacher Act was funded 15 years after enactment.
- The Excellence in Teaching loan forgiveness program received extended funding.
- Revenue from wind energy leases on state school lands will be



used to fund a new teacher and principal evaluation pilot project, with future wind and solar dollars targeted for professional growth programs.

“When the gavel came down, I think we were satisfied that public education had a productive year in the Legislature,” said NSEA President Nancy Fulton.

She cautioned that the coming session will be yet another grind. A bill (LB288) to remove payroll dues deductions for educational unions – aimed squarely at harming NSEA – remains in committee. In addition, LB534 would have limited state aid to education also remained in committee. Had LB534 been enacted for this school year, state aid would have been cut by \$18.6 million. Instead, it was increased by \$17.8 million.

“We’re already looking ahead and planning for the next session,” said Fulton.

Here is a brief look at key 2015 legislation:

■ **Time to Teach Act:** Omaha Sen. Tanya Cook’s LB435, offered on NSEA’s behalf, is in committee. It establishes a 15-member task force to make recommendations for creating incentives for school districts to reduce class sizes and increase instructional time.

■ **Master Teacher Program Act:** LB185, also suggested by NSEA, was sponsored by Lincoln Sen. Kate Bolz. Amended into LB657, it passed, appropriating \$470,000 for grants and additional salary for teachers seeking and obtaining National Board Certification. The program was enacted in 2000, but was never funded.

■ **Coordinator for Educator Effectiveness:** Also suggested by NSEA, LB239 requires the Department of Education to appoint a coordinator to work with schools, educational service units, postsecondary institutions and others to develop evaluation models for educators, provide training to implement the models, and facilitate the collection of data.

■ **Expanded Learning Grants:** Another bill from Bolz, LB379, was enacted. The Expanded Learning Opportunity Grant Program Act promotes academic achievement outside of school hours in high-need districts. It will provide grants to community-based organizations working in partnership with schools to provide expanded learning opportunities.

■ **Tuition Reimbursement:** Another NSEA bill, LB589, (Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks, Lincoln) passed and will extend lottery grant funding for the Excellence in Teaching tuition reimbursement program for five years. It also adds educational endorsements in career academy, early childhood and mental health counselor related fields.

Scherer will Bid for Legislative Seat

Would Represent Northwest Lancaster Co.

Larry Scherer has worked for and with the Nebraska Legislature. Now he hopes to join that lawmaking body.

Scherer seeks the Legislature’s District 21 seat (northwest Lancaster County) held by Sen. Ken Haar. Priorities will be job growth, property tax relief and improved access to education and health care.

“I’ll put my experience to work to ensure we maintain quality schools while reducing property taxes,” he said.

After earning a degree from the University of Nebraska College of Law, he was legal counsel for the Legislature’s Business and Labor Committee and later for the Education Committee. There, he was lead staff and author of the Tax Equity and Educational Opportunities Support Act – the state aid formula that distributes nearly a billion tax dollars to Nebraska public schools.

“It is well past time to revisit our method of funding schools,” he said. “We are 49th in the nation in state support for our schools – and we have shifted far too much of the burden onto property taxes.”

Scherer is a trained mediator. For the last 10 years he has been director of research for NSEA.



Scherer

Lisa Fricke Seeks State Board Post

Dist. 2 Covers Sarpy, Part of Douglas Co.

Longtime Nebraska teacher and NSEA member Lisa Fricke has filed for election to the State Board of Education representing District 2, which includes most of Sarpy County and part of Douglas County.

Fricke taught English in Nebraska for 36 years, experience that will serve her well on the state board.

“I am passionate about ensuring every child has access to an excellent education,” she said. She has been alarmed by the trend of more mandates, testing and ‘top-down’ control of education.

“I believe decisions are best left to local communities, taxpayers, teachers and elected school boards,” she said. “Teachers need time to teach and children need time to explore and learn.”

Fricke plans to focus on reducing property taxes by advocating for additional state aid to schools with growing enrollments; working to promote quality early childhood ed programs; and ensuring appropriate class size.

A Bellevue High School graduate, Fricke graduated from Wayne State College and has earned five additional teaching endorsements. She has served as a master teacher mentor for the Intergenerational Mentoring Program and was a gubernatorial appointee to the Special Education Accountability Commission.



Fricke

A Good Deal: Fourth-Graders and Free Food

State's Ag Producers Again Support Ag Sack Lunch Program at Capitol

A free sack lunch and a fact-filled presentation about agriculture will again be offered to Nebraska's fourth-grade classes when they visit the State Capitol in Lincoln. The Ag Sack Lunch Program is made available at no cost to schools by the Nebraska Soybean Board (NSB), the Nebraska Pork Producers Association (NPPA), the Nebraska Corn Board (NCB) and the Nebraska Beef Council (NBC).

Letters of invitation will be sent in early September to fourth-grade teachers in 660 elementary schools in 44 counties in the eastern third of Nebraska, the schools most likely to make the Lincoln trip.

Reservations for the 2015-2016 school year are limited to 5,000 students on a first-come, first-served basis. These spots fill up quickly, so teachers are urged to sign up their classes as soon as possible. Program coordinators suggest making reservations even if their State Capitol tour dates have not been firmed up yet. Reservations can be placed online at:

agsacklunchprogram.com

More than 20,000 fourth-grade students come to Lincoln to tour the State Capitol Building each year as part of their state-mandated curriculum. The Ag Sack Lunch Program has been designed to com-

bine these tours with a lively learning experience about the importance of farming to the state. Since the 2010-11 school year, nearly 25,000 students have participated in the sack lunch program.

The sack lunches consist of Nebraska-produced food items to help students appreciate where their food comes from. They'll also receive a card game using farm facts to take home to play with their families

As they eat their lunches, students hear a 20-minute presentation about the role agriculture plays in the state's economy. Presentation leaders are University of Nebraska-Lincoln students trained specifically to conduct these sessions

"The kids come to Lincoln to tour the State Capitol building as part of their fourth-grade curriculum anyway," says Kyla Habrock, the NPPA's youth leadership and events specialist. "It's a very convenient time to reach them with our message."

Victor Bohuslavsky, executive director of the NSB, said the objective has been to make fourth-graders aware of agriculture's importance to Nebraskans.

"They learn that one in three jobs in Nebraska are connected to agriculture," he said, "and how the state's farmers work hard to protect the environment, ensure food safety, and maintain their animals' health."

Online registration is available at the website. For more details, call Karen Brokaw at 1.402.432.2299.



Snoots, Sprouts, Pork and Soybeans Ag Groups Provide Free Worksheets

The Nebraska Pork Producers Association (NPPA) and the Nebraska Soybean Board (NSB) have developed a new tool to teach second- through sixth-grade students about the importance of pigs and soybean farming. Entitled *Short Snoots, Soybean Sprouts*, the four-page worksheet is provided free by the NPPA and the NSB.

The worksheet uses a variety of interactive exercises, puzzles and story problems to demonstrate how pigs and soybeans are raised in Nebraska. These activities make use of student skills in math, science, and language while teaching important concepts about agriculture. Other topics addressed include how soybeans provide healthy, high-protein food for both pigs and people and how by-products of soybeans and pigs are used for non-food items.

The NPPA and the NSB actively work to educate Nebraskans about the importance of animal agriculture to the state's economic health.

Teachers can order copies at no cost at: nebraskashortsnootssoybeansprouts.com

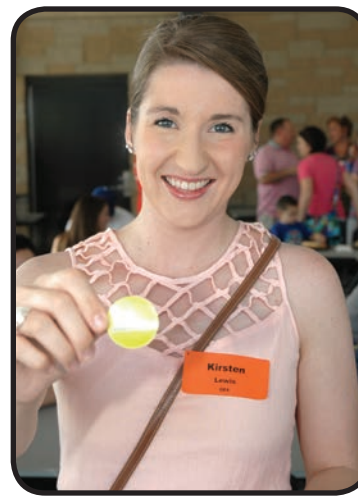
Educators: *Pigmania* is an engaging package of six lessons that teach fourth-through sixth-graders the basics about pork, the most widely eaten meat in the world. Lessons focus on the production steps, from the farm to their dinner tables, and the high nutritional values of pork in their diets. This teacher package helps educators meet NDE standards in several areas, including social studies, language arts and math.

Provided **FREE** to Nebraska educators by the Nebraska Pork Producers Association and the Nebraska Soybean Board.

Quantities are limited, so order yours today!
Go to www.Nebraskapigmania.com

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They Joined! This quartet of new educators proudly display the 'I Joined' stickers they received after they signed up for association membership during an Omaha Stormchasers pre-game social in July. From left are Nicole Baranko, Papillion-LaVista; Amanda Benak, Millard; and Kristen Lewis and Camille Melara, Omaha.

Baseball & Brats Grow Membership

Six Metro Area Locals Join in Campaign at Stormchaser Game

Nearly 400 potential association members and their guests friends attended a successful membership effort for new teachers at an Omaha Stormchasers baseball game in late July.

In addition to the Stormchasers' game, the attendees enjoyed a traditional pre-game meal of hot dogs, brats, chips, beans and lemonade or tea, courtesy of the local associations that sponsored the event.

During the pre-game social, association leaders from six locals were on hand to answer questions about association membership. They talked to the new teachers about teaching contracts, salary schedules, association benefits, the first day of classes, who to turn to with questions and other



Getting Acquainted: Millard Education Association President Paul Schulte, right, greets new Millard teacher Heather Christensen, center, and her husband Kyle. Christensen began teaching at Cather Elementary in Millard.

issues that new educators wondered about.

The July event more than doubled the number of attendees from the inaugural gathering last year.

"This was a wonderful evening," said NSEA President Nancy Fulton. "There was a lot of excitement during the pre-game social and I think good information about the association was shared with potential members."

New teachers also had a chance to join the association at the event, if they chose to do so, and scores did so.

Locals involved included the Omaha Education Association, Bellevue Education Association, Papillion-LaVista Education Association, Millard Education Association, Westside Education Association and Gretna Education Association.

Also on hand were superintendents, or their representatives, from most of the six school districts.

Oct. 1 Deadline for NEA Medical, Related Arts Liability Plan

For nurses who teach or supervise in the medical arts area, it would not be wise to start the school year without the NEA Educators Employment Liability Program Insurance.

For only \$13, NEA provides nurses and other health educators and athletic trainers additional liability insurance coverage for teaching and supervisory responsibilities.

The policy for active and active part-time NSEA members covers school nurses for:

- Rendering first-aid and regular nursing services as a part of the member's educational employment.

- Administering oral prescription medicine to students, if advance written authorization has been provided.

In addition to nurses, eligible school employees include dental

hygienists, occupational therapists or physical therapists. NSEA members who are athletic trainers may also buy the additional coverage.

NSEA members wishing to purchase this extended coverage should send a letter requesting the coverage, along with a check for \$13, payable to NSEA, to: Megan Lyons, NSEA, 605 S. 14th St., Lincoln, NE 68508-2742. Be sure to indicate your occupation (school nurse). Also include your home and work telephone numbers.

Checks for the 2015-16 school year must be received by Oct. 1, 2015. Checks received after that date will provide coverage for the remaining months of the employment year.

For more details, call NSEA at 1-800-742-0047.

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Save With Dave

There are plenty of ways for NSEA members to enjoy financial savings through the NEA Member Benefits program.

For instance, the NEA Online Savings Account through Discover Bank provides these options:

- Members can earn more than five times the national savings average.

- The account offers a .95 percent annual percentage rate.

- Accounts can be opened with an opening balance of as little as \$500.

- There is no minimum monthly balance to maintain.

- There are no monthly maintenance fees for the account.

- The plan offers online and mobile account access.

- Free online money transfers and mobile check deposits are available.

Learn more under the 'Financial' section at the NEA Member Benefits website at:

neamb.com

Money Market's Fine Offerings

The NEA Money Market Account program through Discover Bank is also a great option for your financial consideration.

The program has these fine offerings:

- Rates that consistently exceed the national average.

- An APR of .75 percent.

- You can open an account starting with as little as \$2,500.

- You'll have easy access to your funds.

- There are no ATM fees at more than 60,000 ATMs across the USA.

Does it get any better than that?

NEA's CD Plan

One last financial idea for this month: Check out the NEA Certificate of Deposit Account. Also through Discover Bank, the plan offers rates that consistently exceed the national average. The plan also includes:

- Flexible terms of from 3 months to 10 years are offered with the plan.

- Convenient renewal options are offered at maturity.

- Choose either a Traditional or Roth IRA CD.

Learn more at:

neamb.com

David Glenn is Nebraska's NEA Member Benefits representative



Glenn

Just Married?

What All Newlyweds Need to Know About Purchasing Insurance

Summer is the peak wedding season in the U.S., continuing through September. While it's a time of joy and dreams of the future, there are many important decisions to make: how many people to invite, is there a need for a wedding planner, who will cater the meal and what about entertainment. Once the rings are exchanged and the honeymoon is over, there's another important step – getting your auto and home insurance in order. Here's a checklist for newlyweds:

Combine Your Insurance

If you have separate cars with different insurance companies, now that you are married you can find discounts by putting both vehicles on the same policy. It will also ensure that both drivers are covered no matter which car they use. Get extra savings by bundling your autos with your home or renters insurance.



Homeowner & Renters Coverage

Wedding presents are wonderful. You now have a new set of china, expensive new appliances and other things for your home. These assets need to be covered. Talk to an insurance advisor to make sure you have enough coverage to protect all the items you own and to increase your liability protection. It's also a great time to create an inventory of all your possessions to help you obtain the right amount of insurance protection and make filing a claim much easier.

The Marriage Discount

Make sure to inform your insurance company that you got married – most auto and home insurance companies offer important discounts for newlyweds. Men under the age of 25 are usually considered high risk drivers. However, once they marry they often see a big drop in insurance premiums. The lower rates can also apply to those in domestic partnerships.

Get Extra Protection

That new wedding ring and other special gifts, like fine art or silverware, may need scheduled personal property protection, often called a "floater," to make sure they are covered for their full value. Most homeowners and renters policies will provide limited coverage for those items. Scheduled personal property coverage will also pay to replace a ring, without a deductible, even if it was misplaced or damaged in the garbage disposal.

Committed Partner

Just like in marriage, California Casualty is a committed partner helping you with your auto and home insurance needs. Don't go it alone: take advantage of your NEA Auto & Home Insurance Program by calling a California Casualty advisor today for a free quote or no hassle policy review at 1-800-800-9410 or visit:

www.calcas.com/NEA

Celebrate Healthy Habits Week and Win!

The Lysol Healthy Habits Program was developed in collaboration with the NEA and PTA with the goal of helping children establish a foundation of Healthy Habits.

Teachers can join by celebrating Healthy Habits Week, which kicks off on Sept. 21. This year, Lysol is rewarding 50 teachers and parents with gift cards, valued from \$200 to \$500.

Just submit a video of 60 seconds or less showing how you incorporate Healthy Habits into your classroom. Entries will be accepted until Oct. 16. Eligible entries will be made public on the Lysol website, where viewers can vote for favorites. Once you submit a video, share the link on your social media channels in order to get more "Likes." For more details, or to enter, visit:

lysol.com/HealthyHabits

The Energy of Teachers Drives the System

Support for Educators Comes from All Angles

By Dr. Matt Blomstedt,
State Commissioner of Education

The couple of weeks leading up to the start of a new school year are among my fondest childhood memories, even though there was some anxiety as well.

Growing up just down the block from “my” school, I could easily see teachers park their cars and carry in supplies for the new school year. I remember shopping for the odds and ends I needed to start the school year. I remember the smell of my new crayons and the unsharpened pencils. But my fondest memory was wandering down the block to offer to help the teacher in the elementary school classroom that was about to be “mine.” I offered to carry things into my classroom, to open boxes, to set things out and was at the ready to assist. I did that every year, sometimes with my siblings, at the start of elementary school.

Teachers welcomed the help — or at least they let us think we were helping. The personal connection to my teacher and the

sense of comfort with my classroom helped make the transition from summer to school successful. I remember thinking that my teachers were as excited about the new school year as I was. I enjoyed the anticipation of learning that was promised with the start of a new school year. But I admit, on occasion, the new school year created some personal trepidation. School was a lot of work. In those early years, the elementary years, the teacher’s energy was critical.



Blomstedt

Reflecting back now, I can only imagine the teachers’ natural inclination was to enjoy a few more days “off” in the summer. I can also only imagine the pressure on them to get ready for a new school year. I hope my “support” meant more than just help with a few classroom tasks and decorations. I hope teachers were energized because eager learners were about to enter their classrooms. I hope we “relied” on one another

for energy — the energy needed to start and to successfully complete the year.

I also hope teachers today feel that sense of support from their students, parents, communities and, yes, the Commissioner. I spend most days trying to connect my work to supports for our schools, classrooms, teachers, and students. I’m looking for ways to continue to help “carry” part of the load so teachers have the support systems they need to make every student successful and ready for his or her future.

Year after year, teachers and school systems welcome students — students with an endless list of individual abilities, personalities and unique needs — in their school doors. Students grow each year. We see their progress almost daily in development and growth. Thinking of the paths created and lives affected is energizing. Teachers should take great pride in their role of building the future.

I hope the start of your school year has been a wonderful experience. Stay energized and build on that energy with your students. Your energy drives the system. I’m grateful for your work for every student, every day.

State Test Scores Trending Up

While preliminary test scores released in August are good news, showing that nearly three of every four Nebraska public school students met state standards in 2015, Education Commissioner Matt Blomstedt asked the public to look at results over time to evaluate student and school performances.

“Overall this year, more Nebraska students met our state standards in reading, writing, math and science,” he said, noting a 3 percent increase in reading scores this year, and an 11 percent increase since 2010.

“Moving the needle from year-to-year isn’t easy. It takes hard work on the part of students and Nebraska teachers,” he said.

Test scores have improved steadily since testing began six years ago on reading, with testing in other subjects phased. Over 5 years, the percentage of students proficient on math standards improved by 9 percent, science by 5 percent in four years and writing increased 4 percent over three years.

“Generally, we are seeing not only an increase in the percentage of students proficient on standards but also an increase in the percentage of students exceeding the standards,” he said. “That means, Nebraska teachers are successfully increasing their students learning and knowledge of the standards, in general, at all grade levels.”

Producers, Pigs & Pork

Educators: *Producers, Pigs & Pork* provides elementary students with a meaningful learning experience about our food supply system, centering on pork production. Teacher resource materials include five lessons that teach students where their food comes from; how pigs are raised; environmental issues involved with raising pigs; pork’s nutritional values; non-food pork products; and food safety. This teacher package also includes five 7-minute video lessons.

Provided **FREE** to Nebraska educators by the Nebraska Pork Producers Association and the Nebraska Soybean Board.

Quantities are limited, so order yours today! Go to www.Nebraskaproducerspigs pork.com

EMAC Readies for Banner Association Year

By **Eddie Ventura, Jr., Omaha,**
EMAC Chair

The NSEA Ethnic and Minority Affairs Committee serves to represent the interests of ethnic minority members across Nebraska. The committee includes representatives these caucuses: American Indian/Alaska Native, Black, Asian, Hispanic and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.

Omaha educator Eddie Ventura, Jr., will chair EMAC again this year.

Committee goals for 2015-16 include:

- Continue to visit members statewide.
- Inform members on the election process for Association posts at the local, state and national levels.

- Encourage ethnic minorities to seek delegate spots at the state and national assemblies.

- Send a diverse group of EMAC members to national conferences.

- Review Bylaws and recommend updates as needed.

- Nominate an individual or group for NSEA's Great Plains Milestone Award by January 2016.

- Nominate a past Great Plains Milestone Award winner for a NEA Human and Civil Rights award.

Hernandez Back as Vice Chair

Re-elected as committee vice chair is Norfolk's Jose Hernandez.

Also on the committee are: American Indian/Alaska Native representatives Susan



Townsend, Lincoln, and Tracy Hartman-Bradley, Omaha; Asian representative Hashi Cao, Kearney; Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander representative Susan Loney, Omaha; Black representatives Sharon Rhodes, Omaha, and Broderick Steed, Umo^{ho} Nation; and Hispanic representatives Manuel Andazola and Karla Andazola, both of Lexington.

Dates Set

EMAC meets on the following Saturday mornings with caucus meetings at 9:30 and full committee meetings at 10. The exception will be the Delegate Assembly weekend, which features a 5-7 p.m. Friday event.

The meetings will be held Oct. 3 at NSEA in Lincoln; Nov. 14 at the OEA building in Omaha; Jan. 30 via WebEx; Feb. 20 in Kearney at UNK; March 19, South Sioux City, site to be set; and April 15 in Lincoln.

Opportunity to Lead

Some leadership opportunities in Nebraska:

- Attend local, district and/or NSEA Board of Directors' meetings to listen and learn. You are always invited to attend.

- The annual EMAC meeting will be April 15 in Lincoln during Delegate Assembly weekend. We encourage members to

seek delegate status. Talk to your building rep or local association president.

- NSEA Leadership Institute is in June 2016 in Lincoln. It is where our future leaders learn about the structure of NSEA/NEA.

There are also out-of-state opportunities:

- NEA's Minority Leadership Training is set for Friday-Sunday, Jan. 29-31, 2016, in San Francisco. EMAC seeks a team to attend. If interested, email Ventura no later than Oct. 1 with a brief explanation of how you plan to share the information you gain with others. Include your name and local association. Ventura's email is below.

- The NEA Ethnic Issues Caucus Conference is held between April-June each year. Watch this space for details.

- The NEA Joint Conference for Minorities and Women will be held before the NEA Representative Assembly (RA) in late June. Again, watch this space.

- Representative Assembly (RA) is always the first week of July. The 2016 event is set for Washington, D.C. Watch this space for details on how to become a delegate.

Additional details on EMAC are at:

nsea.org/emac

You can also connect with EMAC on Twitter (@EMAC_NSEA) or Facebook (EMACNSEA). Also, continue looking for us in *The Voice*.

Finally, contact EMAC Chair Eddie Ventura at 402-210-1655 or via email at:

venturaomaha@gmail.com

BCBS Scholarship Process Now Open

Apply Now for Awards to Assist with the Cost of Advanced Degrees

One of the most popular benefits of being a member of NSEA — and of belonging to the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska health care plan — is the availability of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska scholarships.

Each year, NSEA members are eligible to apply for three rounds of scholarship offerings by Blue Cross and Blue Shield. The stipends are designed to help make paying for graduate coursework a little easier.

The deadline for the next round of scholarships from the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska Professional Development Fund is **Wednesday, Sept. 30**.

The funds are for advanced degrees, to seek additional teaching endorsements or take courses for certification. Stipends may cover up to 50 percent of the cost of a single, three-hour college course. Applicants may seek scholarship dollars for no more than three hours of courses. Books and supplies are not covered.



To apply, complete the application form on the NSEA website. The form will be posted through Sept. 30. The website is at:

www.nsea.org

Scholarship applicants will receive an e-mail confirming receipt of the application at NSEA Headquarters. If you do not receive an e-mail, call NSEA at 1-800-742-0047.

NSEA will notify applicants of their scholarship status by the end of October. The goal is to award stipends to the largest number of members from each of NSEA's six governance districts. To be eligible, NSEA members must be covered by either single or family Blue Cross/Blue Shield health care. Previous applicants, successful or not, may re-apply. Applicants may receive scholarships in only two of the three scholarship cycles during a school year.

Recipients must offer evidence of completion of work at an accredited post-secondary institution to receive funds. Courses must be for credit.

Since 1986, 5,331 NSEA members have shared more than \$707,500 in Blue Cross and Blue Shield scholarship dollars. The program does not affect Blue Cross and Blue Shield premiums.

For details, reach Sally Bodtke at 1-800-742-0047 or by e-mail at:

sally.bodtke@nsea.org

Now, More than Ever...

...the Commitment Continues As NSEA Retired Marks 30 Years

Thirty years ago, on Sept. 14, 1985, 10 dedicated Nebraska educators signed the charter for NSEA-Retired with the mission of advancing quality education in Nebraska and protecting retirement benefits for all retired school employees.

Since that date, NSEA-Retired membership has grown to more than 5,400 retirees. More than 400 pre-retired lifetime subscribers have pre-paid their dues in anticipation of having full membership benefits in the NEA-Retired and NSEA-Retired upon retirement, without any additional payment of annual retired dues.

In the years since, NSEA-Retired has been an effective voice with members of the Nebraska Legislature; has provided hundreds of hours of time for retirement planning seminars to hundreds of active teachers; has provided thousands of dollars in scholarships to pre-service teachers in their student teaching semesters; and has held countless seminars and sessions at spring and summer conferences.

Organizationally, NSEA-Retired is an affiliate of NSEA.

"NSEA-Retired has really made a difference on a number of fronts," said NSEA President Nancy Fulton. "The power of our collective retired membership is not to be underestimated."

Retired Omaha North High School physics teacher Roger Rea has served as NSEA-Retired president for the past six years.

"Our members are proud to support the good work that goes on in public schools each day," said Rea. "We are proud of the work our organization has done, and look forward to accomplishing much more."

In other words, NSEA-Retired has made a difference. And as the organization's tag line proudly states, "Now, More Than Ever...the Commitment Continues."

About that Cost of Living Increase

Each July 1, the Nebraska Public Employees Retirement Systems office reviews the rate of inflation to determine whether the monthly retirement benefit issued to school, judicial and state patrol retirees is eligible for a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA).

The COLA is intended to help offset inflation and is designed to keep benefits in step with the changing economy. When economic factors increase the prices consumers pay for goods and services, the COLA reflects these increases by raising benefits accordingly.

Per Nebraska statute, the COLA for the school employee, judi-

cial and state patrol plans are determined using the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W) during the previous fiscal year. CPI-W rates are developed by the U.S. Department of Labor and track the changes in the prices paid by consumers on a "representative basket of goods and services."

For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2015, the CPI-W rate experienced a decrease of 0.383 percent. As a result, none of the state's plans for school, judicial or state patrol employees are eligible for a COLA increase for the fiscal year that began on July 1.



Blanket winner: Blue Hill retiree Loretta Schmidt, center, won the baby blanket raffled by NSEA-Retired. At left is NSEA President Nancy Fulton. At right is NSEA-Retired Secretary Jan Barnason.

Baby Blanket to Blue Hill

A newly made baby blanket raffled by NSEA-Retired to raise money for the NSEA Children's Fund will now reside at Blue Hill.

Blue Hill's Loretta Schmidt was the lucky winner of the baby blanket raffled off by NSEA-Retired last spring. The raffle raised \$887 for the Children's Fund.

Each year, for the past eight or nine years, about \$1,000 has been raised for the Children's Fund by quilt and baby blanket raffles. This year's baby blanket was made and contributed by Gloria Boham, sister of NSEA-Retired Metro District representative Walta Sue Dodd.

Familiar Names

Among the new state officers of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) are two names familiar to NSEA-Retired members.

Retired Lincoln Education Association members De Tonack and Arlene Rea were elected to state office for 2015-16. Tonack is the finance officer while Rea is secretary.

Communications Clean Sweep

Communications efforts by NSEA-Retired on all fronts performed well this past summer at the NEA-Retired gathering in Orlando.

The NSEA-Retired Corner received the 'Hall of Fame Award.' The HOF award is given to publications that win the Spotlight Award three times, and makes the publication ineligible to compete in this category for three years.

The NSEA-Retired newsletter, *The Advocate*, mailed out to members quarterly, won runnerup status for 2014-15 in the Established State Retired Newsletter category.

The Omaha Education Association-Retired newsletter, *Voices of Experience*, took home first place in the Established Local Retired Newsletters category.

Save the Date: NSEA-Retired Fall Conference

NSEA-Retired's fall conference will be held in Grand Island on Tuesday, Oct. 27. The event will celebrate NSEA-Retired's 30 years, and will also have more informative sessions that are of interest to our membership. Stay tuned for further details.

— Renae Kelly, Editor
renaerkelly@gmail.com

Peers Honor Sieboldt, Condon, Fleshner, Deaver

Second-year **Lincoln** Northeast High School math teacher and NSEA member **Cassie Sieboldt** has received a Knowles Science Teaching Foundation Fellowship.

The Knowles program focuses on new teachers and is considered among the most comprehensive fellowships in the nation. It will provide in-depth professional development with grants for classroom materials, a financial stipend and opportunities for leadership and mentoring.

The fellowship program requires a five-year commitment, which is divided in to three phases: content knowledge, exemplary teaching and teacher leadership.

NSEA member **Jean Condon**, a business and technology instructor at **Mid-Plains** Community College, earned the Service Award from the Nebraska State Business Education Association. She was feted during the Nebraska Career Education Conference in June. The award is given to an active NSBEA member considered to be a “highly dedicated” professional.

Condon is past NSBEA president, secretary and treasurer and is now the membership director for the NSBEA and National Business Education Association. She also serves on the Mountain-Plains Business Education Association board.

NSEA member **Sabine Fleshner**, a world language teacher at **Millard** Central Middle School, received a 2015 PBS LearningMedia Digital Innovators award.

She was the only Nebraskan among 100 educators honored. The project will train Fleshner over the next year to act as a digital learning ambassador in her school and community. She is current president of the Nebraska chapter of the American Association of Teachers of German.

Scottsbluff NSEA member and DECA advisor **Derek Deaver** has been recognized as Nebraska’s Outstanding Entrepreneurship Educator.

He was honored during the annual dinner organized by Scottsbluff DECA.

Presenters cited Deaver’s partnerships with the Scottsbluff area business community; his work fostering economic development through entrepreneurship education; and his mentoring of young people in his business and marketing program as well as the DECA chapter.



Yates

Hutchinson

Copich

Raphael

Pittman

Yates, Hutchinson Retire; Copich, Raphael Join Staff

High Plains Assignment to Copich; Pittman to Flatwater

A pair of retirements in the NSEA family has prompted two new hires and a small shuffle in field staff assignments.

Longtime NSEA Organizational Specialist Ellen Yates and Associate Staff member Kathy Hutchinson retired on Aug. 31. Yates had been on staff for 24 years; Hutchinson marked 28 years of service.

Taking their spots in the NSEA lineup are Dr. Cindy Copich, filling the organizational specialist opening, and Michelle Raphael, who has taken Hutchinson’s role as NSEA’s comp study expert.

Yates handled field duties for the Association’s Flatwater Unit, which included all local associations in Dodge, Colfax and Cuming counties. Matt Pittman, who had been the organizational specialist for the High Plains Unit in southwest Nebraska, slides over to Flatwater. Copich will take the reins at High Plains.

With Yates’ retirement, the Association loses a most seasoned employee, with expertise in negotiations, comp studies, interest-based bargaining and member rights. A former language arts and reading teacher, Yates served in the Panhandle for many years before taking a staff assignment with the Omaha Education Association in 2009. She took over Flatwater two years ago.

“Ellen has distinguished herself as a calming, soothing force when members are in distress,” said NSEA Executive Director Craig R. Christiansen. “She also has the ability to quickly assess a situation and ask deep questions that get to the heart of an issue. Her service will be missed.”

‘Touched All Teachers’

Hutchinson joined NSEA as an associate staff member, but soon became an expert in the NSEA-owned software, Navigator, that gives local associations the ability to conduct the comprehensive salary studies

– known as comp studies – that provide a clear picture of how a school district’s salary schedule stacks up to neighboring districts. Scores of local negotiators benefitted from the Navigator training she provided. Her expertise also called her to testify in numerous Commission of Industrial Relations hearings.

“Kathy’s work with Navigator and with negotiators has touched virtually every educator in Nebraska through their salary schedules,” said Christiansen. “She is detail-oriented, accurate and patient – all to the benefit of members.”

Ed Policy, Comp Studies

Copich comes to NSEA from the University of Nebraska-Omaha, where she was an adjunct instructor teaching educational policy, school community relations and elementary social studies. She taught at the elementary level at Missouri Valley, IA; Plattsmouth; and Bellevue. She won election to the Bellevue school board in 2013 as a Bellevue Education Association-recommended candidate. She completed her doctoral studies in educational leadership at UNO.

Raphael’s experience will translate well to her duties with comp studies.

Raphael most recently worked with the Lancaster County Treasurer’s office as banking director, accountant and budget officer. She has 16 years of experience with the State Treasurer’s office, and also worked for First Bank, later to become US Bank, and the Police Officers Association of Nebraska. She is a Certified Treasury Professional and an Accredited Automated Clearing House Professional.

She is past president of the Nebraska Association of Financial Professionals. She has taught finance at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and taught a cash management course at Bellevue University.

Speaking of Teaching

“The nation’s public schools collectively remain one of America’s most vital institutions, with the mission of sustaining a democratic nation as well as serving the individual. When all is said and done, we dare not permit the current debate about choice to blur this vision. The goal must be to make every public school a source of national strength in pursuit of excellence for all.”

— *Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, in the 1992 publication ‘School Choice.’*

Ralston Effort Jumpstarts Opening Day

Association Gets Noticed at First-Day Breakfast

When more than 500 Ralston educators and staff poured into the Ralston High School gymnasium in early August for the district’s first pre-service day, they were greeted by the aroma of free pancakes and a lineup of 18 vendors giving away prizes, gadgets and information.

It was the first such event at Ralston in nearly a half-dozen years, and it might not have happened without REA’s push.

REA President Jane Leadabrand said her leadership team felt it was an important enough event that she took the initiative to contact several NSEA-recommended vendors about attending, and then reached out to the district. From that point on, it became a cooperative – and very successful – effort with the district.

The REA table included drawings for \$25, a “Make Back Your Dues” handout, free letter openers and a bottle of REA Welcome Water.

The Welcome Water was an easy-to-replicate marketing promotion that included a label with the REA logo, a declaration that it



Free Welcome Water! Ralston educators attending the district’s opening day event were greeted by a gymnasium full of vendors, free pancakes and free bottled ‘Welcome Water’ among other give-aways from the Ralston Education Association. Working the REA booth were, from left, REA Treasurer Michelle Hulsing, REA President Jane Leadabrand, and REA Vice President Kathy Kassebaum.

contained “500 ml of support” and claimed it was “enhanced with dedication for a refreshing & rewarding experience.” The nutrition label indicated that “1 serving per bottle” provided a “100 percent yearly value of support, commitment, encouragement, dedication, protection, opportunity and information” – with ‘quality guaranteed.’

“We’re just letting people know we are here,” said Leadabrand.

That’s important, because much associa-

tion work is done behind the scenes.

REA Vice President Kathy Kassebaum said the ultimate goal is to increase membership, which should go smoothly, with 36 new hires in the district this year.

“We want to show potential members that there is value to joining,” she said.

“Members don’t always know that Kathy and I meet with the superintendent each month, we go to every school board meeting, and more,” said Leadabrand.

Back to School and Work

By high school teacher Julie Williams, Fort Wayne, IN.

“My high school students often comment that they don’t bring basic supplies on the first day of school because the teacher reads the rules, and they do nothing in class. To avoid this basic, boring routine, I give an activity to each student as they enter the room. I ask that they print their name at the top and begin working on the activity. When the bell rings, I take roll by walking up and down the aisles marking present students, while they continue to work. Walking around gives me a



chance to see that “Peter” wants to be called “Pete” and so on, without boring all the students by calling out roll and wasting time. It also picks up misplaced students with a schedule error without embarrassment.

“Most students know basic rules, but I address my rules as needed. When an announcement comes on, I “stop, look and listen” and then address that rule.

When a student is tardy, I address the tardy rules for my class. When a student asks to use the restroom, I discuss those rules.”

Sign up for Works4Me at:

www.nea.org/tools/Works4Me.html